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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEB SITE: <http://commerce.senate.gov>

ELLEN DONESKI, STAFF DIRECTOR
DAVID SCHWIETERT, REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

July 19, 2013

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Oil and gas products trapped within fine-grain sedimentary rocks in underground shale formations can be rich sources of critical energy resources. Over the past decade, improvements in drilling technologies have allowed access to large volumes of previously inaccessible shale oil and gas deposits in several states. Since 2008, this boom in shale oil and gas production has produced a significant economic effect, the most dramatic drop in U.S. oil imports in 45 years.

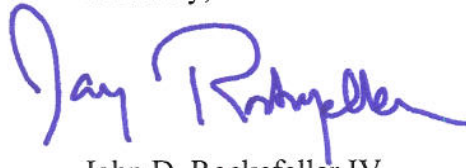
Shale oil and gas exploration, and the resulting development, has increased the throughput of these hazardous products through existing transportation channels—including pipelines, rail, and highways—and led to the construction of new infrastructure. While pipelines are a relatively safe mode for transporting these products, your 2010 report on natural gas gathering pipelines noted important gaps in the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration's data on the U.S. pipeline infrastructure. The recent derailment of a freight train in Canada carrying crude oil from shale reserves in North Dakota illustrated the potential deadly consequences of what can happen when something goes wrong during transport of these products. Further, production throughout the Marcellus Shale region, including in West Virginia, is straining infrastructure, often located in rural areas, to the point that producers are calling for larger highway interstate connections and increased transportation capacity overall.

With these concerns in mind, I request that the Government Accountability Office examine the impact of shale oil and gas development on transportation infrastructure and safety. In particular, I am interested in the following:

- How has the U.S. transportation infrastructure changed to accommodate increased domestic oil and gas production in recent years and what is known about future infrastructures challenges associated with this increased production?
- What is the potential impact of this development on transportation safety, including pipeline, rail, and highway safety?
- What is the federal role in infrastructure and safety issues resulting from shale production, and what related challenges are associated with this increased production?

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. Should you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Ian Jefferies of the Democratic Staff at (202) 224-9000 or Dan Neumann of the Republican Staff at (202) 224-9046.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jay Rockefeller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jay" and the last name "Rockefeller" clearly legible.

John D. Rockefeller IV
Chairman