

**Governor Gary Locke's Remarks
Testimony to Senate Commerce, Science, & Transportation Committee
13 March, 2000
Bellingham, Washington**

I want to express my appreciation to Senator Gorton and Senator Murray for holding this field hearing to allow the people of Washington to express our concerns about the safety of the pipelines that lie below our towns and cities.

Since the terrible tragedy on June 10, 1999, we have become all too aware of the risks surrounding these vital pathways so central to our fuel distribution network. We realize we need pipelines to carry the natural gas and petroleum products that power our cars and trucks, warm our homes, and keep factories humming and airplanes flying. But we also know that for virtually all of us, the risks posed by the pipelines were "out of sight, out of mind" before the explosion in Whatcom Falls Park.

Immediately after this tragic event, I formed a task force to research our pipeline regulatory system and our response capability. That team worked incredibly hard for 5 months, analyzing the existing regulatory system and response capacity and preparing recommendations for improvement. They consulted with experts from the federal government – including the National Transportation Safety Board and the Office of Pipeline Safety – from other states, including Minnesota and California that operate their own interstate pipeline safety oversight programs – and from a variety of interest groups.

One of the first things they – and the people of Washington – learned was that our state exercises almost no control over the pipeline that leaked the gasoline that exploded. This interstate pipeline – as well as 6 other interstate petroleum and natural gas lines – is solely under the authority of the federal Office of Pipeline Safety. And until Senator Murray succeeded in obtaining an OPS position for our state, the entire Western Region had only 13 inspectors.

When the task force's work was done, they issued a report that included over 30 strong and solid recommendations for improving pipeline safety. I endorsed those recommendations and have been working with our state legislature, with other Governors, and with members of Washington's congressional delegation to turn them into reality. I would like to acknowledge the hard work done by the legislature on this subject, especially Representative Linville and Senator Spanel.

Since December:

- ◆ The Legislature adopted the Washington State Pipeline Safety Act, which will strengthen our "Call-Before-You-Dig" program to reduce third-party damage to pipelines and will promote comprehensive mapping of pipeline locations to inform local governments who must make building permit decisions and prepare for pipeline accident response. The bill will also initiate studies by the State Fire Marshal of the training and equipment needs facing communities that lie along pipelines.
- ◆ The Legislature also adopted a Joint Memorial to Congress and the President that cited the work of the task force and urged you to amend the federal pipeline safety act to allow states to adopt and enforce standards stricter than federal standards when doing so would not interfere with interstate

commerce. Even before that occurs, the Memorial asks the President to direct the Office of Pipeline Safety to use existing law to grant authority to states for interstate pipeline oversight.

- ◆ I sponsored, and the National Governors' Association adopted, a resolution promoting stronger pipeline safety and committing the NGA to work with Congress on legislation to achieve that objective. This parallels a similar resolution that several Washington cities successfully promoted to the National League of Cities.
- ◆ I have been working with Senator Murray and Representative Metcalf to promote their bills that will push the Office of Pipeline Safety to adopt the stronger standards it should have enacted years ago and that will authorize willing states to go beyond federal standards on issues like operator training and certification, leak detection, and accident preparedness.
- ◆ Senator Gorton, I want to thank you for co-sponsoring Senator Murray's bill. I appreciate your recognition that pipeline safety is of paramount importance to the people in our state and I want to do everything in my power to work with you to ensure safe lines.

I am confident that with the concerted effort of my Administration and our entire congressional delegation we can change the federal law and institute a substantially stronger program here in Washington. That will enable us to give our citizens the peace of mind they deserve that the pipelines beneath our state are operated and maintained to protect public safety and our environment. This will be the legacy of Liam Wood, Wade King and Steven Tsiorvas.

Thank you very much.