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COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND COMMERCE

# Congress of the United States
## House of Representatives

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May 28, 2015

Mr. Timothy P. Butters
Deputy Administrator
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
East Building, 2nd Floor
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Deputy Administrator Butters:

I write to you regarding the May 19, 2015 failure of Plains Pipeline, LP's (Plains) Line 901 pipeline (pipeline) and the subsequent crude oil spill along the Gaviota Coast in the 24th Congressional district of California, which I represent.

The Santa Barbara community has sadly experienced devastating oil spills like this one in the past, most notably in 1969 when more than 4 million gallons of crude oil spilled into our ocean and onto our beaches from Union Oil's Platform A. While progress has been made since then to make oil drilling and transportation safer, spills continue to happen.

As you know, this particular spill of over 100,000 gallons of heavy crude oil has already caused severe damage to our local environment and economy, and these impacts will be felt for years to come. This spill is particularly devastating given that the Gaviota Coast is one of the most diverse and unique wildlife habitats in North America and has been largely protected from development precisely for this reason. The waters off this coastline are also important for our local economy, including recreation and commercial fishing interests.

I appreciate the briefings you provided me last week on what you have learned so far about the incident. However, many key questions remain unanswered, particularly regarding the spill detection and emergency shutoff systems. While I understand that it will take time for PHMSA to conduct its full investigation, I ask that you continue to keep my office updated on the latest steps in the Plains Spill cleanup and investigation, as well as provide my office and the public with answers to the following questions as soon as possible:

1) How much time elapsed between the pipeline failure and Plains becoming aware of the failure? How many gallons of oil spilled out of the pipeline after the valves were closed and the pumps were shut down?

2) Did Plains know the pipeline had failed prior to being contacted by local emergency personnel?

3) Why did it take nearly 90 minutes for Plains to report the spill to the National Response Center after it discovered the failure?

4) What, if any, spill detection sensors are installed on the pipeline? If there are sensors, at what intervals are these sensors installed on the pipeline?

5) Did Plains know of the pipeline failure prior to making a visual inspection onsite or being contacted by local emergency personnel? If yes, did they know the location of the failure prior to arriving onsite?

6) What emergency shutoff systems are installed on the pipeline? Did these systems function properly during this incident?

7) How far apart are the shutoff valves located on the pipeline? What is the volume of oil between the shut off valves? Are the valves nearer to high points of the pipeline or low points? How far away from the rupture is the nearest shutoff valve?

8) Are there more advanced spill detection and emergency shutoff systems available that, if installed on this pipeline, could have reduced the amount of oil spilled or prevented the spill entirely?

9) When will the formal analysis of the in-line inspection that took place on May 5, 2015 be completed and released to the public? Have you asked the vendor to expedite its analysis of the data collected? If not, will you?

10) Upon arriving at the failure site, what, if any effort did Plains personnel make to stop the spilled oil from flowing into the ocean? Are there any additional PHMSA safety requirements for pipelines near coastlines or in environmentally sensitive areas, such as the Gaviota Coast?

Additionally, as Plains proceeds with its compliance measures required under the May 21, 2015 Corrective Action Order (CAO), I urge you to make available to my office and the public any and all analyses and supporting documents submitted by Plains or produced by PHMSA regarding this incident. I also ask that you provide to my office and the public regular status updates regarding Plains' compliance with the CAO.

I look forward to working closely with you to ensure that this incident is thoroughly investigated, that those responsible are held accountable, and that federal safeguards are as strong as possible and enforced moving forward. Thank you for your attention to this issue, and I look forward to your responses.

Sincerely,

Lois Capps

**LOIS CAPPS**
**Member of Congress**