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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce
“Pipeline Safety Oversight and Legislation”
Subcommittee on Energy and Environment
September 23, 2010

Today the Subcommittee on Energy and Environment will examine the safety of the nation’s oil and natural gas pipelines. With over two and a half million miles of pipelines across the country, this issue affects every American. These pipelines are usually hidden from view, but we cannot afford to take their safety for granted.

Recent tragedies have reinforced the need for vigilant and strong oversight.

On September 9th, a natural gas pipeline operated by Pacific Gas and Electric Company ruptured and exploded in San Bruno, California. Seven people died. Many more were injured. The gas-fed inferno spread from house to house, driven by the wind. Thirty-seven homes were destroyed. 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.” Chairman Stupak and the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee are looking into this accident.

In late July, a crude oil pipeline operated by Enbridge ruptured near Marshall, Michigan. Between 800,000 and one million gallons of oil spilled into the Talmadge Creek and then flowed into the Kalamazoo River. Chairman Markey and this Subcommittee have been examining this spill.

These incidents are a stark reminder of the importance of pipeline safety. The last two reauthorizations of the pipeline safety statute – in 2002 and 2006 – required significant improvements to the regulations governing pipeline safety. This hearing is an initial step in the process of reauthorizing the statute. Our Committee needs to assess the implementation of the 2002 and 2006 provisions, identify where there have been implementation problems or where regulatory gaps remain, and determine what additional policies may be necessary to further increase safety and transparency. I don’t think anyone can look at what has happened in Michigan or California and conclude that our pipeline safety laws are working as intended.

Today’s hearing is an opportunity to examine these issues. The government agency, industry, and safety advocate witnesses testifying today will present a variety of perspectives on

the legislative proposals and policy issues before us. The Administration has offered a legislative proposal on pipeline safety which we need to carefully analyze.

I look forward to the testimony and discussion. I don't think there is any reason for this to be a partisan issue. We want to work with all of the members of the Committee in a cooperative fashion to produce a good bill that will enhance pipeline safety.