

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.**

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

January 18, 2024

Today the Subcommittee is finally holding a hearing on pipeline safety. The most recent reauthorization of pipeline safety programs at the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, or PHMSA, expired over 100 days ago. And all our Republican majority has to offer today is a partisan draft bill, unintroduced and unchanged since they released it in July. There was no effort to work together. No effort to sit down and discuss shared priorities. And no heads up at all that the Republicans were putting together this draft.

This is a stark departure from the path Democrats forged when we were in the majority during the last reauthorization process. We sat down and negotiated with our Republican colleagues for months to try to agree on a bipartisan bill – even postponing a Committee markup because we did not yet have bipartisan agreement. It was only after months of detailed discussions reached an impasse that we ultimately moved a Democratic bill through this Committee that had a strong commitment to enhanced pipeline safety.

Today, we are considering a partisan bill masquerading as a pipeline safety bill when, in fact, it will only lead to the construction of more dangerous pipelines. Republicans’ priorities are on full display today: do the bidding of corporate polluters while putting the safety of our communities at risk. Just last week, a natural gas leak in Fort Worth, Texas caused an explosion that injured 21 people and destroyed two floors of a hotel. A year and a half ago, an LNG facility, also in Texas, suffered a massive explosion due to what PHMSA later found to be inadequate procedures. The reality is that there are over 600 pipeline safety incidents every year, which result in an average of 31 injuries and 10 deaths. That’s just simply unacceptable.

And that’s why I am so disappointed that Republicans didn’t even attempt to work with us on a bipartisan pipeline safety reauthorization bill that could actually become law. This discussion draft is reckless. It would gut state oversight of pipelines built within their boundaries, encroaching on states’ rights. It also prevents states and municipalities from deciding to move away from natural gas if they so choose.

Even more radically, the bill actually cuts funding for pipeline safety. It delivers a \$42 million annual cut to PHMSA’s authorized programs from the levels in the last bipartisan authorization that was signed into law by the last Republican president. This bill asks PHMSA to do more with less. Like the vast majority of the legislation this Subcommittee has acted on this

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Congress, this bill will never become law. It is yet another proof point that House Republicans are not able to govern and it underscores why this Congress is on pace to be the least productive since the Great Depression.

And all of this stands in stark contrast to the bipartisan process that the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee implemented last year. They spent months holding serious, bipartisan negotiations to craft a bipartisan bill, and they were able to move that bill out of Committee last year. As with any bipartisan legislation, neither side likely got everything it wanted in the final bill, but it garnered strong support from Democrats and Republicans. It also authorized \$80 million more each year for pipeline safety programs than this bill does. And it was free of the poison pill riders that make up so much of this bill.

Frankly, I cannot believe that Republicans on this Committee would cede ground to another committee on an issue where we share jurisdiction. It also defies logic to continue to move forward with a partisan process while another committee has crafted a bipartisan compromise that could potentially become law. It's unfortunate that Committee Republicans have chosen partisanship on something as important as keeping our communities safe from dangerous pipelines. It is our responsibility to ensure PHMSA has the resources and authorities it needs to keep nearly 3.4 million miles of oil, gas, and other pipelines nationwide safe. This discussion draft simply will not do that. It's time for Committee Republicans to scrap this discussion draft and finally begin a bipartisan process so we can produce a pipeline safety bill that lives up to its name.

And with that I yield back the balance of my time.