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Slaughter and McHugh Release GAO Letter Documenting WHTI Implementation Woes

DHS and State Unlikely to Meet 2008 Deadline for New Border Program

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28) and Rep. John McHugh (R-NY-23) today released a letter from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) detailing the agency's initial observations regarding efforts to implement the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI).

In its statement, GAO concludes that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of State face broad and extensive challenges in implementing the program by the 2008 deadline that has been set for it.

"GAO has confirmed our longstanding concerns that the current WHTI program cannot be implemented, and will have a devastating economic impact on boarder communities," Rep. Slaughter said, **"and the fact that DHS has declined to comment on this letter means answers to the issues raised are not forthcoming."**

"We need an extension of the WHTI deadline, and then we have to go back to the drawing board and fix this program where it is broken," Rep. Slaughter said.

"GAO's findings reaffirm my belief that the WHTI proposal holds significant implications for our upstate New York communities," Rep. McHugh said. **"Not only is the agency concerned about the impact it would have on commerce, but they have underscored the effects a passport requirement would have on travel - and particularly spontaneous trips. Simply put, it is critical that DHS and State address the very valid concerns raised in this report, and that WHTI not move ahead until better solutions are at hand."**

BACKGROUND

Last June, the GAO accepted the request of Rep. Slaughter and Rep. McHugh to study the implementation of WHTI and its effect on northern border security, as well as its economic

impact on regional trade and travel. This letter is the first official statement regarding the agency's findings. GAO will continue to audit the WHTI process, and will report back periodically to Rep. Slaughter and Rep. McHugh.

In the letter, GAO concluded that, "DHS and State have a long way to go to implement their proposed plans for the Travel Initiative, and the time to get the job done is slipping by. Alternative programs or documents...have their own set of challenges, and using them in lieu of a passport will not easily resolve the management issues face by DHS and State."

GAO also confirms that WHTI may have a significant impact on the U.S. economy, and tells the agencies to complete a cost-benefit analysis of their final plan. This analysis, which Rep. Slaughter and Rep. McHugh have been calling for since February, would require DHS to prove that the benefits of their passport/border ID plan outweigh the negative impacts on northern border economies.