

**TESTIMONY OF
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INTERIM PRESIDENT & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
INTERSTATE NATURAL GAS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA**

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**REGARDING
THE STATE OF TRANSPORTATION AND CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE:
EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

JUNE 3, 2020

Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Alex Oehler, and I am Interim President & CEO of the Interstate Natural Gas Association of America (INGAA). Thank you for holding this hearing and the opportunity to testify today. INGAA appreciates the Committee's interest in ensuring that our nation's pipeline infrastructure continues to safely and reliably deliver the energy that Americans need while we respond to and recover from the COVID-19 public health emergency.

INGAA's members transport natural gas through a network of transmission pipelines that are analogous to the interstate highway system. These are large capacity, critical infrastructure systems that span multiple states or regions to bring the nation's natural gas resources to market. Our members provide an essential link between every major natural gas supply basin in the country to every major consumption area in the lower 48 states, and all of this infrastructure is built and maintained using private capital. Natural gas is used to heat our homes, cook our food, power our nation's industries, and generate electricity. Natural gas is essential to manufacturing many of the products used in hospitals to combat COVID-19, including personal protective equipment.

Our industry is relentlessly committed to its obligation to operate safely, reliably, and responsibly, and this includes continuing to serve our communities throughout the COVID-19 emergency while also taking every step necessary to protect the health of our work force and those communities in which we operate. INGAA's members have made significant changes to their operations to confront COVID-19, and they have also contributed millions of dollars towards relief and recovery efforts in their communities.

I wish to convey four main points today. First, because most end uses of natural gas are essential to the health, safety, and well-being of American families and businesses, our nation's demand for interstate natural gas transportation services has persisted throughout the COVID-19 emergency, although some pipelines have experienced changes in their utilization profiles that

reflect the new ways Americans are living and working during this time. Interstate natural gas pipeline operators are confident that we will continue to deliver energy supplies safely and reliably throughout this crisis. The stability and interconnected nature of our coast-to-coast natural gas pipeline grid, and the diverse sources of natural gas supply and storage, provide a high level of energy reliability for the nation.

Second, pipeline companies recognize that as operators of critical infrastructure, it is our responsibility to implement safeguards that ensure pipeline operations, maintenance, and construction activities can safely continue. Our frontline employees and contractors have demonstrated remarkable resilience during this challenging time, and INGAA member companies have taken numerous actions to protect them, consistent with the guidance of the CDC, OSHA, and state and local health departments. I'm pleased to report that our efforts are working—INGAA members have experienced only limited instances of COVID-19 amongst the pipeline workforce.

Examples of specific actions that INGAA members are taking include: leveraging technology to create new ways to work from home; using backup control rooms to separate essential workers into isolated shifts and locations; conducting deep cleaning of work locations; collaborating with our contractors to implement pandemic planning across the supply chain; and developing robust plans to respond to a COVID-19 infection at a work location if needed. The INGAA Foundation has issued a [guidance document](#) that synthesizes practices the pipeline industry is using to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 during construction and maintenance work.

Third, I would like to commend several federal agencies for providing the targeted support that pipeline operators need to ensure continued safe and reliable energy delivery. PHMSA repurposed the agency's plans for responding to extreme weather events and established a mechanism for operators to notify the agency of the need to reschedule any non-essential compliance activity until after the COVID-19 emergency subsides. An example of such an activity is refresher training programs that require employees to travel offsite. PHMSA's actions have helped keep the pipeline workforce safe and allowed pipeline operators to refocus resources on essential and time-sensitive activities during the pandemic emergency, while ensuring that PHMSA has all necessary information to continue its regulatory oversight.

Furthermore, several federal agencies, including FEMA, CDC, DOE, and CISA, have taken a lead role in working with state and local agencies to ensure that essential critical infrastructure workers have sufficient access to COVID-19 testing, personal protective equipment, and other health-related supplies. Availability of these supplies has been limited at certain times and in certain areas. We are grateful for the joint efforts of federal, state, and local agencies to-date, and it is important that this coordination continues in the months to come as "stay at home" orders and similar restrictions are loosened, which could create a surge in demand for necessary supplies. Of course, patients, healthcare workers, and first responders should always be first in line to receive this equipment. We strongly support S. 3728, the Critical Infrastructure Employee Protection Act of 2020, which would ensure that these coordination efforts continue.

Fourth, although not directly related to COVID-19, I would like to suggest that reauthorizing our nation's pipeline safety program could help provide stability as PHMSA and state pipeline safety agencies work to recover and adapt to the dynamic environment that we will all be living and working in for the months to come. As you know, PHMSA's authorization expired last September. INGAA continues to support a reauthorization bill that increases funding for federal and state pipeline safety programs and establishes clear policy priorities for PHMSA for the next four years. We appreciate the Committee's work to advance a bipartisan reauthorization bill last July and look forward to continuing working with you on this important legislation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. INGAA members will continue to do everything that is needed to ensure safe and reliable natural gas transportation during this challenging time.