

May 18 2005 - Rep. Slaughter's NEXUS Expansion & 'Phony Badge' Amendments are Passed by the House ..

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Will be included in final Homeland Security Authorization Bill

Washington, DC - Two Amendments to the Homeland Security Authorization Bill, which were offered today by Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, were debated and passed by the full House this afternoon. The amendments will be included in the final DHS Authorization legislation, which is expected to pass the full House this evening.

The first amendment would expand the popular, though underutilized NEXUS program. It would authorize the creation of at least four enrollment centers in the U.S. and would also establish a customer service phone number to resolve issues over the phone rather than in an office visit, streamlining the processor for citizens and maximizing critical program resources. The amendment would also create one consistent NEXUS card for land and air travelers.

The second amendment would require the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security to submit a report to Congress on the agency's efforts to improve the design of its badges, uniforms, or other insignia to reduce the ability of counterfeiters to produce phony imitations. In addition, the amendment would require the report to include information on efforts to increase public awareness of counterfeit badges and uniforms, to teach Americans to identify authentic identification of DHS officials, and to recommend any legislation or administrative action necessary to achieve these objectives.

Please contact the Rep. Louise M. Slaughter's office for copies of the amendments.

Following are statements made by Rep. Slaughter today on the House floor in support of her amendments:

Statement of Congresswoman Louise M. Slaughter

NEXUS Amendment to H.R. 1817 - Homeland Security Authorization Act

Mr. Speaker, tightening security along our vast northern border is one of the most important steps that we have taken to defend our homeland since September 11th. Unfortunately, new security measures have had the unintended consequence of stifling trade and tourism with our Canadian neighbors. 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. It is not uncommon for travelers on the Peace Bridge in Buffalo to experience three to four hour delays when trying to cross the border.

Beyond the local impact on our constituents, border crossing delays cost our entire nation dearly. According to a new report by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. economy absorbs 40 percent of the current cost of border delays. This means that the U.S. loses \$4.13 billion a year, or \$471,000 an hour, due to border congestion. If no action is taken to lessen border congestion, the U.S. stands to lose over 17,000 jobs by 2020 and 91,000 jobs by 2030.

My amendment would alleviate border congestion by expanding pre-clearance programs like NEXUS, FAST, and SENTRI. These programs, which are joint ventures between the U.S., Canadian, and Mexican government, are designed to simplify border crossings for pre-approved, low-risk travelers and businesses.

Right now, constituents along the border complain that registration for these programs is overly-burdensome and

complex. For example, individuals in Buffalo and Niagara Falls must travel to Fort Erie, Canada to enroll in NEXUS. Such barriers to participation have meant that less than 80,000 people have signed up for NEXUS. To expand and make pre-clearance easier to navigate, my amendment would authorize the creation of at least four enrollment centers in the U.S. It would also establish a customer service phone number to resolve issues over the phone rather than in an office visit. An easily-identifiable phone number would have the added benefit of promoting awareness about NEXUS, FAST, and SENTRI in our border communities.

Finally, my amendment would create one consistent NEXUS card for land and air travelers. NEXUS Air cards currently require a retinal scan, while NEXUS land cards use fingerprints. We should merge these two cards and use one security feature for both air and land crossings.

Mr. Speaker, this amendment has the support of the U.S Chamber of Commerce and border mayors in Western New York. With nearly half a million dollars lost each hour from border delays, the cost of pre-clearance upgrades would easily pay for themselves.

Statement of Congresswoman Louise M. Slaughter

Amendment to H.R. 1817, the Homeland Security Authorization Act

My amendment would require the Secretary of Homeland Security to report to Congress on the agency's efforts to reduce the replication of its badges, uniforms, and other insignia. In addition, the Secretary would be directed to report on the agency's efforts to increase public awareness of counterfeit badges and uniforms, and to teach Americans to identify authentic identification of DHS officials.

Two years ago, a man wearing an FBI jacket and carrying a badge attempted to rob the Xerox employee credit union in my district. The would-be robber killed one man and shot another. That murderer is still at large.

Last week, the Department of Homeland Security arrested a man in New York City who was in the possession of over 1,300 fake badges and I.D.'s from over 35 law enforcement agencies, along with two NYPD police uniforms. In addition, DHS agents found a Glock 9 mm handgun, a Beretta semiautomatic rifle, a Winchester shotgun, and used casing from a shoulder-fired missile.

I think everyone would agree that this man posed a legitimate threat to his community based on his weapons stash alone. Knowing that he had a gun and a FBI badge, or a CBP badge, or a police uniform, makes me even more frightened of the trouble he may have