

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
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**Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman**  
**Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce**  
**“The American Energy Initiative, Day 11 - Discussion Draft of H.R. \_\_, the ‘Pipeline**  
**Infrastructure and Community Protection Act of 2011”**  
**Subcommittee on Energy and Power**  
**July 15, 2011**

Today, we will examine the safety of the nation’s oil and natural gas pipelines and begin to consider legislation to update and strengthen our pipeline safety laws.

During the last twelve months, a litany of tragic failures has reinforced the need for stronger pipeline safety laws. Since last month’s hearing on this topic, ExxonMobil’s Silvertip Pipeline ruptured in Montana, spilling an estimated 31,500 to 42,000 gallons of crude oil into the Yellowstone River. It appears that the oil may have been carried as far as 240 miles down the river. Pockets of oil have been confirmed at least 90 miles down the river. Ranchers are struggling to prevent the contamination from destroying their livelihoods. We don’t yet know the cause of this spill, though much of the focus is on whether the pipeline buried beneath the river was uncovered by erosion from flooding and became vulnerable to a collision from debris.

During May of this year, two serious spills occurred on the first Keystone pipeline, which brings Canadian tar sands oil to refineries in Illinois and Oklahoma. This is a brand new pipeline. It was predicted to spill no more than once every seven years. But in just one year of operation, it has reported twelve separate oil spills.

In February, a natural gas pipeline in Allentown, Pennsylvania exploded, killing five people and damaging more than 50 homes and businesses. This was an old cast-iron pipeline.

Last September, a natural gas pipeline on the other side of the country ruptured and exploded in San Bruno, California. Eight people died. Many more were injured. The gas-fed inferno spread from house to house, driven by the wind. 38 homes were destroyed and 70 more were damaged. The explosion left behind a suburban street with a massive crater and burned-out vehicles. The Vice Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board described it as “an amazing scene of destruction.”

Two months before the San Bruno explosion, a crude oil pipeline ruptured near Marshall, Michigan. Over 800,000 gallons of oil spilled into the Talmadge Creek and then

flowed into the Kalamazoo River. The cleanup is ongoing a year later and is expected to cost \$550 million.

These are just some of the catastrophic pipeline failures our country has experienced during the past 12 months. These failures have occurred all around the country, from California and Montana to Michigan and Pennsylvania. Natural gas pipelines have exploded. Oil pipelines have ruptured. Some failures involved old, out-dated pipelines, others involved brand new, supposedly state-of-the-art pipelines. When we step back and look at the last twelve months, I think it's impossible to conclude that our pipeline safety laws are working as intended.

We need to seize this opportunity to reauthorize and update the pipeline safety statute. The Senate Commerce Committee has produced a moderate, bipartisan bill. I think the Senate bill is a good place to start, and I hope that we can work together to strengthen and improve that bill. The discussion draft we'll be examining today contains several of the same provisions but also weakens some key provisions.

With the benefit of the testimony we'll hear today, let's use this discussion draft as a foundation to craft a strong bill together. I don't think there is any reason for this to be a partisan issue. We want to work in a cooperative fashion to produce a good bill that will meaningfully enhance pipeline safety.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.