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9TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

REPUBLICAN POLICY COMMITTEE  
CHAIRMAN, TASK FORCE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

SENIOR FRESHMAN WHIP



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-0909  
January 23, 2008

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The Honorable Sheila Jackson-Lee  
Chair, Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection  
Committee on Homeland Security  
2435 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Madam Chairwoman:

I am writing to respectfully request that the Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection hold a hearing on pipeline security.

I have been honored to serve on the Homeland Security Committee, and its Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection Subcommittee which you and Ranking Member Lungren so ably lead, since my election to Congress. I sought a seat on this Committee to help strengthen our homeland defenses and ensure that federal security policies are properly protecting my constituents and our country. I believe, however, that current federal policies regarding pipeline security may be lacking and in need of scrutiny by our Subcommittee.

I have these concerns because of a recent incident near my congressional district in which a teenager drilled a hole into a pipeline carrying anhydrous ammonia, which released this dangerous gas and created a poisonous chemical cloud that forced the evacuation of thousands of area residents. I found the response from both the Department of Transportation – which is charged with pipeline safety – and the Department of Homeland Security – which is charged with pipeline security – very troubling.

Media reports indicated that both agencies failed to provide clear explanations about which agency should be responsible for an incident of this nature and whether federal pipeline security requirements are adequate to stop acts of vandalism such as this, or worse, deliberate acts of terrorism against pipelines, which federal warnings about Al Qaeda have specifically mentioned as terrorist targets.

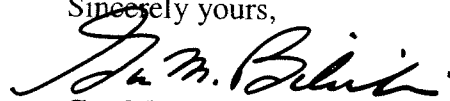
I believe that our Subcommittee should examine the interrelated responsibility that the Department of Transportation and the Department of Homeland Security share for pipeline safety and security and the respective roles of and division of authority between the Office of Pipeline Safety at DOT and the Transportation Security Administration at DHS for pipeline security.

I would like to explore whether federal policies are sufficient to ensure pipeline safety and security, mitigate security risks, and monitor compliance with safety and security standards. This is an especially important issue for my constituents and the area I represent, which is home to hundreds of miles of pipelines carrying oil, gas, jet fuel, and other chemicals that could cause significant loss-of-life and catastrophic damage if released into the atmosphere of a highly-populated area like the Tampa Bay region.

I believe that this incident should be a wake-up call about the potential vulnerabilities of our nation's critical pipeline infrastructure and federal procedures for ensuring their security. It also highlights some very serious issues that I believe our Subcommittee should examine. Therefore, I urge you to hold a Subcommittee hearing to highlight the aforementioned issues and ensure that federal pipeline security efforts are as sensible and robust as they should be.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my Legislative Director, Jerry White, at (202) 225-5755 if you have any questions or to discuss this matter. Again, thank you for your consideration of this request and for your leadership of the Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection.

Sincerely yours,



Gus M. Bilirakis  
Member of Congress

Cc: The Honorable Daniel E. Lungren  
Ranking Member, Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection Subcommittee  
Committee on Homeland Security  
2448 Rayburn House Office Building