

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery

of

Subcommittee on Energy

Ranking Member Kathy Castor

Hearing on “Strengthening American Energy: A Review of Pipeline Safety Policy”

July 22, 2025

Today’s hearing is a reminder about the important role that this Committee has in ensuring the safety of the public and our energy infrastructure. Congress created the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration in 2004 and charged it with ensuring the safety of nearly 3.3 million miles of pipelines across the country.

Pipelines can be dangerous – there are over 630 pipeline safety incidents each year, resulting in 44 injuries and 10 deaths. That’s why PHMSA’s work – setting safety standards and inspecting interstate pipelines – is critical.

For years, Democrats have been focused on ensuring that PHMSA has adequate resources and the professional workforce that it needs. After a number of accidents and evidence of harmful, leaky pipelines, Congress passed the Pipes Act of 2020 to address methane pollution and improve safety standards for gas gathering lines and other pipeline segments. We followed in 2021 with the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that allocated \$1 billion over five years for Natural Gas Distribution Infrastructure Safety and Modernization Grants to help replace leak-prone pipelines.

Congress has been clear that we expect PHMSA to conduct robust reviews of pipeline maintenance and operation plans. The last time we reauthorized PHMSA’s Office of Pipeline Safety, in the bipartisan PIPES Act of 2020, we required PHMSA to consider “protection of the environment” when reviewing proposed safety rules, including on methane leak detection. The Biden Administration completed a final leak detection rule, but President Trump demanded PHMSA withdraw it.

Climate risks, costs, and harms are growing in severity, and PHMSA’s work is only becoming more important. Climate-fueled hurricanes and other extreme weather can cause pipeline leaks and explosions, especially in high-risk states like Texas and Louisiana. We must ensure that climate impacts are considered in siting, design, repair, and maintenance of oil and gas infrastructure, including pipelines. I hope today can be the start of a real bipartisan process to reauthorize PHMSA’s pipeline safety activities and that we can work to address some of these issues in this Committee.

Unfortunately, rather than follow the law mandated by Congress, the Trump Administration’s PHMSA is taking a laissez faire approach to pipeline safety, and that is dangerous and costly. The Trump Administration has gutted PHMSA over the past seven months. Enforcement actions by the agency are at record lows – just 5 cases in the first three months of this year, compared to 66 cases during the same time period in 2017. More than half of the agency’s senior leadership has left.

July 22, 2025

Page 2

We've seen this playbook over and over again from the Trump Administration. My neighbors in Florida are less safe as we enter hurricane season because cuts at the National Weather Service have terminated vital satellite forecasting programs and left Florida offices 20-40% understaffed. At the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the President asked the existing Chair—who he appointed the first time around—to resign early and then nominated a new Chair who doesn't have an energy background. These actions jeopardize FERC's independence and make our energy systems less safe.

At the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, President Trump has fired a safety commissioner and pushed executive orders that threaten NRC independence, making it vulnerable to industry or government influence in ways that could increase the risk of a nuclear accident.

And just last week, Trump fired nearly every member of the US Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board. At every opportunity, Trump is cutting corners with safety and attacking agency independence. This is not normal, and I urge my Republican colleagues on this Committee to conduct real oversight and stand up against President Trump's reckless gutting of independent, expert regulators that keep Americans safe.

Americans want safe and affordable energy – but analyses are pouring in: the Republican Big Ugly Bill will raise energy costs for American families over 400 dollars each year, and cost businesses between 7 and 11 billion dollars more per year. The Big Ugly Bill will decrease our electricity generation capacity by more than 300 gigawatts – at the same time we're facing massive heat waves and exploding electricity demand growth.

Democrats in Congress are standing up for hardworking families who need lower energy bills, not a Republican Rate Hike that gives handouts to billionaires while hiking electricity bills, killing jobs, poisoning our air, and selling out America's future to Big Oil and China.

I yield back.