

Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Whitfield
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
“Legislative Hearing to Examine Pipeline Safety Reauthorization”
March 1, 2016

(As Prepared for Delivery)

I am pleased that we are at the point of having a legislative hearing on pipeline safety reauthorization. I want to thank all of our witnesses for their time and thoughtful comments. In particular, I want to thank Administrator Dominguez for her constructive comments and her commitment to work with our committee.

The Energy and Commerce Committee has been at the forefront of improving pipeline safety. Members today will examine a discussion draft of a bill that reauthorizes the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration’s (PHMSA) pipeline safety program. The discussion draft contains targeted mandates for PHMSA to increase transparency and accountability, complete overdue regulations, and improve safety.

This committee has a proud, longstanding tradition of working together when it comes to pipeline safety. Together with the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, the House successfully ushered through the Pipeline Safety, Regulatory Certainty and Job Creation Act of 2011 on a bipartisan basis. Now it’s time to update that law. With today’s changing energy landscape and the need to modernize infrastructure greater than ever, we are looking forward to a productive discussion on our draft bill that allows this committee to move expeditiously, so we can report a bill to the full House this spring for its consideration. Our Senate colleagues on the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee reported S 2276, the Safe PIPES Act on December 9, 2015. We believe that a strong bipartisan-bicameral effort will yield a public law we can all be proud of.

I do need to point out the unfinished business from the last reauthorization. The 2011 Pipeline Safety law included 42 mandates of PHMSA and 16 of them remain incomplete well beyond the statutorily imposed deadlines. Our discussion draft requires the Administrator to prioritize overdue regulations ahead of new rulemakings and keep us updated on their progress. To make sure we are not being too rigid, exceptions are allowed when there is a significant need for a new regulation.

Another provision of the draft bill that has received strong support is section 6, which would require the Secretary of Transportation, no later than 30 days after the completion of a pipeline inspection, to conduct a post-inspection briefing with the operator outlining any concerns. This provision will ensure that un-safe conditions are corrected as quickly as possible.

The draft legislation before us today also contains requirements for new safety regulations relating to underground gas storage facilities and underwater hazardous liquid pipeline facilities and response plans.

This is just a preview of some of the provisions reflected in the draft before us today. I look forward to a robust discussion about the lessons learned from the past and ways to prepare for the future.

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