

April 18 2005 - Slaughter Requests Domestic ...

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Expansion of NEXUS Program

We Need U.S. Enrollment Center & Customer Service Number

Washington, DC - This morning, Rep. Louise Slaughter (NY-28) sent the following letter to the Commissioner of the U.S. Customs & Border Protection regarding the need for an expansion of the NEXUS program.

Ms. Slaughter was the first New York Member of Congress to oppose the DHS plan to require passports to cross the U.S./Canadian border. A copy of the letter follows:

April 18, 2005

Robert C. Bonner

Commissioner

U.S. Customs & Border Protection

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, D.C. 20229

Dear Commissioner Bonner,

In light of the newly proposed passport requirements and the Fiscal Year 2006 budget, I write requesting Customs and Border Protection (CBP) implement two basic initiatives to expand the NEXUS program in Western New York. They include the creation of a U.S.-based enrollment center and a customer-service phone number.

As you know, the reduction of congestion at our bi-national bridges is one of my top priorities in Congress. To this end, I have convened several working-group meetings over the past year with officials from CBP, the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, the Peace Bridge Authority as well as Members of Canadian Parliament and local business leaders. Through this collaboration, bridge delays have improved, high level bi-national shared border management meetings have restarted, and the Niagara River Bi-National Border Mayors' Coalition was created. However, traffic congestion at the border continues to be a long-standing problem for local Canadian and New York residents who rely upon it for their business and personal lives. This congestion could worsen if travelers were required to present a passport for entry into the United States.

A better alternative to the proposed passport requirement, put forth during my working-group meetings, would be to encourage more travelers to enroll in the NEXUS program. NEXUS provides the most comprehensive security check of trusted travelers available and affords the opportunity to achieve the goal of a secure border, while at the same time expediting border crossings for travelers. To encourage more users, the program must be made more user-friendly. Accordingly, CBP should immediately take two steps to expand the NEXUS program. First, CBP should create a U.S.-based NEXUS Enrollment and Processing Center in Niagara Falls, NY. As it stands now, U.S. citizens must travel to Fort Erie, Canada in order to apply for a NEXUS card. While many of my constituents would like a NEXUS card, it is inconvenient to travel to Fort Erie to complete an application. Consequently, Western New Yorker's enrollment in NEXUS continues to lag behind that of their Canadian counterparts. To save on the cost of constructing a new facility, the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission (Commission) has offered to house the NEXUS processing center at their headquarters in Niagara County. CBP should work with the Commission to make this processing center a reality for U.S. motorists interested in enrolling in the NEXUS program.

Similarly, DHS should establish a NEXUS customer service phone number to resolve issues over the phone, rather than in person at the Fort Erie office. A customer service number would solve problems more quickly than an office visit. More importantly, an easily-identifiable phone number would raise awareness about the NEXUS program in the Western New York community.

CBP must do all that it can to implement both of these common-sense proposals in a timely manner. Particularly as Congress continues work on the FY06 budget, I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss these NEXUS-related concerns once you have analyzed this request. To maintain the program's affordability and attractiveness, it may be necessary to fund these improvements directly through the federal appropriations process. I appreciate your attention into this request, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Louise Slaughter

Member of Congress

