

Senator NELSON. Our next witness is Dr. Page Hudson, chief medical examiner of the State of North Carolina.

**STATEMENT OF PAGE HUDSON, M.D., CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER
OF THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA**

Dr. HUDSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MORGAN. Before Dr. Hudson begins, I might say that Dr. Hudson is a very noted, highly respected member of the medical profession in North Carolina.

He and I worked together many years ago when I was attorney general, and he became chief medical examiner.

Senator NELSON. Let me say the witnesses were invited today because of their national distinction, and we are delighted to have you here.

Dr. HUDSON. Senator Nelson, members of the committee, I am very grateful for the opportunity to speak.

Unless requested specifically, I would prefer to not go into my entire statement.

Senator NELSON. Your statement will be printed in full in the record. It is always helpful to the hearing process, after you get to about the third witness, if you can skip anything that might be particularly repetitious. But you may present it however you desire.

Dr. HUDSON. Thank you.

My statement speaks to some material that has already been covered, so I would tend to skip that.

My particular area in medicine is what is called forensic pathology, which is that medical specialty that involves the detection, identification, and investigation and other studies of real or suspected unnatural deaths, and I practice and write and teach in this field of medicine and related sciences, and I have had the pleasure of serving as chief medical examiner of the State of North Carolina.

I will address myself to the experiences in that State.

Several years ago it became apparent to my colleague, Dr. Arthur J. McBay, who is here, who is chief toxicologist with the office of chief medical examiner, and to me that propoxyphene was responsible for an increasing number of deaths in our State.

We examined rather carefully our cases and our criteria, we have conferred with authorities in other States and with many physicians in our State, particularly physicians involved with daily patient care.

We began to get the feeling that we were into something that was awesome, at least to us, and that is that a drug medication appeared to exist, did exist, that was at the top in prescription popularity, one that had but a trace of benefit and that was reaching the point of causing more deaths than any drug, licit or illicit.

We saw the numbers of deaths from propoxyphene increase from just an occasional case in the late 1960's, or early 1970's, to 20 or so a year, a peak of 50 in 1975, and 40 or so the following year and 30 in subsequent years, and it was the drug causing the greatest number of deaths.

For the past 2 or 3 years, the deaths due to propoxyphene have been approximately twice that of the barbituates collectively.