

As many of you know, the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) went into effect on Monday. WHTI requires that travelers between the U.S. and Canada present a passport or other document that denotes identity and citizenship when entering the U.S.

I have felt for a long time that we are not ready for WHTI implementation, and I've expressed my concerns about the potentially devastating effects that WHTI could have on our northern border communities. In 2007, I led the charge in Congress to delay the implementation of WHTI from January, 2008 until June, 2009. It has become clear over the past year that this delay has proved to be absolutely necessary. [More after the jump.](#)

Consider all the work that has been done in Western New York after the original January 2008 deadline in for WHTI implementation:

The first NEXUS enrollment center in Western New York, where "trusted travelers" can get obtain a NEXUS border-crossing card, was not opened until September of 2008. The radio frequency identification system (RFID) technology that can scan PASSport cards, NEXUS cards, and Enhanced Driver's Licenses cards from several feet away as a vehicle approaches inspection? That technology, which is critical to WHTI implementation, didn't "go live" at the Peace Bridge in Buffalo until this past November. This has been an issue at other important border crossings in New York State and Michigan, where this vital technology was not set to be working and active until April; less than two months before Monday's final WHTI implementation.

It's true, there is progress being made, but a number of my colleagues and I remain wary of the readiness of WHTI. We are strongly committed to border safety, but we also want to ensure that it is implemented in a way that will not harm the cross border trade and travel that is so critical to our border communities. A successful WHTI implementation is an important aspect of the biggest trade relationship in the world. A failed WHTI implementation could have a devastating effect on not only border communities, but on the broader national economies of both countries.

The economic downturn facing both countries has already dramatically affected cross border travel and trade. Statistics from the Public Border Operators Association show that passenger, truck and bus crossings at all New York and Michigan border crossings in January of 2009 decreased by an average of over 16% from January 2008 levels. In Western New York, traffic at the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge and the Peace Bridge decreased by 19% and 13% respectively.

The U.S. and Canada rely on an intertwining economic relationship that is vital to our prosperity. If WHTI is not implemented properly it will only compound the recent downturn in commerce across the border. For this reason, I introduced legislation last night to place significant oversight on the implementation of WHTI to identify and mitigate any harmful effects of the new requirements. This bill will enable us to identify WHTI's impact on travel and trade across the border, measure enrollment for frequent traveler cards, and analyze staffing and infrastructure levels at the land and sea ports of entry. It will also measure the economic impact of WHTI and study its effect on delays at the border and on overall border security, prior to the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver. We hope to quickly determine what actions need to be taken to ensure

that our border and our regional economies are healthy.

My colleagues and I are looking forward to working with Secretary Napolitano and Secretary Clinton on this important issue.