

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rep. Slaughter Visits Peace Bridge, Announces Upcoming Visit of DHS Secretary Chertoff to Bridge

Buffalo, New York - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-Fairport), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today visited the Peace Bridge in Buffalo to discuss Shared Border Management and announced that Dept. of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Michael Chertoff has accepted her invitation to visit the Bridge in the coming months. The visit to the Peace Bridge comes after an active few weeks of the Congresswoman meeting with Canadian officials and DHS Secretary Chertoff in hopes of coming to an agreement on Shared Border Management.

"I am pleased to be here to speak with Peace Bridge officials and to discuss the future of this vital bridge," said Congresswoman Slaughter. **"We have a long way to go, but I remain committed to Shared Border Management and the Peace Bridge capacity expansion project, and hope for an agreement soon."**

"I am also pleased to announce Secretary Chertoff has accepted my invitation to visit the Peace Bridge expansion firsthand this spring to help him understand the very real benefits of Shared Border Management," concluded Slaughter.

Also in attendance were Chairman of the Board Paul Koessler and General Manager Ron Rienas of the Peace Bridge Authority to go over future plans for the Peace Bridge with Congresswoman Slaughter.

BACKGROUND:

Shared Border Management (SBM):

Congresswoman Slaughter has led the effort to facilitate a final agreement between the United States and Canada on Shared Border Management. Early this month, Congresswoman Slaughter wrote a letter to Canadian Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day, who was in Washington last 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. During Day's visit to Washington, he met with Slaughter to discuss the Peace Bridge and Shared Border Management. Congresswoman Slaughter has also spoken with Rob Nicholson, the Attorney General of Canada this week in regards to Shared Border Management.

Congresswoman Slaughter met this week with Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff to discuss the Peace Bridge and the status of the agreement between the United States and Canada on Shared Border Management. Secretary Chertoff also accepted Slaughter's invitation to visit the Peace Bridge, and will be making a trip this spring to see it first hand.

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 to work with the City of Buffalo on a traditional customs plaza on the US side.

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