

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eric Swalwell (D-CA)
Subcommittee on Energy
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Joint Subcommittee Hearing
“Bakken Petroleum: The Substance of Energy Independence”

September 9, 2014

Thank you Chairman Lummis and Chairman Broun for holding this hearing, and I also want to thank our witnesses for their testimony and for being here today.

We are obviously in the middle of a substantial boom in oil and gas production, and it is worth reminding my colleagues here today that this is a great example of how government research can pay off when it comes to energy development. It is widely recognized that DOE-supported research was key to advancing the directional drilling technologies and hydraulic fracturing practices that have made this boom even possible.

But it should also come as no surprise that the rapid, massive growth in demand to transport these fuels has raised new issues. What kind of growth am I talking about? Well, according to the Association of American Railroads, there were 10,800 carloads of crude oil transported by rail in 2009. Now that may sound like a lot, but in 2013, there were over 400,000 carloads of crude oil, or about 37 times as many. And it’s unfortunately becoming increasingly clear that our current railway safety standards were not designed to handle anywhere near these levels and types of crude oil transport we’re seeing today.

There have been several significant accidents in recent years, one of which led to the tragic death of 47 people in a small town in Quebec last year. And we may frankly be lucky that the locations of some of the other accidents were remote enough to avoid similar - or even worse - outcomes.

My home state of California is projected to receive up to 150 million barrels of oil by rail by 2016, compared with just 2 million barrels in 2011, and much of that oil will be volatile crude from the Bakken region of North Dakota and Canada.

This is why I am glad that the Department of Transportation is finally addressing this issue head on. It appears to me that with this proposed rule we are ensuring that the United States not only continues to be a leader in the production and transportation of these fuels, but that we really do this in a safe and responsible manner.

Thank you again to all of our witnesses for being here today and providing us with an opportunity to hear from a wide range of stakeholders, and with that I yield back.