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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rep. Slaughter Questions Department of Homeland Security's Proposed WHTI Regulations

Washington, D.C. - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter, Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today responded to the Department of Homeland Security's proposed regulations for the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. Rep. Slaughter has been the leading voice in Congress against WHTI.

"Homeland Security's ambitious rush ahead with its passport requirement is not grounded in reality," Rep. Slaughter said. **"The Administration has yet to complete the driver's license pilot program in Washington State, or develop a low-cost alternative passport card. Until then, announcements like the one today are premature and serve to only further confuse the traveling public."**

"I am especially concerned with the Administration's economic analysis because it does not accurately assess WHTI's impact on the Buffalo economy and cross-border trade nor does it estimate the impact of a decline of Canadian visits into the US."

"Last week, the House overwhelmingly voted to delay WHTI until June 2009. It is important to remember that this extension has not been signed into law, and until then, I will continue fighting for common-sense crossing requirements at the northern border."

"I am pleased that Secretary Chertoff has accepted my invitation to come to Buffalo this Monday to discuss WHTI and the future of the Peace Bridge. The visit will be an opportunity for the Secretary to explain the WHTI proposal in more detail and field questions from local officials."

"The Administration's proposal is open for public comment until August 15th. I strongly encourage Western New Yorkers to visit my website at louise.house.gov to register their concerns with WHTI, which I will personally pass onto Secretary Chertoff," concluded Slaughter.

BACKGROUND:

Rep. Slaughter's website, <http://www.louise.house.gov/>, includes more information on the Bush Administration's WHTI proposal. She encourages constituents to submit their comments on WHTI through her website by August 15th. She will personally deliver the comments to Secretary Chertoff.

This month, Rep. Slaughter worked closely with House Homeland Security Chairman, David Price, to include key provisions of her PACT ACT in the upcoming Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act for FY 2008. In addition, the House voted to prohibit the Administration from implementing the land and sea WHTI requirements any sooner than June 2009. The House passed the Homeland Security Appropriations Act on Thursday, June 14th.

Rep. Slaughter's language in the DHS appropriations withholds \$100 million from the funds required by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to implement WHTI until the Department has determined if driver's licenses can be enhanced to meet the WHTI's requirements. The provisions are designed to slow down WHTI implementation until 2009.

Rep. Slaughter's language also requires DHS to fully test its proposed passport card before making it publicly available, as well as to develop a plan for land implementation that will be

shared with the public. Finally, Rep. Slaughter's legislation requires that DHS submit a report to Congress on the success of the driver's license pilot program, and reveal its overall WHTI roadmap before being allowed to put the proposed WHTI documentary requirements into place.

Furthermore, the report must include:

- (1) infrastructure and staffing required, with associated costs by port of entry;
- (2) updated milestones for plan implementation;
- (3) a detailed explanation of how such section (7209) has been satisfied;
- (4) confirmation that a vicinity read radio frequency technology identification card has been adequately tested to ensure operational success;
- (5) a description of steps taken to ensure the integrity of privacy safeguard.

FURTHER BACKGROUND:

In February, Rep. Slaughter introduced comprehensive legislation to fix and reform WHTI. The Protecting American Commerce and Travel Act, or PACT Act, has been endorsed by over 100 groups in the greater Niagara region, as well as the US Chamber of Commerce and the

Travel Industry Association of American.

The PACT Act requires DHS to develop low-cost alternatives to a passport and test the concept of an enhanced driver's licenses prior to the implementation of WHTI. Rep. Slaughter believes that travelers should not have to purchase new documents if a common driver's license can suffice instead.

The Government Accountability Office has agreed to Rep. Slaughter's request to audit the entire WHTI process, including a thorough evaluation of the Administration's cost-benefit analysis. Rep. Slaughter expects an initial report some time this summer.

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