

Opening Statement
of Senator Inouye
Pipeline Safety Hearing

May 11, 2000

I would like to thank the Chairman for convening this hearing today. Pipelines are an integral part of our transportation network, facilitating large movement of both gas and liquid throughout the United States. I was pleased to see that the overall pipeline accident rate declined last year, but have concerns because the average spill amount increased. While I recognize that pipelines are the safest way to transport hazardous materials, there is still much that can be done to ensure that pipelines are safer for people living near them and safer for the environment.

It is my pleasure to welcome Senator Murray to the Committee this morning. I look forward to hearing her comments on this important issue. She has been a strong advocate for increased vigilance on the subject of pipeline safety. Her legislation, S. 2004, lays out many options for strengthening safety and environmental standards.

Today we will hear from several very distinguished panels about gas and liquid pipelines. I would like to welcome all of the witnesses to the Committee this morning. I appreciate the commitment to pipeline safety that each of you have, and recognize that some of you are testifying before the Committee today as a result of very personal experiences. I want to thank all of the witnesses for their participation and I look forward to working with all of you as we craft a constructive authorization bill.

As we begin the process of reauthorizing the pipeline safety programs housed in the Office of Pipeline Safety, we have the responsibility for ensuring that transportation is efficient, clean and safe. Three bills have been introduced in the Senate this Congress. While I support S. 2004, introduced by Senator Patty Murray, I am interested in learning the witnesses's views of all the pending bills.

I am look forward to hearing from Administrator Coyner about pending rulemakings as a result of congressional mandates from the 1992 and 1996 legislation authorized by this Committee. I would like to see the Office of Pipeline Safety move ahead to implement outstanding mandates. Clearly some of these directives have languished much too long and I would be interested to know their current status.

On that subject, I would like to hear about personnel levels at OPS and whether or not they are sufficient to carry out legislative requirements. I see that your FY 2001 budget request is a 29 percent increase over this year's enacted appropriation. In addition, your grants to states and local entities is increased by 52 percent in your budget request. I understand that there will be additional needs for personnel and funding as research and development, inspections, and information gathering is expanded. I look forward to hearing how these demands will be met if your funding levels remain constant and what an increase in funding will permit. I want to work to ensure that the pipeline safety

program gets the level of support needed to be effective.

I will listen carefully to the testimony today. I look forward to hearing about the differences between the provisions in the pending legislative proposals and the program in use today.