The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Washington.

THE NEED FOR PIPELINE LEGISLATION

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, on June 15, under the leadership of Chairman MCCAIN, the Senate Commerce Committee passed a bill reauthorizing and amendment the Pipeline Safety Act. This bill is, in my view, the single most important piece of legislation the committee will address this session. Following a June 10, 1999, accident in Bellingham, WA, that killed three children, blackened a magnificent city park, and sent shock waves through the community and State, Senator MURRAY and I have been working in front of and behind the scenes to see the Federal law regulating the operation of pipelines is changed: that communities and citizens are better informed about pipelines; that States can obtain a clear role in the oversight of interstate pipelines; that the Federal Office of Pipeline Safety adopts more meaningful safety standards; and that funding is increased for Federal and State pipeline safety operations.

While we are well on our way to accomplishing this last goal—the Senate has provided a significant increase in funding for the Office of the Pipeline Safety, and I have earmarked matching Federal funds for Washington State to supplement the funds appropriated by the State legislature for expanded safety activities—securing passage of the authorizing legislation has proven more difficult. I come to the floor to tell my colleagues that I will not rest in seeking the enactment of meaningful legislation this year. I am by nature a determined man, and my resolve on this issue has been strengthened by the example set by the Mayor of Bellingham, whose interest in this matter has not been half-hearted or expedient, but who has devoted and continues to devote time, resources, and thought to what we can do to make pipelines safer. I am committed to seeing that his efforts and my own are not in vain.

The bill that passed the Commerce Committee is a good one. It makes meaningful changes in Federal law. S. 2438 requires the Federal Office of Pipeline Safety to implement the recommendations of the Inspector General of the Department of Transportation by completing rulemakings that are long overdue, collecting better information to determine the causes of pipeline accidents, and providing better training to OPS inspectors. It accelerates the deadline for operators to prepare plans for training and qualifying their employees. It requires that information about pipeline incidents and safety-related conditions be made available to the public and that operators work with local communities to educate them about the location and risks of pipelines and what to do in case of an accident. The bill increases fines for violations, and explicitly provides a role for States in the oversight of interstate pipelines. It provides more funding for the Office of Pipeline Safety and direction on areas of research and development to focus on to improve safety.

In addition, the bill imposes on operators of pipelines of any length—not just longer pipelines as suggested by the administration—an obligation to conduct risk analyses and to adopt integrity management plans for high consequence areas—plans that provide for periodic assessments of pipelines' integrity. S. 2438 ensures that OPS will have easier access to operator information, and lowers the liquid spill reporting threshold to 5 gallons. It creates a national database of pipeline events and conditions. The bill contains protections for whistle blowers. Significantly, the bill also authorizes the Secretary to create a pilot program for State safety advisory committees to allow for meaningful citizen input into safety issues of local and State concern, and to monitor the performance of the Office of Pipeline Safety.

The bill, in summary, substantially improves current law. Unfortunately, in its current form, I am told, the bill will be stopped by a pipeline industry that can prevent its passage by getting any single Member to place a ''hold'' on the bill once the committee report is filed. At another time, however, when the Senate is able to debate the measure, the reforms could be much less palatable to industry. It has already been over a year since the fatal accident in Bellingham, and the public should not have to wait longer for improvements to the federal pipeline law.

While I led the effort to defeat amendments offered in the Commerce Committee that I thought undermined this legislation, I recognized then, as I do now, that some of the issues raised by industry should be and must be addressed if we are to enact legislation this year.

I have tried, since the committee passed the bill, to understand and address industry concerns in a reasonable manner. While I think we are getting close on a number of issues, I am growing impatient, particularly with the industry's continued opposition to allowing State and local input on pipeline safety issues of local concern. At some point—and this point will come very soon after our return from the August recess—I will ask my colleagues, one by one if necessary, to join me in voting for S. 2438 and a sound manager's amendment. I trust by that time they will be satisfied that the pipeline industry has had a fair opportunity to work out a reasonable compromise and that the time has come for Congress to act in the interest of all Americans.

NOTICE

Incomplete record of Senate proceedings.

Senate proceedings will be continued in the next issue of the Record.