

Slaughter Says Shared Border Management Will Save Money and Bring Long-Awaited Solution

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28) today wrote to President Obama to encourage him to move forward with a plan for the Peace Bridge that will allow a shared border operation between the U.S. and Canada.

In her letter to the President, she advocated for the concept of shared border management which was highlighted in an agreement between the U.S. and Canadian government last week during Prime Minister Harper’s visit to the White House.

Today, Slaughter is encouraging the President and the Beyond the Border Working Group to strongly consider it as a solution to move the project along more quickly.

“We’ve been waiting for a Peace Bridge in Buffalo for 20 years. What’s really important here is making sure we implement a solution that is smart for both countries and allows this project to move forward. Shared border management gives us that solution and saves money by consolidating the building of the customs plaza on one side of the border making trade and travel easier for the residents of both nations. It has always been my goal to ensure our border remains secure and our trade relationship strong. I hope the President continues to look at shared border management and realizes, as I do, that it is the best solution to improve our shared border.”

In her letter, Slaughter points out, “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.”

A copy of her letter is below.

February 09, 2011

President Barack Obama

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

I am extremely pleased with your recent announcement with Canadian Prime Minister Harper that the United States and Canada will initiate a bi-national shared security initiative. Thank you for taking this important step and I strongly encourage you to reengage the Canadian government in negotiations on land pre-clearance and Shared Border Management (SBM).

The United States and Canadian governments in 2005 agreed in principle to SBM, which would enhance security and trade facilitation while minimizing adverse effects on border communities. After months of negotiations, in 2007 Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff announced that he was unilaterally ending talks on SBM. This was a mistake, and I believe that land pre-clearance and SBM still remains the best solution for joint security on the Northern Border.

As you know, the United States and Canada have the largest bilateral trade relationship in the world. Key pillars in this relationship are the Peace Bridge in Buffalo, New York – which serves as the second busiest passenger vehicle crossing and third busiest commercial crossing on our shared border – and the Alexandria Bay Bridge in Alexandria Bay, New York. 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.

These economic ramifications must be addressed and I am pleased that the joint declaration, “Beyond the Border: A Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness,” issued by you and Prime Minister Harper on February 4, 2011 stated:

To enhance our risk management practices, we intend to continue planning together, organizing bi-national port of entry committees to coordinate planning and funding, building, expanding or modernizing shared border management facilities and border infrastructure where appropriate, and using information technology solutions.

We intend to look for opportunities to integrate our efforts and where practicable, to work together to develop joint facilities and programs – within and beyond the United States and Canada – to increase efficiency and effectiveness for both security and trade.”

I strongly support these principles and believe that a land pre-clearance program at the Peace Bridge would allow for the long-delayed Peace Bridge Expansion Project to move forward without the construction of a \$230 million security plaza on the United States side of the border, saving considerable construction costs. At a minimum the United States should work to establish a pre-processing capability for commercial vehicles which would provide a safe way to immediately alleviate chronic congestion experienced at the border crossing each day.

I respectfully request that when the Beyond the Border Working Group considers the issue of shared border security, it takes land pre-clearance and SBM into strong consideration as a solution. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter and for your commitment to border security and economic development between the United States and Canada.

Sincerely,

Louise M. Slaughter

Member of Congress