

Walden: We need to reauthorize and modernize the nation's pipeline safety program

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WASHINGTON, DC – Energy and Commerce Committee Republican Leader Greg Walden (R-OR) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Energy **hearing** on “The State of Pipeline Safety and Security in America.”

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing to begin our work to reauthorize and modernize the nation's pipeline safety program. This is an important hearing, and I am pleased that we are beginning this process on a bipartisan basis, which is the tradition of the Energy and Commerce Committee on matters relating to pipeline safety and security.

The Federal government, acting through the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, known as PHMSA has an important responsibility to develop and enforce regulations for the safe, reliable, and environmentally sound operation of the nation's 2.7 million miles of pipelines. Pipelines are among the safest and most efficient ways to transport critical fuels and feedstocks such as natural gas and petroleum to our homes and businesses. Simply put, the safe operation of our nation's pipeline system is essential to help keep prices low for consumers and drive our economy forward.

PHMSA cannot do this important job by itself. It must coordinate effectively with other Federal agencies, such as DOE, FERC and TSA, and especially with States. In fact, it is important to recognize that much of the responsibility for pipeline safety falls on the States. It is often State pipeline safety workers who are on the front lines inspecting and enforcing safety requirements. In many cases, it is also the States' responsibility to regulate rates and ensure that adequate investments are made in pipeline maintenance and modernization.

As Members of Congress, it is our responsibility to ensure that PHMSA and the States have enough resources and the appropriate tools to get the job done. With PHMSA's authorization expiring at the end of this fiscal year, it's time for us to get to work.

As we turn to reauthorization, I will remain focused on protecting public safety and consumers. These are not mutually exclusive goals, and I am optimistic that we can find bipartisan agreement as we always have when it comes to pipeline safety.

Mr. Chairman, I hope we can get a commitment to work together on the drafting process from the very beginning. That would be consistent with our practice from the last round of reauthorization, and I think it would contribute toward a better-quality work product.

There are many areas where I believe we can update and strengthen the law to drive innovation and lower the barrier of entry for new technologies. New technologies for pipeline construction and integrity management can help improve efficiency and safety at the same time. I also believe we should examine recent pipeline safety incidents and incorporate lessons-learned.

We should also make sure to provide PHMSA with clear directions, recognizing that they already have a backlog of Congressional mandates and they are working on two high priority rules for both gas and liquid pipelines.

PHMSA must also finish its work on other important safety rules relating to pipeline valves and rupture detection, integrity management, class location, and public education and awareness.

I believe PHMSA is on the right track, and I look forward to the agency completing this important work. At this point, I will close by thanking our witnesses for appearing before us today. We are going to hear a range of perspectives to help inform our work, including PHMSA, the State of Ohio, pipeline operators, and safety advocates.

We are also going to examine the findings of a recent GAO report, which raises numerous, serious concerns about the effectiveness of the Transportation Security Administration's pipeline cyber security program.

As the Committee of jurisdiction for energy and interstate commerce, I am very disappointed that TSA refused to provide a witness for today's hearing. I would urge the Administration—in the strongest terms—to cooperate with our Committee and respond to what I believe are legitimate oversight requests relating to pipeline safety and security.

With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing. I yield back the balance of my time.

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