

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johson (D-TX)
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Joint Subcommittee Hearing
“Bakken Petroleum: The Substance of Energy Independence”

September 9, 2014

Thank you Chairman Lummis and Chairman Broun for holding this afternoon’s hearing to discuss issues related to the transportation of oil from the Bakken region. I am looking forward to hearing more about steps the Administration is taking to ensure that this is done as safely as possible and that measures are being taken to provide emergency personnel with all the information and training they need to do their job in the event of an accident.

No one wants to see another horrific train derailment and explosion like the one that happened in a small town in Quebec which claimed 47 lives last year. Unfortunately, more and more of these dangerous incidents are happening because there are more and more trains carrying light crude oil to refineries across the country. The Federal Railroad Administration estimates that the overall volume of crude oil moving by rail increased from just over 65,000 carloads in 2011 to more than 255,000 carloads in 2012, and more than 400,000 carloads last year. In addition, according to the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration the number of train accidents involving crude oil increased from zero in 2010 to five in 2013 and another five as of August of this year. Our first responders and fire fighters must be adequately prepared to act if a train derails and the leaking oil catches fire.

I have been a strong supporter of bills reauthorizing the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response program. These grants provide money to fire departments throughout the nation, including in Dallas and the surrounding cities in my Congressional District in Texas, to purchase equipment, to fund training programs, and to hire additional firefighters. In fact, in May, the Federal Emergency Management Agency awarded the Lancaster Fire Department a grant that will provide critical help to meeting its firefighting and emergency medical response needs.

The firefighters in the cities and towns these trains pass through need to know what kinds of oil are going through their communities. Knowing the level of flammability and other key characteristics of the materials carried in these tank cars will help inform local fire departments and first responders on how to prepare for any future accidents and may well help save lives.

While I am certainly supportive of the responsible development of new sources of energy, we also have a responsibility to protect the welfare of the people. I look forward to this Committee doing what it can to support any additional research into the safety of crude oil transportation and to support the necessary emergency response training for our firefighters. I appreciate the witnesses’ time and expertise.

Thank you, and I yield back.