

Feb 2 2006 - Rep. Slaughter Asks for Clarification on One-Day Border Pass

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Bipartisan Letter, Co-Signed by 19 Members, Supports New Border-Crossing Option

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-Fairport), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, has authored a bipartisan letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) asking that the agency clarify recent remarks made by a DHS official, U.S. VISIT Director Jim Williams, regarding the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. Last week, Mr. Williams suggested that DHS is working on a one-day border pass for travelers who reach the U.S.-Canadian border without the required passport or alternative travel card.

"DHS continues to move ahead with a policy that will close our borders to legitimate trade and travel. Tourists and spontaneous travelers are not going to pay \$50 dollar for a card in order to simply cross into Canada for a day trip," Rep. Slaughter said. "I am, therefore, very interested to know if DHS is planning to create a one-day pass that could be obtained right at the border," she added.

"Our communities need to know of DHS is truly committed to making affordable and convenient cross-border travel a priority," Rep. Slaughter said.

The letter, which has the support of 19 fellow Members of the House, will be sent to DHS today.

cross-border travelers. Rep. Slaughter has questioned how a new card will address spontaneous and tourist travelers, and will be meeting with DHS officials later this month to learn details about the card proposal. Director Williams, while testifying in front of the Senate Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee last week, suggested that DHS is looking at providing individuals with a one-day border pass if they do not have the alternative travel card or a passport.

Excerpts from Rep. Slaughter's letter follow:

"[F]amilies decide to visit Niagara Falls, on average, 14 days before a trip. Since it appears that these families would be unable to get a PASS card within that timeframe - or be unwilling to spend an additional \$50 dollars per person to get the correct documentation - DHS must develop flexibility that does not impede legitimate cross-border travel."

"Accordingly, we were encouraged by Director Williams' comments about a one-day pass for travelers who reach the land borders without a passport or PASS card. As far as we know, this was the first time that an official from DHS publicly suggested the creation of a one-day pass for tourists and spontaneous travelers."

The complete text of the letter can be found below:

February 2, 2006

The Honorable Michael Chertoff

Secretary

United States Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff,

We write seeking clarification on remarks made by U.S. VISIT Director Jim Williams while testifying in front of the Senate Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee on January 25th, 2006. In responding to questions about the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), Director Williams suggested that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is working on a one-day pass for individuals who reach a land border-crossing without the proper documentation required under the WHTI.

As you are aware, the WHTI initiative is causing much angst along the northern border. Our constituents do not look at Canada in terms of being another country, but rather as our neighbor to the north - as one community closely intertwined. Our economy is heavily dependent on Canadian visits to our sporting events, cultural institutions, and other tourist sites. According to a report by the Canadian Tourism Agency, new documentation requirement could result in an annual loss of 3.5 million trips by Canadians to the U.S. The estimated loss to the U.S. tourism industry would be \$667 million per year.

The creation of the PASS card, as announced by DHS and the Department of State on January 17th, 2006, is a welcome first step in creating alternatives to a passport. However, we have concerns that the PASS card, which will cost around \$50 dollars and take several weeks to process, will not adequately address tourism travel in border communities. We know, for example, that families decide to visit Niagara Falls, on average, 14 days before a trip. Since it appears that these families would be unable to get a PASS card within that timeframe - or be unwilling to spend an additional \$50 dollars per person to get the correct documentation - DHS must develop flexibility that does not impede legitimate cross-border travel.

Accordingly, we were encouraged by Director Williams' comments about a one-day pass for travelers who reach the land borders without a passport or PASS card. As far as we know, this was the first time that an official from DHS publicly suggested the creation of a one-day pass for tourists and spontaneous travelers.

We respectfully request clarification on Director Williams' remarks, including details on DHS' efforts to create a secure, one-day pass for U.S. travelers who wish to cross into Canada for a day trip. Additionally, we would like to know how DHS envisions this program working and how it will impact the inspection process at our binational border crossings. We appreciate your attention to this request, and await your response.

Sincerely,

Louise Slaughter

John McHugh

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

Bart Stupak

John Sweeney

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

cc. The Honorable Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State

BACKGROUND

Rep. Slaughter continues to be the Congressional leader of the effort to fix the WHTI proposals. Yesterday, she met with the President of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, Randall Williams, to discuss ways to improve the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. Rep. Slaughter also learned this week that the Government Accountability Office will deliver

a draft report of their evaluation of DHS' Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) and its economic impact to her by May 9. This objective report is anticipated to be a valuable tool in convincing the Bush Administration to rethink their WHTI proposal.

FURTHER BACKGROUND

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.

On January 17, the Department of Homeland Security announced that its agency will be creating a secure alternative passport card that will meet the security requirements of the IRTPA, but provided few details on the program.

"DHS and State must implement the passport requirement in 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."

Rep. Slaughter has played a leading role in working to improve the passport plan. Last June, the Government Accountability Office agreed to her request to study the economic ramifications of the passport proposal, as well as to examine alternative documents that will satisfy the IRTPA mandate, including the NEXUS card and enhanced drivers' licenses. The GAO should have their initial results sent to Rep. Slaughter by late winter.

Rep. Slaughter was also the only Member of Congress to testify in front of the House Small Business Committee's October hearing on the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. Her testimony focused on the negative consequences that a passport proposal will have on Western New York, and offered five suggestions to improve DHS' current plan.