

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Energy, Climate, and Grid Security
Ranking Member Diana DeGette

Hearing on “Fueling America’s Economy: Legislation to Improve Safety and Expand U.S. Pipeline Infrastructure”

January 18, 2024

I am glad to be here, finally at a hearing on pipeline safety in the 118th Congress. The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration or PHMSA , oversees the safety of nearly 3.4 million miles of pipelines that reach across the country. These pipelines carry hazardous materials like oil, gas, and other means of energy production to where they need to go. They are part of our current energy system, ensuring the light comes on when you turn on the switch. In an ideal world, the average American would be blissfully unaware of pipelines because they are quietly doing their job for us. But, unfortunately, as the American people have seen all too often, pipelines can be very dangerous, especially when neglected.

On average, there are more than 600 pipeline safety incidents each year. These incidents can be fatal and are devastating to families and communities. Congress is responsible for reauthorizing PHMSA’s pipeline safety activities. And to prevent these incidents Congress must take a more active oversight role. PHMSA’s pipeline safety program reauthorization actually expired in September of last year. In response to the then-impending lapse, Ranking Member Pallone and I sent a letter last September to Chair Rodgers and Energy Subcommittee Chair Duncan, requesting this Subcommittee immediately hold an oversight hearing of PHMSA’s pipeline safety programs. The letter also expressed our disappointment in the lack of bipartisan engagement in reauthorizing these vital programs. Despite our letter, the majority took no action. Instead of being more involved in oversight, the majority seems to have taken a step back

The only action the majority took on pipeline safety in 2023 was releasing the partisan draft bill we are considering today, the “Pipeline Safety, Modernization, and Expansion Act of 2023.” A bill that, despite its name including “safety”, has several sections that are completely unrelated to PHMSA pipeline safety. This bill, rather, contains provisions to increase the construction and operation of pipelines. It would allow the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) authority to grant authorizations to modernize existing pipelines and construct new pipelines. It would streamline the permitting process, all while authorizing a funding level that would be 18 percent below current funding levels, stripping PHMSA of critical funding and safety measures – despite this bill’s clever branding. As if the cuts alone weren’t enough, this bill also places additional burdens on the administration’s pipeline safety program – burdens which are unfunded. PHMSA has an important job in ensuring safety and protecting communities, and they require full funding to carry this out.

Fortunately, in contrast with what we’re seeing proposed by the majority, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) invested \$1 billion in the safety of natural gas distribution pipeline. The

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President's FY24 budget also requested a 20 percent increase for PHMSA's pipeline safety budget to support this important work. Now, the Energy and Commerce Committee shares pipeline safety jurisdiction with the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. And we can look to the T&I Committee for an example of bipartisanship and adherence to regular order. Last December, following their oversight hearing in March 2023, the Committee released their bipartisan pipeline safety reauthorization bill.

Both sides weighed in to provide a common-sense solution that would work to ensure no lapse in the transportation of energy, while also actually focusing on safety and environmental protection. T&I aren't the only ones who know that pipeline safety demands a bipartisan process. In their letter to Chair Duncan and myself, the Interstate Natural Gas Association of America noted that, quote "As the Subcommittee begins considering this measure, we request it be advanced through a bipartisan process as we believe that is the best way to ensure pipeline safety reauthorization legislation becomes law". I could not have put it better myself. The partisanship from our committee only serves to increase the amount of time it will take to reauthorize important pipeline safety measures. It is vital to fund this program to ensure pipeline safety and protect our communities. I stand ready to work on a compromise to reauthorize PHMSA's pipeline safety program. I yield back.