

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Higgins calls for pipeline replacement

A forty-year old underground pipeline travels through the lower peninsula of Michigan and typically carries millions of gallons of oil per day to Canada. The Embridge, Inc., Lakehead System pipeline was shut down on Monday, July 26th following the discovery of an estimated one million gallon oil leak near Marshall. The pipeline likely has weak spots along its entire length according to Carol Higgins of Mendon Township.

“I watched Embridge workers make repairs at two locations in Mendon Township near their Mendon pumping station earlier this summer,” said Higgins, a Mendon Township resident and candidate for the 59th state house seat. The 59th State House District is composed of all of St. Joseph County and much of Cass County. The pipeline intersects both counties entering the southwest corner of Cass County and exiting at the Northeast corner of St. Joseph County. “When I was a teen, I watched while this pipeline was installed. It passed through my father’s farmland and we climbed on the dirt mound to see the deep hole and the large diameter pipe it contained.”

“This past June when I saw the localized excavation, workers told me the repairs were necessary due to weak spots they had located in the pipe. How many other weak spots exist is a question to which we need an answer. This pipeline intersects numerous county drains, creeks, and rivers as it travels across our state. It must be fixed or replaced,” Higgins said.

Higgins believes that the availability of fresh water is what will ultimately bring the best jobs in the U.S.A. back to Michigan. “It is up to state residents to demand that our water resources are not contaminated to protect the health of our citizens, the environment, agricultural interests, tourism, and many other industries,” Higgins said.

The leak near Marshall quickly made its way to the Kalamazoo River, one of the states major tributaries that flow to Lake Michigan. It’s a huge job for authorities to monitor where the oil is moving, suction it up, and use booms to reduce its natural flow towards Lake Michigan.

“But what if the break in the pipe had been less obvious and contaminated an underground aquifer--our groundwater?” Higgins asked. “How would we even begin to clean that?”

One gallon of oil can contaminate one million gallons of drinking water, according to the One Drop Foundation. Earth has lots of water, but only 1% of it is available as fresh, potable water and those of us living in the Great Lakes Region tend to assume it will always be there for us. “This leaking pipe incident reminds us that we should not take our water for granted,” Higgins said.

“Most of the current concern regarding the oil spill near Marshall seems to be about surface water. But, many municipalities, most rural homeowners, and a great number of farmers who irrigate in our area use groundwater resources. We must prevent contamination of our groundwater as well as our surface water,” Higgins said.

“This state cannot afford the risk of contamination to our water that this deteriorating pipeline, and possibly others like it, poses to our health and our economy,” Higgins said.

“If Embridge can afford to clean up this huge spill, then the company can surely afford to prevent the next one,” Higgins suggested. “Now we know we need to be vigilant, not complacent about the integrity of old pipelines that flow beneath our feet.”

Higgins believes that the state should demand a complete repair and thorough inspection of the Line 6B pipeline by an independent company before any oil flows again. She also believes it might be smarter to replace major sections of the pipeline.

“One of the hidden costs of our demand for cheap oil is what we pay in taxes to support the DNRE and the EPA and other government agencies that assist in disasters such as the Embridge oil spill. “That is one reason why I support a strong focus on energy conservation measures and a move to renewable energy to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels,” Higgins said. “We must live smarter because cheap energy is becoming a thing of the past.”