

June 1, 2006 - Slaughter Unveils New Bi-Partisan Legislation Addressing WHTI Concerns Raised by GAO

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PACT Act Will Delay Implementation and Fix Major WHTI Problems

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-Fairport), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today announced new bi-partisan legislation she has co-authored with Rep. John M. McHugh (R-Pierrepont Manor) that will delay implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) and correct many of its inherent flaws.

The legislation is known as the Protecting American Commerce and Travel Act, or PACT Act.

"This bi-partisan bill is a common-sense solution to a critical problem our northern border communities are facing," Rep. Slaughter said. "We won't sit idly by while the local economies of Western New York and beyond are severely damaged by this ill-conceived legislation. And we will keep fighting until a new course is accepted by the federal agencies pushing this plan."

"First and foremost, it is critical that we delay the deadline for implementation of WHTI," Rep. McHugh added. "The GAO findings have underscored the need to answer many critical questions about this plan, and a delay provides us with this opportunity.

"Beyond that, this legislation will allow time for a much-needed closer look at exactly what will constitute acceptable documentation for crossing our borders - as well as require a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of WHTI's potentially significant economic impact," Rep. McHugh continued. "To this point, DHS and State have been focused on passports or another somewhat undefined document, and we must ensure that an affordable alternative is available and that every possible effort is made to prevent losses in tourism, commerce, and travel dollars."

Highlights of the PACT Act include, but are not limited to:

- An extension of the WHTI implementation deadline until September 15, 2009
- A requirement that DHS and State develop a plan to re-admit into the country spontaneous U.S. travelers who do not possess a passport or an acceptable alternative document
- A vastly expansion of expedited traveler programs such as NEXUS and FAST
- A capping of the cost of the North American Travel Card (often referred to as the "PASS card" or "passport card") at \$20
- A requirement that DHS and State complete a cost-benefit analysis of their final WHTI plan before implementation
- An exemption of children younger than 16 from the WHTI documentary requirements

The PACT Act comes on the heels of a new report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), released yesterday, confirming the longstanding concerns Rep. Slaughter and Rep. McHugh have had about implementation of WHTI. The report states that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of State will be unlikely to effectively meet the current January 1, 2008 deadline for carrying out WHTI, and that the program as currently envisioned will significantly impact border economies in the United States.

To read the GAO findings in full, [click here](#).

Rep. Slaughter continues to be a Congressional leader in the ongoing effort to fix WHTI. Over the past year, she has met with a wide array of concerned officials, including Randall Williams, President of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, DHS Assistant Secretary Elaine Dezenski, and Western New York political and business leaders.

Rep. Slaughter is also the only Member of Congress to have testified in front of the House Small Business Committee's October, 2005 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.

At today's event, Rep. Slaughter was joined Paul Koessler, Chairman of the Peace Bridge Authority, Arlene White, Executive Director Binational Tourism Alliance (BTA), and other BTA members to discuss the new GAO study.

A complete summary of the PACT Act can be found below:

The Protecting American Commerce and

Travel Act (PACT Act)

Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY) and Rep. John M. McHugh (R-NY)

Key Provisions

- Extends the WHTI deadline until September 15, 2009.
- Requires one consistent implementation date for land, sea and air travel.
- Requires DHS/State to develop a plan to re-admit into the country spontaneous U.S. travelers who do not possess a passport/acceptable alternative document.
- Exempts children younger than 16 from the WHTI documentary requirements.
- Sets standards for linking in REAL ID with WHTI by requiring that DHS/State report to Congress within 120 days on the method, cost, time period of implementation, and security advantages, of connecting WHTI with State issued driver's licenses. The report will then be reviewed by the Government Accountability Office within 120 days.* DHS/State are prohibited from moving forward with implementing WHTI until this report has been transmitted to Congress.
- North American Travel Card (often referred to as the "PASS card" or "passport card"):
 - o Sets the cost at no more than \$20.
 - o Qualified applicants must receive the card within 10 business days of the State Department receiving the application.
 - o All ports of entry must be equipped with the infrastructure to read the North American Travel Card by September 15, 2009.
- Vastly expands expedited traveler programs such as NEXUS and FAST:
 - o Sets the price of a NEXUS/FAST card at \$20 and waives the first-time renewal fee.
 - o Requires that NEXUS/FAST be acceptable documents under WHTI, as well as acceptable for re-entry into the US at any border crossing.
 - o Requires NEXUS/FAST technology to be installed at additional crossings in North Dakota, Michigan, New York, Montana and Minnesota.
 - o Establishes a minimum of six new enrollment centers across the northern border, and creates new mobile enrollment centers that will sign up applicants in low-participation areas.
- Requires DHS/State to complete a cost-benefit analysis of their final WHTI plan before implementation. A cost-benefit analysis will require DHS/State to empirically prove that the security and economical benefits of WHTI outweigh the costs

to travel and trade.

- Requires that DHS/State work with the Canadian and Mexican governments to ensure their citizens have the right documents to enter the US.
- Requires DHS/State to develop and implement a WHTI public promotion campaign.

* The Government Accountability Office has already agreed to Rep. Slaughter and Rep. McHugh's request to evaluate and audit the entire implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative.

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