

## Jan 17 2006 - Slaughter Says Alternative Travel Card is a Step in the Right Direction

Slaughter Says Alternative Travel Card is a Step in the Right Direction

Also States that More Work Must be Done for Card to Work for Western New York

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-Fairport), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today responded to the announcement by Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice and Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff that their departments will produce an alternative passport card for travel to and from Canada.

"Today's announcement is a step in the right direction, but DHS and State have a lot of work to do if they are going to make this alternative travel card work for border communities," Rep. Slaughter said. "We need to know how much this travel card will cost, how long it will take to process an application, and where people can apply and receive this document," she added.

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) of 2004 will require all individuals to present a passport or comparable documentation when entering the United States from Canada. This requirement, referred to as the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), is set to go into effect on December 31, 2007. The announcement made today by Secretaries Rice and Chertoff states that they will be creating a secure alternative passport card that will meet the security requirements of the IRTPA, but provided few details on the program.

"I am afraid that the current vision for this card does not address the spontaneous travelers who pump millions of dollars into the Western New York economy," Rep. Slaughter said. "If these individuals are unable to easily acquire this travel card, or if the card is prohibitively expensive, then spontaneous trips to and from Canada will dry-up," she added.

Rep. Slaughter also commented that drivers' licenses should not at this time be eliminated as an acceptable border-crossing document.

"Drivers licenses pose the least burden on cross-border travelers, and so they shouldn't be prematurely excluded from consideration," she said.

## BACKGROUND

Given the importance of cross-border trade and travel to Western New York's economic well-being, Rep. Slaughter has been a leader of the Congressional group working to improve the WHTI. In December, she offered an amendment to the Border Security bill that would create an alternative travel card. The card would be free for children for one year, would be only half the cost of a traditional passport, and would be obtainable at all border crossings. Rep. Slaughter was also the only Member of Congress to testify before the House Small Business Committee's October hearing on the economic consequences of WHTI - a hearing that was held at her request.

Rep. Slaughter also hosted a meeting with DHS Assistant Secretary Elaine Dezenski and Western New York political and business leaders in Buffalo on October 24th, 2005. The meeting gave these influential individuals an opportunity to speak directly with the policy maker responsible for implementing the passport proposal.

In June, the Government Accountability Office agreed to Rep. Slaughter's request to study the economic consequences of requiring passports at the border. The study will also examine if alternative travel documents will be effective in limiting the effects of the passport requirement. Rep. Slaughter expects GAO's preliminary results later this winter or early spring.

"DHS and State must implement the passport requirement in such a way that increases security without closing our borders," Rep. Slaughter has stated. "I will continue working to improve the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, and advocating for common-sense approaches to border security."

Below is a chronology of action taken by Rep. Slaughter to improve the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative:

April 7, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter writes to Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and State against the WHTI proposal, and suggests that current programs like NEXUS and FAST need to be dramatically expanded.

April 14, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter meets with Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Assistant Secretary Elaine Dezenski and Department of State officials to register her concerns with the WHTI proposal.

April 15, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter requests a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study on the economic implications of a passport requirement, as well as alternative documents that will meet the requirements of Section 7209 of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA). The letter was co-signed by Rep. John McHugh and Rep. Loretta Sanchez.

April 18, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter writes to DHS asking that they create a NEXUS enrollment center and customer-service phone number for the Buffalo region.

May 2, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter reintroduces legislation that will create a position of Northern Border Coordinator at DHS. This position will allow the agency to better secure the northern border and effectively implement Section 7209 of IRTPA.

May 2, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter speaks to the Ontario/Niagara Falls Chamber of Commerce on her efforts to improve the WHTI, expand NEXUS, and increase border security.

May 12, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter meets with GAO to discuss her study request in more detail.

May 18, 2005: The House accepts Congresswoman Slaughter's amendment to the Homeland Security Authorization bill to expand the NEXUS program along the northern border.

June 7, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter and Canadian Member of Parliament Rob Nicholson send the U.S. and Canadian governments a letter requesting that they allow bicyclists with a NEXUS pass to cross the Whirlpool Bridge in Niagara County.

June 15, 2005: The GAO formally accepts Congresswoman Slaughter's request to study the economic implications of the WHTI.

June 29, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter meets with the Assistant Commissioner for Customs and Border Protection, to impress upon him the need to expand the NEXUS program.

July 9, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter cuts the ribbon on the new NEXUS lane at the Peace Bridge and holds a press conference on her amendment to the Homeland Security authorization bill to expand the program.

September 8, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter alerts local officials know about the advanced notice of proposed rulemaking on the WHTI and urges them to submit comments. Additionally, DHS asks Congresswoman Slaughter to have local leaders contact the agency directly about improving the NEXUS program.

September 21, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter hosts a Northern Border Caucus meeting with the State Department's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, Frank Moss. The Caucus hears from Mr. Moss about the agency's proposal to create a North American travel card for land crossings.

September 28, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter hosts a strategy lunch with the Canadian Embassy and local border mayors from both countries. The Congresswoman later meets privately with the border mayors to discuss holding a public hearing on WHTI in Buffalo.

September 29, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter joins members of the Northern Border and Southern Border caucuses in sending a letter to DHS/State with their concerns on the WHTI proposal.

October 7, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter requests that DHS and State extend the public comment period on advanced notice of proposed rulemaking until a complete economic analysis has been conducted.

October 24, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter hosts DHS Assistant Secretary Elaine Dezenski and Members of Congress, local mayors and elected officials, tourism agencies, and economic development offices on a discussion of the WHTI proposal. The forum gives Western New York leaders an opportunity to speak directly with the policy maker responsible for implementing WHTI. The Congresswoman meets privately with Ms. Dezenski following the event.

October 26th, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter hosts a Northern Border Caucus meeting with a coalition of border Chambers of Commerce. The chambers make a presentation on the economic consequences of the WHTI and share with the caucus their ideas for improving the rule.

October 27th, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter is represented by her office at a briefing by Elaine Dezenski and Frank Moss.

October 28, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter's staff represents her at a panel discussion on WHTI at the Canadian

Embassy. Panelists include officials from Homeland Security, the travel industry, and professional staff on the House Judiciary Committee.

November 1, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter's office meets with Frank Moss on State's proposed alternatives to a passport at a House Tourism Caucus event.

November 14, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter asks that the Congressional Research Service prepare a memorandum on the legal issues of allowing a drivers license to be an acceptable alternative under the WHTI. The memorandum is distributed to national associations as well as local officials, and is widely hailed as the first objective look at linking REAL ID with WHTI.

November 17, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter works with the House Small Business Committee to hold an oversight hearing on the WHTI proposal. She testifies to the negative effects such a requirement will have on border communities, and offers five solutions for improving the WHTI. Additionally, Congresswoman Slaughter submits testimony from the Buffalo-Niagara Partnership and the Niagara USA Chamber into the hearing record.

November 18, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter meets with DHS officials responsible for the NEXUS program. DHS shares that they have agreed with the Canadian government to dramatically expand and streamline the NEXUS program by Fall 2006.

November 28, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter shares her Small Business hearing testimony with local leaders and provides an update on her meeting with DHS on the NEXUS program.

November 28, 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter's staff convenes a conference call with local Western New York border leaders to discuss a strategy for improving the WHTI and NEXUS.

December 2005: Congresswoman Slaughter and Congressman McHugh write to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee asking that they review the WHTI's potential impact on the ability of bridge commission's to improve their facilities.

December 8, 2005: The Canadian Ambassador, Frank McKenna takes Congresswoman Slaughter to lunch to thank her for her work on the WHTI, and to discuss a strategy for moving forward.

December 16, 2005: Rep. Slaughter offers an amendment to H.R. 4437, the Border Security bill, that will require DHS and State to create an alternative travel card. The card will be free for children for one year, be at least half the cost of a traditional passport, and be obtainable at all border crossings.