

Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Energy
“Legislative Solutions to Make Our Nation’s Pipelines Safer”
June 19, 2019

As Prepared for Delivery

The Committee’s work to reauthorize and modernize the nation’s pipeline safety program is important and deserves close, careful, and bipartisan attention. This is the hallmark of the Committee’s work, especially when it comes to safety related legislation.

While it looked like we were on the right track a month ago, we haven’t made much progress since then. In part, I think this is because we have not been adhering completely to our past bipartisan practices. Judging by the Discussion Draft before us today, it appears that the Democrats have chosen to go it alone up until this point, releasing a partisan draft that on our initial read requires a lot of work.

Mr. Chairman, Members deserve the ability to gather the views of all relevant stakeholders and understand the full impact of legislation before voting on it. The Discussion Draft before us today was only released last week, and the process was so rushed that, as I understand it, PHMSA didn’t have time to prepare testimony.

While we were fortunate to have PHMSA testify back in May, it has come to my attention that our Member's Questions for the Record have not been submitted. So here we are today, with many unanswered questions for PHMSA, and facing the prospect of a subcommittee markup next week.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, pipeline safety reauthorization has historically been a fully bipartisan process. Under the Republican majority, Democrats and Republicans sat down together to work through the issues and draft a bill. I am disappointed that a month has gone by and we have nothing to show for it.

As we move ahead, I hope that we can get a commitment to slow down and work together. While we may not agree on everything, I believe there are many areas where we can strengthen the law to drive innovation and improve safety.

First and foremost, we should recognize that pipeline safety is a shared responsibility between PHMSA, the States, and pipeline operators. There is a lot Congress can do to encourage pipeline operators to improve their performance; however, I have serious

concerns by the Discussion Draft's "one size fits all" approach and overly prescriptive mandates.

This Administration inherited a number of missed deadlines for pipeline safety rulemakings; however, PHMSA officials have worked hard and made substantial progress. Certain impacts from this Discussion Draft actually could delay these important rulemakings to improve safety and bog down the process even further. This will not serve the public interest.

While it can be tempting, we should not get too far ahead of ourselves. Congress should recognize and account for the safety improvements that will be implemented through the outstanding congressional mandates and pending rulemakings.

PHMSA is making progress on several important regulations addressing hazardous liquid pipelines, gas pipelines, valve and rupture protection, and plastic pipes, among other regulatory actions. Together, these rules represent many years of work, and we should not pull out the rug and disrupt the progress by injecting more regulatory uncertainty.

Our reauthorization bill should reflect this reality by continuing to encourage a cooperative, flexible approach to pipeline safety. We should make sure PHMSA and States have adequate resources to inspect and protect the nation's pipeline system; we should hold PHMSA accountable for completing overdue rulemakings; and finally, we should encourage pipeline operators to adopt new technologies and continue to improve safety.

With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing and I look forward to the testimony of the witnesses. I yield back the balance of my time.