

OPENING REMARKS FOR FULL COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 15205,
GAS PIPELINE SAFETY

Mr. Chairman, the bill we are considering today, H.R. 15205, extends the authorization for the Office of Gas Pipeline Safety for two years, and also authorizes for two years the continuation and expansion of the program supervised by that office which provides grants-in-aid to the states. These grants-in-aid contribute up to 50% of the cost of the states activities in pipeline safety, which are the backbone of the system.

As Chairman Staggers has told you, the Administration requested open-end authorizations for the administrative costs of the OPS, which the subcommittee rejected. Instead, we have recommended that specific sums be authorized -- \$2 million for fiscal 1975, \$2.8 million for fiscal 1976. The fiscal 1975 appropriations have already passed the House, provided for in the Department of Transportation funds.

We have also recommended the authorization of Federal grants-in-aid to the states of \$1.8 million for fiscal 1975 and \$2.5 million for fiscal 1976. These sums are in line with recommendations of ~~not only the Office of Pipeline Safety, but also~~ the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners.

Aside from the general policy of this committee against granting long-term, open-end authorizations, there is another basic reason that we have recommended extending the authorization for the Office of Pipeline Safety by only two years: during the hearings which our subcommittee held on June 13, we put a great many questions to the Director of OPS, Mr. Caldwell and to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Transportation, Mr. Sedan. The subcommittee intends to exercise its oversight authority and satisfy itself that the Office of Pipeline Safety is really doing the vitally important job the Congress has directed it to do, namely to insure that there will be no recurrence of the pipeline explosions that we have seen in the past year. Some of these tragic accidents have occurred within the local gas distribution systems which do not come under Federal control. The latest incident did occur in an interstate pipeline, but in a non-populated area in Virginia. There is, of course, no guarantee that we will be so lucky next time. It is the responsibility of Congress to see that the Office of Pipeline Safety is doing all that is humanly possible to prevent future accidents. We fully intend to assume that responsibility.