

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION**

Full Committee
Nominations Hearing
Wednesday, July 16, 2025, at 10:00 A.M.

DEMOCRATIC QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

Mr. Paul Roberti

COVER PAGE

SENATOR MARIA CANTWELL (D-WA)

Federal Workforce Staffing Cuts

In May, the Department of Transportation paused its planned reductions in force due to ongoing litigation. On July 8, the Supreme Court allowed the Administration to move forward with widespread firings. There is now uncertainty about what actions DOT plans to take. Meanwhile, 13.1 percent of Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) employees have already left the agency through the deferred resignation program.

Question 1: Yes or No: Do you oppose a reduction-in-force at PHMSA, particularly when the agency has already lost over 13 percent of its workforce?

Answer:

Question 2: Are you concerned that widespread departures may be contributing to the decline in enforcement actions?

Answer:

Compliance with PHMSA Rulemaking Transparency Requirements

Congress required PHMSA to provide monthly updates on its progress in implementing congressionally mandated pipeline safety requirements. This is critical information needed to hold an agency accountable for completing Congressional mandates, some of which date back to 2011. However, we have not received a status update since January 2025.

Question 1: During your tenure at PHMSA the agency provided timely updates on the implementation of federal law. Yes or No: Do you believe it is acceptable that current agency leadership has failed to keep Congress informed?

Answer:

Question 2: If confirmed, will you commit to providing the monthly updates that Congress requires?

Answer:

Continuing Pipeline Safety Trust Funding

The Pipeline Safety Trust was created in the aftermath of the Olympic Pipeline explosion that killed three kids in Bellingham, Washington. The trust works to ensure that other families in communities around the country do not have to face similar tragedies.

Question 1: The Trust currently receives grant funding to ensure communities understand the unique risks that pipelines pose to them so that they can adequately prepare. Do you think this kind of public education is important?

Answer:

Question 2: Do you support continuing the Pipeline Safety Trust's educational efforts?

Answer:

Safer Rail Tank Cars

The National Transportation Safety Board has repeatedly found that DOT-111 tank cars do not perform well in derailments. The Board has recommended that these tank cars be phased out for the transportation of all hazardous materials and replaced with stronger DOT-117 tank cars, which have a much better track record of preventing spills during derailments.

Question 1: Do you agree that we should phase out DOT-111 tank cars for the transportation of all hazardous materials?

Answer:

Improving Emergency Response Preparedness and Training

Just this month in Glendora, Mississippi, 12 fire departments and 50 fire trucks fought a fire caused by a train derailment for over 12 hours. The fire was not extinguished until Canadian National Railroad was able to bring specialized firefighting foam to the scene.

Question 1: Do you believe we should reform PHMSA's existing hazardous materials emergency response grant programs to ensure that firefighters—like those in Glendora and East Palestine—can obtain the training and equipment they need to respond more effectively to hazardous materials incidents?

Answer:

Question 2: What more can we do to ensure that railroads are providing first responders with the information they need to adequately prepare for these kinds of emergencies?

Answer:

SENATOR ED MARKEY (D-MA)

Enforcement

Question 1: Pipeline enforcement cases have fallen by more than two-thirds so far this Administration. Do you commit to reversing this trend and ensuring that enforcement actions continue?

Answer:

Question 2: How do you plan to ensure that pipeline operators are held accountable for regulatory violations?

Answer:

Staffing Cuts

PHMSA has always struggled with insufficient staffing to carry out its mandates on pipeline safety. To make matters worse, in recent months, 20 percent of the agency's staff has departed. For example, the Community Liaisons—which were already understaffed with only a dozen FTEs covering the entire nation—are reportedly down to a team of three people.

Question 1: Do you believe reductions in staffing can affect safety, inspections, and community outreach?

Answer:

Question 2: What specific steps will you take to rebuild PHMSA's workforce?

Answer:

Question 3: Do you believe community outreach is an important component of PHMSA's work?

Answer:

Question 4: Will you commit to fully staff the Public Engagement Division

Answer:

Liquid Natural Gas

PHMSA's existing liquefied natural gas (LNG) safety regulations are out of date; they have not been substantially updated in more than two decades and come from an era before the rapid proliferation of massive U.S. LNG export terminals. This regulatory gap is especially concerning given the flammable and explosive nature of LNG and the proximity of many facilities to communities. After two Congressional mandates in 2016 and 2020 to update LNG safety regulations, PHMSA recently published an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking on the topic.

Question 1: How do you plan to seek input from community members near LNG facilities? Please include how you will ensure physical and virtual accessibility, as well as transparency for community members.

Answer:

Draft Carbon Dioxide Rule

Last Congress, I introduced a bill to improve pipeline accountability, safety, and environmental standards. Amongst multiple other priorities, my bill would finalize regulations on carbon dioxide pipelines to avoid future disasters like the one that devastated Satartia, Mississippi.

Question 1: Will you commit to finalizing the draft carbon dioxide pipeline rule, which PHMSA proposed in January of this year?

Answer:

Question 2: If yes, by when would you ensure the rule is finalized?

Answer:

Question 3: If not, please explain why you do not support a rule to improve safety on this technology, particularly as it expands throughout the country.

Answer:

SENATOR GARY PETERS (D-MI)

1. Mr. Roberti, in your written testimony you mention “constant vigilance” as a key to ensuring pipeline safety. I wholeheartedly agree. However, “constant vigilance” isn’t possible without proper staffing.

PHMSA is a relatively small agency that has faced hiring and retention challenges for several years. That’s why the PIPES Act of 2020 – which was signed into law by President Trump – included a mandate for PHMSA to hire 20% more pipeline inspectors in the succeeding three years.

Unfortunately, since the creation of DOGE, PHMSA employees have been encouraged to leave the agency, and many have. Some estimates suggest as much as 20 percent of the agency has left just in the first few months of this Administration.

PHMSA is not an agency I want to have spread thin. The stakes are just too high.

So, Mr. Roberti, can you speak to the importance of proper staffing levels at PHMSA to ensuring pipeline safety? As Administrator, will you work to ensure that PHMSA is properly staffed and, specifically, that the staffing levels outlined in the 2020 PIPES Act are met?

2. Currently, state utility commissions and state pipeline inspectors oversee about 85 percent of the nation’s pipeline infrastructure. This federal/state partnership is critical, as our state inspectors are intimately familiar with local pipeline operations and their work can lead to more thorough and more frequent inspections than what PHMSA alone could provide. Recognizing the important role our states play in ensuring pipeline safety, in 2024, Congress boosted funding for state pipeline inspection programs to the tune of roughly 30 percent.

Mr. Roberti, do you support continuing to fund state pipeline inspection programs at the levels envisioned by Congress – at up to 80% of their costs – so that states have the tools to oversee pipeline safety and environmental protection?

SENATOR BEN RAY LUJÁN (D-NM)

1. PHMSA has been tasked with drafting leak detection and repair standards for gas pipelines by Congress and signed by President Trump in 2020. PHMSA drafted a final rule that received broad support last year, but was withdrawn.

What timeline will you commit to ensuring PHMSA complies with this legislative mandate and what are your views on the withdrawn rule?

2. PHMSA has had an unprecedented drop in enforcement over the past few months.

What are your plans to ensure that pipeline operators are held accountable for regulatory violations?

3. Most of PHMSA's leadership team has left the agency in recent months. Other departments have been hit especially hard with retirements as well. For example, the Community Liaisons have apparently gone from 13 to 3.

(a) Do you believe the reduced staffing and leadership levels at PHMSA will impact safety?

(b) If so, what specific steps will you take to rebuild PHMSA's institutional knowledge and leadership capacity?

(c) How will you ensure communities have adequate access to pipeline safety information and emergency response coordination?

SENATOR BLUNT ROCHESTER (D-DE)

PHMSA and Train Derailments

Question 1: There has been some discussion about renewing a proposal from the first Trump Administration that would allow for the transport of Liquified Natural Gas by tanker rail cars without any restrictions on train routes, nor the number of tanker cars allowed on a particular train. The National Transportation Safety Board and the National Association of State Fire Marshall have previously objected to this proposal.

As the nominee for PHMSA Administrator, can you share your thoughts on renewing this proposal? And will you be pursuing this proposal?

Answer:

Question 2: Safety concerns have only increased following recent tanker rail car derailments, including one last month in Bear, Delaware, carrying crude oil—thankfully, no one was hurt.

Can you discuss the vulnerabilities of switching to tanker rail cars as opposed to approved UN portable tanks that PHMSA has historically required?

Answer:

PHMSA and Technology

Question 1: As you know, pipelines require continuous monitoring and inspections to protect public safety and prevent pipeline system failures and leaks.

As Administrator, how will you incorporate technology innovation into pipeline management?

Answer: