Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 12, 2011

Vice Admiral Thomas Barrett, USCG (Ret.)
President
Alyeska Pipeline Service Company
900 East Benson Blvd.
Anchorage, AK 99508

Dear Admiral Barrett:

As Ranking Member of the House Natural Resources Committee, I am deeply concerned about the recently discovered leak at Pump Station #1 of the Trans Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS). The Natural Resources Committee has jurisdiction over TAPS and I am therefore writing to request additional information regarding the leak investigation and your announced plan to restart pipeline operations before the scope of the leak has been established.

Among the many tragic lessons learned from the BP disaster in the Gulf is that the public's right to transparent and complete information regarding the causes and consequences of a failure of this type is paramount. Given the enormity of what is at stake – not only the continued operation of the pipeline, but also impacts to fragile natural resources – your cooperation in providing the public the necessary information will be critical.

Sadly, this incident is reminiscent of a March, 2006 leak from a BP pipeline which released 267,000 gallons of oil at Prudhoe Bay. At a 2007 hearing before the Energy and Commerce Committee, on which I also serve, Alyeska testified under oath that accelerated corrosion was not a threat to TAPS integrity and trumpeted "several new corrosion monitoring locations at Pump Station One." You testified at the hearing in your capacity as Administrator of the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration. It would appear that those new monitoring locations were insufficient.

Apparently, Alyeska has moved forward with a plan to "briefly restart the pipeline for an interim period" and "recover oil as needed." This proposal appears to be based on the assumption that all leaked oil will be recoverable; however, given that the leak is underground, this assumption is dubious. In fact, Situation Report #3, issued on January 10 and posted on your website, clearly states that, "It has not yet been determined whether oil has been released into the ground outside the concrete pipe casing and booster pump building."

Please provide detailed documentation regarding the amount of oil expected to be released during this restart, the methods that will be used to recover the leaked oil and evidence demonstrating that oil is not being released into the environment.

Please provide such documentation, as well as responses to the questions below, by 12:00pm, Tuesday, January 18.

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1. What caused the leak in the basement of Pump Station #1, which was discovered on Saturday, January 8, 2011? Please provide any schematics or blueprints depicting how and where the failure took place as well as detailed information regarding the scope of the leak, including the total amount of oil that has leaked and an exact description of any and all areas impacted by the leak.
2. How was the leak detected and what leak detection systems, if any, were in place at the time of the leak? Did those leak detection systems function as intended and if not, why not?
3. What corrosion detection measures were being used on the TAPS feeder line that ruptured and similar feeder lines? When were these lines last inspected for corrosion and how many times have these lines been inspected and maintained in the last 5 years?
4. Did any recent inspections show evidence of corrosion on the line that ruptured or any other lines in the TAPS system?
5. In the wake of the 2006 spill, it was learned that BP had not "pigged" some of its lines for years prior to the accident. How often was the feeder line that ruptured, and similar TAPS feeder lines, pigged and are so-called "smart-pigs" ever used on these lines? Is such activity required by statute and if so, how often?
6. The investigation into the 2006 incident also revealed a hostile workplace environment and regular harassment preventing employees from reporting evidence of corrosion. What steps have been taken to remedy this situation since 2006?
7. In the last 10 years, how many times has oil leaked from the TAPS system? For each instance, please provide the date, location, cause and volume of oil that leaked.
8. Who is responsible for cleanup and repair costs associated with this pipeline leak?
9. Please detail any potential problems or complications related to a "cold restart" following the current shutdown of the TAPS system, including any danger posed by the two "pigs" currently stuck in the pipeline?

Finally, please be aware that preservation of any and all records relating to this leak, and the response to this leak, is fundamental to the public's right to know. It is expected that all such records will be preserved.

Your cooperation in providing the Committee this and any other relevant information going forward is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey

Edward J. Markey
Ranking Democratic Member
Committee on Natural Resources