

Committee on Energy and Commerce

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

Hearing on “America’s Energy Infrastructure: Authorizing Pipeline Safety”

March 4, 2026

Thank you, Chairman Latta. We are here today to discuss a Republican proposal to reauthorize the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration’s pipeline safety activities, more than two years after the last authorization – the PIPES Act of 2020 – expired. It’s disappointing to me that Republicans are once again choosing to go it alone on this reauthorization because bipartisan cooperation is necessary to get any reauthorization across the finish line. And that’s exactly the approach that both the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Senate Commerce Committee have taken – working together and producing bipartisan bills.

It’s also troubling that Republicans are choosing a partisan path when you look at how the Trump Administration has weakened and radically altered PHMSA’s pipeline safety program over the last year. Enforcement activities have fallen off a cliff – the number of pipeline enforcement cases opened last year was roughly half of the average during the prior four years. Instead of focusing on safety, in the first weeks of the Trump Administration, PHMSA withdrew two ready-to-be-finalized safety rules required by law. It has yet to reissue them.

PHMSA staffing is also a major issue, with a 14 percent reduction and nearly all of its senior career staff choosing to leave. So even if the Administration were to suddenly recognize the importance of keeping our pipelines safe, it’s unclear to me if PHMSA has the resources and staff necessary to aggressively enforce our nation’s pipeline safety laws.

Administrator Roberti, I was frankly hopeful that, with your confirmation, the bleeding and disorder at PHMSA would stop. Unfortunately, that has not been the case.

In recent months, PHMSA has been engaged in a bogus “audit” of grants given to the Pipeline Safety Trust, the nation’s only nonprofit dedicated to pipeline safety. For months, PHMSA suspended reimbursements to the Pipeline Safety Trust, and now is only allowing the resumption of the grant on the condition that it not be used to compensate the Trust’s Executive Director – who testified before this Committee last year on pipeline safety. To me, this looks a lot like retaliation against the only organization working to shine a light on the Trump Administration’s dangerous PHMSA agenda. It is unacceptable and cannot happen again.

You also recently issued a memo indicating that PHMSA would waive enforcing pipeline safety rules for pipelines helping Trump’s so-called energy-dominance agenda. Administrator Roberti, PHMSA does not have the authority to selectively enforce our nation’s laws based on whether the President thinks a pipeline is important or not.

Let me now turn to the discussion draft before us today. This draft represents a marked improvement over the version that Committee Republicans proposed last Congress – it no longer contains a number of provisions that Democrats had identified as poison pills and were completely unrelated to pipeline safety. However, any pipeline safety reauthorization must strengthen PHMSA’s core safety and enforcement responsibilities, especially in light of an Administration that seems unwilling to do so. On that count, this Republican bill falls short.

The bill fails to reauthorize a few provisions from the PIPES Act, including TAG grants and damage prevention programs that are vital to communities. It also fails to formally authorize a continuation of the successful Bipartisan Infrastructure Law program to replace aging, unsafe distribution pipelines across the nation. The draft bill attempts to roll back a requirement from the 2020 law that PHMSA consider environmental harms and does nothing to push PHMSA to finalize safety rules for carbon dioxide pipelines and methane leak detection. Finally, the bill does nothing to enhance PHMSA’s ability to fight back against companies flouting its safety rules and regulations.

That is not to say the bill is all bad. I support the establishment of a voluntary information-sharing system and also think that pushing states to adopt best practices for their one-call excavation programs is a good idea. But, the bad in this discussion draft outweighs the good. Committee Republicans should learn the lessons of the partisan approach they took last Congress and not repeat the same mistakes. There is ample time to negotiate and alter the bill before a markup, and I hope we can get to a bipartisan product just like the other two committees have done. If we can't, we risk further delaying reauthorization of PHMSA’s critical pipeline safety authorities.

I don’t think that’s acceptable, and I don’t believe Republicans do, either. So, Chairman Latta, let’s work in a bipartisan fashion so we can produce a bill that keeps the American people safe.

Thank you. I yield back the balance of my time, Mr. Chairman.