

TINA KOTEK
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
HOUSE DISTRICT 44
NORTH/NE PORTLAND



Testimony in Support of House Joint Memorial 201A
Senate Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources

Speaker of the House Tina Kotek
February 18, 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HJM 201A. This memorial urges Congress to improve safety standards of oil tank cars used to transport crude oil by rail. In the past year, the growth in domestic oil production has increased the amount of crude oil shipped by freight rail. Much of this increase can be attributed to the transporting of more flammable crude from North Dakota to other parts of the country, including refineries in the Pacific Northwest.

Freight rail has historically been a very safe method of transporting hazardous materials, however more crude oil was spilled in U.S. rail incidents last year than was spilled in the nearly four decades since the federal government began collecting data on such spills. From the year 1975-2012, freight rail accidents resulted in about 800,000 gallons of spilled crude oil, but in 2013 alone, over 1.15 million gallons of crude oil were spilled.

You have likely seen news coverage of the event in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, Canada when a train carrying crude oil exploded killing 47 people and leveled part of the town. Had this tragic event happened in a more densely populated area, the loss of life would have been much higher.

Freight rail lines pass through many of Oregon's population centers, including my district in North Portland. If an accident involving tank cars happened in one of our communities, the consequences would be devastating.

Crude oil tank cars do not meet the same standards as rail cars used to carry other hazardous and flammable materials, so they are less likely to withstand puncture in a derailment. The risk of not updating tank cars used to carry crude oil is not new:

- In 2009, the National Transportation Safety Board [NTSB] said that the poor design of the cars makes them "subject to damage and catastrophic loss of hazardous materials."
- In 2011, railroads and car owners agreed to improve new cars with thicker steel and better protections, but existing cars do not reflect new standards.

The only way to ensure all tank cars meet the newest and safest standards is through federal regulation. Oregon should add her voice to the mounting pressure to address this problem by urging federal regulators to update oil tank car safety standards. I urge your support for HJM 201A.