



**WRITTEN STATEMENT OF
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**BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY
HEARING ON PIPELINE SAFETY REAUTHORIZATION**

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Introduction

Chairman Latta, Ranking Member Castor and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today on the reauthorization of the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration's (PHMSA) pipeline safety program. I appreciate the subcommittee's support for PHMSA's vital work in ensuring the safety of our nation's vast energy transportation network.

Safety drives everything we do at DOT and PHMSA. Our goal is a zero-incident future for the nation's network of over 3.3 million miles of pipelines transporting oil, gas, and other energy products all over the country. PHMSA also oversees approximately 400 underground natural gas storage facilities and 180 liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities, as well as nearly 1.2 million daily shipments of hazardous materials via other modes of transportation. A modern, safe, and reliable transportation network is critical to ensuring American homes and businesses always have access to the energy needed to power daily life.

PHMSA's pipeline safety program has three key elements: updating or developing new regulations, policies, and guidance for operators; using our enforcement process to hold pipeline operators accountable; and supporting research into new and promising technologies. Each of these three elements is critical to ensuring the safety and reliability of our pipeline network,

which is more important than ever before as our nation experiences an energy renaissance, propelled by innovative production technologies and global demand for U.S. energy.

Under Secretary Duffy's leadership, the PHMSA team is hard at work unleashing American energy and delivering on President Trump's America First agenda. PHMSA is operating more efficiently and effectively than ever before, initiating more pro-growth, pro-safety rulemakings in the first year of this administration than in the previous four years combined.

Our regulatory agenda has been heavily focused on modernizing our regulations and eliminating unnecessary and outdated requirements that do not advance our safety mission. Many of PHMSA's regulations have not been updated in decades, and last year we initiated several concurrent efforts to update key sections of our code to enhance safety and encourage continued industry innovation.

At the same time, PHMSA has revamped its enforcement program to ensure the process is fair while continuing to hold operators accountable. PHMSA announced new inspection and enforcement priorities for the agency last year, a first-of-its kind effort that recently led to the issuance of the highest proposed administrative civil penalty in the agency's history. The agency is also deploying its investigators earlier and more often to ensure we are on-site when incidents occur.

PHMSA is laser focused on safety, which is why we are also refocusing the agency's research and development program, shifting away from the previous administration's pursuit of a green agenda and sending dollars back to research that can help improve the safety of our existing infrastructure and keep it operating safely for years to come.

PHMSA's most recent pipeline safety authorization expired in 2023. While the agency has continued to operate since then, we appreciate the Subcommittee's attention to extending our authorization formally. I am particularly grateful for the streamlined approach the committee has proposed. PHMSA is continuing work to complete several outstanding mandates from past reauthorizations, and your bill will allow us to continue focusing on advancing those priorities without adding to the agency's backlog.

I have been a public servant most of my career, and I am honored to return to PHMSA as Administrator after four years in which the agency's top job was left vacant. Having served as both a State utility regulator and as PHMSA's Chief Counsel, I know how critical the agency's work is to ensuring public safety, and I am grateful that President Trump has prioritized staffing the agency and returning its focus to its core safety mission. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and share my vision for a modern PHMSA.

Rulemaking and Congressional Mandates

Last year, PHMSA announced an ambitious rulemaking agenda intended to reduce regulatory burdens on industry and unleash American energy, beginning with an effort to modernize Federal standards for LNG facilities as directed by Congress in the Protecting Our Infrastructure of Pipelines and Enhancing Safety (PIPES) Act of 2020. The Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) PHMSA issued in April 2025 opened the docket for public comment on our intent to update these critical regulations using a risk-based regulatory framework. The United States is a global leader in LNG safety, and this effort will support the safe expansion of our LNG export capacity and continued American energy dominance abroad.

PHMSA followed that announcement with another ANPRM related to updates to repair criteria for both gas transmission and hazardous liquid pipelines. Many of the current repair criteria have been in place for decades, even as PHMSA regulations and industry standards have evolved. We can and should make updates to reflect advancements in technology and best practices to ensure that operators are directing their resources where the safety need is greatest.

Because so many of PHMSA's regulations have gone untouched for years, there are abundant opportunities for improvement. That is why the agency also issued a broader "Unleashing American Energy" ANPRM soliciting feedback from the public on which regulations could be eliminated or updated to reduce regulatory burdens while preserving safety. Feedback from this ANPRM supported the agency's issuance of 28 regulatory actions on a single day this past summer. This deregulatory package was built upon ideas submitted by the public to that docket, as well as successful PHMSA special permits and industry consensus standards.

We are on track to be just as productive in 2026. In January, PHMSA published a final rule modernizing the class location regulations for gas transmission lines. This rule was years in the making and accounts for more than five decades of advancements in technology and safety practices. The rule is modeled on PHMSA's highly successful class location special permit program. PHMSA has been issuing these special permits for decades without a single failure on an affected segment of pipe. The changes in the final rule will allow operators to avoid unnecessary pipeline replacements and pressure reductions by implementing modern, risk-based Integrity Management practices. The agency expects these changes to save more than \$461 million per year and reduce maintenance-related emissions by 1.3 billion cubic feet per year. PHMSA anticipates these cost savings will allow industry to reinvest in other critical safety areas.

Later this year, PHMSA intends to publish Notices of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) for the LNG facilities and repair criteria rulemakings we initiated last year. The agency also plans to address another congressional mandate related to the safety of gas distribution pipelines.

PHMSA published an NPRM on gas distribution safety in 2023. PHMSA plans to hold a meeting this year with the Gas Pipeline Advisory Committee (GPAC) to advance progress towards a final rule.

In addition to the LNG facilities and gas distribution safety rules, PHMSA expects to address another congressional mandate next month by opening a physical location for its National Center of Excellence for LNG Safety. Last year, the agency signed a 20-year lease to establish the Center of Excellence at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana. As directed by the PIPES Act of 2020, the Center of Excellence will support the LNG revolution by encouraging innovation and collaboration. PHMSA is actively hiring staff for the Center of Excellence and expects to move into the new location in the coming months.

Enforcement and Compliance

As the agency's former Chief Counsel, ensuring PHMSA has a strong and effective enforcement program is one of my top priorities. Last year, PHMSA announced several policy changes that I believe will ensure the process remains fair while still holding operators accountable for safety violations.

As outlined in two memoranda from our Chief Counsel, PHMSA has implemented long-overdue reforms to ensure the law is applied fairly. First, we have changed how civil penalties are calculated. Operators are now held accountable to the penalties in place at the time a violation occurred, rather than potentially being subjected to enhanced penalties instituted after-the-fact. The agency has also begun sharing case files and disclosing all pertinent agency records to operators subject to enforcement proceedings, including potentially exculpatory evidence. This is not only fair – it also responds to an open congressional mandate from the PIPES Act of 2020.

These reforms are part of a broader Department-wide effort to ensure due process and transparency. The Department has established updated procedural requirements to ensure all enforcement actions adhere to core due process principles, specifically requiring adequate notice and a meaningful opportunity for affected parties to be heard. The Department has proposed to codify those protections and others in the Code of Federal Regulations.

The Department is working to codify policies and procedures relating to the issuance of rulemaking documents, the clearance of guidance documents, and the initiation and conduct of enforcement actions, including administrative enforcement proceedings and judicial enforcement actions brought in Federal court.

In addition to these reforms, PHMSA for the first time announced data-driven inspection and enforcement priorities. These priorities provide direction to PHMSA staff, focusing our regulatory oversight on the areas our data show have the greatest impact on pipeline safety. Those priorities are incidents and accidents; high and moderate consequence areas; control room management and leak detection; damage prevention; and transactions and due diligence.

These new priorities are driving change in the agency and producing results. PHMSA staff conducting inspections are prioritizing operator compliance with recent rulemakings developed in response to significant accidents and incidents, including inspection of rupture mitigation valves, verification of pipeline materials, reconfirmation of Maximum Allowable Operating Pressure, and Underground Natural Gas Storage facility safety.

The focus on incidents and accidents goes hand in hand with our decision to begin deploying PHMSA staff to more reported incidents. Having boots on the ground earlier and more often allows us to support our State partners and other first responders and is decreasing the time it takes for us to gather information and issue Corrective Action Orders when appropriate.

These efforts to ensure due process and refocus our inspection and enforcement process should not be misinterpreted as going soft on safety. If operators break the rules, PHMSA will act decisively. In January, Secretary Duffy and I announced the largest civil penalty ever proposed in a pipeline safety enforcement action—\$9.6 million against Panther Operating Company following the release of 1.1 million gallons of crude oil in the Gulf of America.

PHMSA and the Department of Justice also recently settled another significant case in Federal court. The complaint alleged that Panhandle Eastern Pipe Line Co., LP violated pipeline safety regulations, and that the company's failure to follow the rules led to an employee's death. The operator agreed to pay the government \$1.425 million to settle the case. The case is particularly significant because the operator challenged PHMSA's authority to take enforcement action. PHMSA's enforcement program is critical to ensuring pipeline safety and holding operators accountable, and we will continue to defend it vigorously.

Data, Research, and Innovation

PHMSA has a small but mighty research and development (R&D) program. We leverage \$12.5 million a year to advance critical pipeline safety research, and those funds must be managed responsibly to maximize their impact. The prior administration chose to direct these funds to green agenda projects focused on transporting carbon dioxide and alternative fuels like hydrogen. As this administration pursues American energy dominance and increased domestic oil and gas production, PHMSA is refocusing its R&D program and aligning our research agenda

with the most pressing pipeline safety challenges to make our existing pipeline infrastructure safer.

To do that effectively, the agency needs input from industry, academia, and other stakeholders. We will be seeking direction through the next PHMSA R&D forum, which is scheduled later this month. This year's forum will feature panels focused on advancing digital transformation and optimizing gas transmission and liquid pipeline integrity. We will be convening five dedicated working groups to look at gas transmission and liquid pipelines; corrosion research; damage prevention; human error prevention; and LNG.

PHMSA will also be hosting a Technology Transfer Workshop as part of the R&D forum. This session is designed to bridge the gap between innovation and implementation by hearing directly from operators regarding the technical and regulatory barriers that currently hinder the deployment of safety-advancing technologies. Our goal is for federally funded research to result in market-ready solutions that protect the American public.

Focusing our research on supporting these market-ready solutions ensures we are maximizing the impact of our grant funding. For example, one recent project is developing a rapidly curing, light- or heat-activated resin system for internal pipeline repairs that will deliver three times the fracture toughness of standard epoxies and nearly 95 percent the strength of steel. PHMSA anticipates this project will be commercialized when completed, offering a cost-effective solution to protect critical infrastructure.

PHMSA also collects data from operators that helps us assess safety trends to support our R&D agenda as well as other policy decisions. That data has historically been difficult for the public to access and interpret. Another key part of this administration's effort to modernize the agency is improving the website to make our data more usable, so it can better inform safety outcomes. PHMSA held a public meeting in September to solicit feedback from stakeholders on whether PHMSA is collecting the right data from operators to improve pipeline safety, as well as ideas on how we could better present that data for public consumption. I look forward to sharing more in the future on our progress.

State Partners

Sections 60105 and 60106 of Title 49 U.S. Code (49 U.S.C.) require PHMSA to certify State pipeline safety programs that meet statutory requirements and allow them to assume safety authority for inspection and enforcement related to intrastate pipelines. The Federal pipeline safety regulations that PHMSA issues are considered minimum standards, and States can either choose to adopt those standards or introduce their own more stringent standards.

Our State partners regulate over 85 percent of the 3.3-million-mile pipeline network that PHMSA oversees, and our State partners are critical to ensuring effective oversight. PHMSA supports our State partners through formula grants that reimburse up to 80 percent of the cost of running a State pipeline safety program, including personnel and equipment. In September, Secretary Duffy announced \$86 million in grants to the States, including \$82 million in Pipeline Safety State Base Grants and \$4 million in Underground Natural Gas Storage Grants.

The majority of these intrastate pipelines are gas distribution lines delivering energy to homes and businesses in populated areas. These grants help keep communities safe and energy flowing by funding the inspections needed to ensure the distribution network is operating safely.

As a former State utility commissioner, no one values this partnership more than me. I know first-hand that State regulators have invaluable expertise regarding local and regional infrastructure challenges and needs. However, I would be remiss if I fail to mention a concerning trend the agency has identified. Certain States are choosing to delay critical safety upgrades, specifically the replacement of cast iron and bare steel pipelines, some of which predate the Civil War.

DOT issued a Call to Action in 2011 urging States and operators to prioritize replacing these aging, leak-prone pipes which present a heightened safety risk. While progress has been made in the last decade, significant mileage remains in the ground, and some State regulators are refusing to approve utilities' repair and replacement plans. Citing climate goals and a desire to stop investing in fossil fuel infrastructure, these States are making a short-sighted choice to ignore a known safety threat in favor of scoring political points.

PHMSA has sent letters to multiple States, including my home State of Rhode Island, urging them to rethink their position. Safety cannot be held hostage to environmental ideology. Under my leadership, PHMSA will continue to hold our State partners accountable for doing the work that is needed to ensure pipeline safety.

Oversight and Accountability

As a safety regulator, PHMSA values its partnership with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the DOT Office of Inspector General (OIG), and the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Their findings often highlight opportunities for us to strengthen our programs and advance safety. PHMSA is working to address outstanding recommendations from these bodies.

Since this administration took office, PHMSA has closed three outstanding NTSB recommendations: one related to promoting the benefits of pipeline safety management systems;

and two related to addressing the risks associated with hydrogen-induced cracking and hard-spots, highlighting the need to follow industry best practices when conducting in-line inspection data analysis. PHMSA has completed the necessary safety actions and formally requested closure of seven additional recommendations.

PHMSA also closed an outstanding GAO recommendation directing the agency to develop an implementation plan for the 2022 gas transmission final rule.

PHMSA has no open OIG recommendations, but the agency is currently working with the DOT OIG on an audit of the agency's Natural Gas Distribution Infrastructure Safety and Modernization (NGDISM) grant program. The bipartisan infrastructure law provided \$1 billion in funding for this five-year program that is now entering its final year. The money supports municipal and community-owned utilities' work to repair, rehabilitate, or replace aging and leak-prone natural gas distribution pipelines. PHMSA is providing the OIG with all requested information and looks forward to reviewing any recommendations they may have to ensure the continued integrity of the program as grantees continue to spend down these funds.

By addressing recommendations from our government partners head-on, we are doing our utmost to learn from the past and prevent future incidents and accidents.

Conclusion

Thank you for your work on this bill to reauthorize PHMSA. The committee's proposed approach introduces important statutory reforms aligned with the administration's efforts to modernize the agency. The proposed changes to the regulation of in-plant piping and the special permit program, for example, will make permanent some of the common-sense reforms that we recently put in place.

These changes will be impactful while the decision to forego new regulatory mandates allows the agency to continue forging ahead with efforts to clear the backlog of outstanding rulemaking requirements.

Today's PHMSA is more efficient, effective, and responsive than ever before. I am grateful to the dedicated PHMSA staff for their hard work keeping the American people safe and ensuring affordable, domestic energy is available where it is needed.

In closing, I want to thank you again, Chairman Latta, Ranking Member Castor, and members of the Subcommittee, for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.