

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rep. Slaughter Meets with Canadian Premiers on Need for WHTI Reforms

Bi-Partisan PACT Act Receives Bi-National Support from U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Canadian Officials

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today met with Michael Wilson, Canadian Ambassador to the US; Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario; Shawn Graham, Premier of New Brunswick; and Gary Doer, Premier of Manitoba to discuss fixing the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative.

Also discussed was the Protecting American Commerce and Travel Act, or PACT Act, authored by Rep. Slaughter and Rep. John McHugh. The bill, which the Congresswoman recently reintroduced for the second time to the House of Representatives, is designed to ensure that WHTI will not unintentionally freeze trade and tourism with Canada. A strong coalition of travel and business groups have endorsed the bill, including the US Chamber of Commerce, the Travel Industry Association of America, the Travel Business Roundtable, and the Binational Tourism Alliance.

After the meeting, Rep. Slaughter delivered a major policy speech at the US Chamber of Commerce Leader's Luncheon on WHTI, during which she outlined the need to reform the plan and explained how her PACT Act would achieve that goal.

"WHTI is a looming crisis that has the potential to greatly harm the strong and mutually-beneficial relationship America has long shared with Canada," Rep. Slaughter said.

"We must do all we can to prevent this crisis from reaching the breaking point. We can have a smart and secure shared border, but only if the Departments of Homeland Security and State take a step-back and realize that their current plan will devastate cross border travel and trade."

"Unfortunately, DHS and State are still moving forward with their deeply flawed plan, and so Congress must force them back to the drawing board," Rep. Slaughter continued.

"The PACT Act I recently reintroduced in the House of Representatives should serve as the blueprint for WHTI reform. The Premiers and I remain optimistic that the ideas contained in it are gaining momentum."

In an announcement last week, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff officially agreed to exempt children 15 and younger from the requirements of WHTI. Rep. Slaughter had been calling for this exemption since last May. In addition, the Chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, Rep. Bennie Thompson, has agreed to hold a hearing on both the PACT Act and WHTI as soon as next month.

Background on the PACT Act and the full text of Rep. Slaughter's Keynote Address are attached below:

Background on the PACT Act

- § Title: The Protecting American Commerce and Travel Act

- § Introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on February 14 by Rep. Louise Slaughter, along with bipartisan co-sponsorship from Representatives McHugh (R-NY), Peterson (D-MN), and Manzullo (R-IL).

- § Has the support of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Travel Industry Association, and the Travel Business Roundtable.

- § Requires that DHS complete at least one pilot project to determine if a state may enhance their driver's license to meet WHTI standards. DHS is prohibited from issuing a Final Rule on WHTI until the pilot project is complete.
 - o DHS has agreed to conduct an enhanced driver's license pilot project in Washington state, but they maintain that WHTI will be implemented by January 2008 - long before the pilot project has been completed.

- § Exempts US/Canadian children 16 and younger from the WHTI documentary requirements, and encourages flexibility for school groups. Last Thursday, Secretary Chertoff responded to Rep. Slaughter's bill and announced an exemption for children age 15 and under.

- § Sets the cost of the PASS card at \$20 for the first year of issuance in order to encourage early compliance. An applicant must receive the card within 10 business days after the State Department has received the application.

- § Expands and improves frequent traveler programs for low-risk travelers (NEXUS) and commercial drivers (FAST).

- § Requires DHS/State to develop and implement a WHTI public promotion campaign.

- § Requires DHS/State to complete a cost-benefit analysis of their final WHTI plan before implementation.

Rep. Slaughter's Keynote Address (as prepared)

Thank you, Ron, for that kind introduction. I am pleased to be here this afternoon to kick-off the Leader's luncheon on the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. I want to thank the Chamber for hosting us, and the Travel Industry Association and the Travel Business Roundtable for cosponsoring this important event. In a moment, I'll turn the floor over to our distinguished guests from Canada, Premier McGuinty, Premier Graham, and Premier Doer.

Earlier this morning, the Premiers and I had a productive discussion regarding the challenges confronting our shared border and what we need to do to solve them. We all agreed that WHTI has many flaws, and in its current form has the potential to harm the strong and mutually-beneficial relationship the United States has long shared with Canada.

We recognize that the US-Canada border is a vital channel for travel and commerce, and that Canada and the United States are both each other's largest trade and tourism partner. It is simply vital that our border policies take into account the fact that our economies are so closely intertwined and inter-dependent.

But I am afraid that DHS and the State department have lost sight of this special friendship. They are moving forward with a WHTI policy that will freeze that relationship while doing little to improve our overall security. Making matters worse, we have a limited amount of time to fix WHTI. In a rush to cross off another item from their checklist, the Administration wants to implement WHTI at the land borders by January 2008.

I can't, for the life of me, figure out how DHS and State are going to justify this move. As the Government Accountability Office told me last year, DHS does not have any money in the budget for the new passport card readers. The two agencies continue to disagree on the type of technology to embed in the passport card. And DHS still must complete an extensive cost-benefit analysis before they can issue a proposed rule.

So, what we are left with is the creation of a passport card that I doubt many people are going to rush out and buy. But what's even more shocking is that this plan will not improve our overall security. DHS admits that it will not have the readers at the border to verify the authenticity of the passport card for at least a year. I really question the benefit of requiring new documents before DHS is capable of reading them.

It's clear that Congress is going to have to step-in and restore common-sense to WHTI before it's too late. It is for this reason that two weeks ago, I reintroduced legislation that will fix the current flaws in WHTI. Known as the Protecting American Commerce and Travel Act, or PACT ACT, my bill lays out a vision for a smart and secure northern border.

First, it requires DHS to complete at least one pilot project to determine if a state or a province can enhance their driver's licenses to meet WHTI standards. DHS has been talking about this idea for the better part of a year now. Washington State and British Columbia are working closely with DHS to set-up a pilot project. I understand that Michigan's Secretary of State, who I met a couple of weeks ago, is also pursuing the idea of linking driver's licenses with WHTI. DHS should run the pilot and determine the specifications a state or a province would have to meet in order to allow their driver's licenses to work for WHTI. It does not make any sense to implement

the plan before we know if the pilot has been successful. The PACT ACT prohibits DHS from putting WHTI into effect until such a pilot project has been completed.

Now I recognize that the enhanced driver's licenses option will probably not be pursued by all fifty states. That will leave many American travelers with only two options: a passport or the passport card. Yet polling shows that northern border residents are not going to buy the passport card in large numbers. At 45 dollars and an application processing time of six weeks, the card is too expensive and difficult to obtain to be a realistic option for most travelers. To make the passport card a viable option, the PACT ACT caps the cost of the card at \$20 and requires the State department to turn around applications within 10 business days.

If WHTI is going to improve security and facilitate the movement of cross-border traffic, we must expand low-risk frequent traveler programs like NEXUS for individuals and FAST for commercial drivers. The 9/11 Commission found that NEXUS and FAST - which are joint US-Canada programs -- are critical to improving the security of our borders. The two programs help low-risk frequent travelers and truckers get across the border quickly, while allowing our border inspectors to use their limited resources to better inspect high-risk travelers.

Unfortunately, the United States and Canada have done little to encourage enrollment in these programs or bring them to additional ports-of-entry. That's why the PACT Act will expand NEXUS and FAST, and address the barriers that are prohibiting them from reaching their full potential. 48 percent of all northern border crossings are made by just 400,000 people. These are the frequent travelers that we need to get into the NEXUS program.

I'm pleased that Secretary Chertoff agreed with the fourth provision of my bill -- an exemption for kids and flexibility for school groups. The Secretary's announcement last week is welcome news, and will help families adjust to the new WHTI requirements.

The PACT ACT is the blueprint that DHS and State should follow to implement a sensible version of WHTI. It is bipartisan, and we have a strong coalition behind it. I am pleased and grateful that the US Chamber of Commerce, the Travel Industry Association, and the Travel Business Roundtable, have all chosen to support the bill. In addition, the Chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, Bennie Thompson, has agreed at my request to hold a hearing on WHTI and the PACT ACT as soon as next month.

In the end, our challenge in the coming weeks is to persuade more of my colleagues in Congress that WHTI is not just a northern border issue. The plan as currently envisioned will also severely impact states like Florida, who welcome thousands of Canadian snowbirds each year, and its ramifications on the supply-chain and international trade will ripple across the US economy.

We must also make it clear that the Administration's current proposal does little to improve border security. We need to stress that even former members of the 9/11 Commission, such as Senator Slade Gorton, have stated that WHTI does not match the commission's recommendations and will unintentionally hurt the economies of both the United States and Canada.

None of us are against the intent of WHTI, but we need to be smart about it. We cannot simply flip a switch and move from having the world's largest open-border to requiring expensive new crossing documentation overnight.

Today's luncheon is another positive step in the right direction. Together, I am confident we will succeed in producing real solutions for WHTI, solutions that will keep the US-Canada friendship strong and our borders open for business. Again, thank you to the Chamber and TIA and TBR for inviting me to speak with you today. Please know that I will continue to do everything in my power to advance smart and secure northern border policies. Thank you.

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