

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rep. Slaughter Meets with Canadian Officials to Help Reach Agreement on Peace Bridge

Congresswoman Will Introduce Bi-Partisan WHTI Enhancement Bill

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-Fairport), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, met today with the Canadian Public Safety Minister, Stockwell Day, and the Canadian Ambassador to the United States, Michael Wilson, in order to facilitate negotiations on Shared Border Management (SBM) that are necessary to finalizing the critical Peace Bridge expansion.

Should the two countries fail to reach a final agreement by May of this year, the Peace Bridge Authority will be forced to eliminate the SBM from their capacity expansion project, ultimately neglecting congestion problems related to current infrastructure restraints and customs procedures.

"The importance of the Peace Bridge to the economies of Canada and the United States can not be overstated, and the Peace Bridge Authority urgently needs an answer

on SBM before it can move forward with it's expansion project. I am pleased to help facilitate negotiations between the US and Canada in order to work toward this vital and necessary agreement," said Rep. Slaughter.

"I would also like to thank Minister Day and Ambassador Wilson for their leadership and enthusiasm to reach an agreement of such importance to our two countries," continued Slaughter. **"I also look forward to working with them both in the future on passing my Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative bill to further enhance our relationship with our neighbors to the north."**

Additionally, Congresswoman Slaughter will call to the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff, after the meeting to encourage the Department to come to an agreement SBM as soon as possible.

Congresswoman Slaughter also announced her intentions to soon bring forth her bi-partisan and broadly supported Protecting American Commerce and Travel Act (PACT), to enhance the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) bill that would keep the border secure while not hindering tourism and trade. Key provisions of this bill are included in the background listed below.

BACKGROUND

Shared Border Management (SBM):

Early this month, Congresswoman Slaughter wrote a letter to Minister Day, who is in Washington this week to meet with the Department of Homeland Security, asking him to prioritize reaching an agreement with the United States on SBM at the Peace Bridge.

Canada and the United States have the largest bilateral trade relationship in the world. A key pillar in this relationship is the Peace Bridge, which serves as the second busiest passenger vehicle crossing and third busiest commercial crossing on our shared border. The Peace Bridge carries \$20 billion of trade annually between the United States and Canada. Yet congestion related to infrastructure constraints and customs processes has been a serious problem since the mid 1990s, and has worsened since September 11, 2001. The economic ramifications of congestion and new customs rules cannot be overstated; the Ontario Chamber of Commerce estimates that border delays are costing the US and Canadian economies over CDN \$13.6 billion annually.

In order to address the emerging security and traffic issues arising from 9/11, Canada and the United States agreed to the Smart Border Declaration in December 2001. The Declaration's aim is to enhance the security of the US-Canada border, while facilitating the flow of low-risk people and goods. Under that Declaration, the two governments agreed on December 17, 2004 to issue a framework to put land pre-clearance in place at the Peace Bridge. The pre-clearance pilot, often called Shared Border Management (SBM), would involve the relocation of all United States primary and secondary border operations for both commercial and passenger traffic from Buffalo to Fort Erie.

The Peace Bridge Authority has made clear that for SBM to be included as part of the capacity expansion project, Canada and the United States must reach a final agreement no later than May 2007. If no decision is reached by then, the Peace Bridge Authority will eliminate SBM from their capacity expansion project and proceed with a traditional customs plaza on the existing Buffalo Plaza.

Protecting American Commerce and Travel Act (PACT Act):

Representatives Louise Slaughter (D-NY) will soon reintroduce (H.R. 5536 in the 109th Congress), the Protecting American Commerce and Travel Act, a bill designed to improve and enhance the provisions of WHTI. This bill has broad bipartisan and trade association support, and will be the model for fixing the flaws in WHTI.

Key Provisions of the Protecting American Commerce and Travel Act (PACT) will be:

- Requires DHS to establish a pilot project in at least one state to determine whether an enhance driver's license can satisfy the WHTI requirements. DHS will not be allowed to move forward with WHTI implementation until this pilot project is completed.
- Requires DHS/State to develop a plan to re-admit into the country spontaneous U.S. travelers who do not possess a passport/acceptable alternative document.
- Exempts children younger than 16 from the WHTI documentary requirements.
- Sets the passport card at no more than \$20 and requires that State expedites the application time.
- Vastly expands expedited traveler programs such as NEXUS and FAST:

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