

## September 27, 2006 - Slaughter Calls on Hastert to Retain WHTI Extension to Homeland Security

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, July 7, 2006

Slaughter Calls on Hastert to Retain WHTI Extension to Homeland Security Appropriations Bill

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today sent a letter she authored to Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-IL-14) urging that a provision extending the implementation deadline for the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) be retained in H.R. 5441, the Homeland Security Appropriations Conference Report likely to be voted on in the House this week.

"Blocking this provision would be a critical blow to border economies everywhere, especially in Western New York," Rep. Slaughter said. "This common-sense, bi-partisan extension gives us the time we need to fix WHTI and get it right. Failing to pass it can't be an option."

The provision, which would extend the WHTI implementation deadline until June of 2009, had been approved by both House and the Senate Conferees and seemed ready for passage as part of the Homeland Security Appropriations Conference Report. Yesterday's refusal of leading House Republicans to allow it to go forward came as a surprise to most observers and Members of Congress.

Rep. Slaughter's letter was co-signed by 21 Democratic House members.

"The WHTI provision is a necessary first-step toward ensuring that WHTI strengthens border security without unintentionally closing our borders to legitimate trade and travel," the letter reads. "Accordingly, we strongly urge you to ensure that the language agreed to by the Homeland Security conferees remains in the final bill."

The complete text of Rep. Slaughter's letter can be found below:

September 27, 2006

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert

Speaker

US House of Representatives

H232 Capitol Building

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert,

We are writing to urge the House Leadership to accept the Homeland Security Appropriations Conference Report language that will extend the implementation date of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) until June 1, 2009 and set guidelines for alternative documents to a passport.

As you are aware, the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 requires the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and State to implement a plan, called WHTI, to require travelers re-entering the US from Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean to present documents denoting both identity and citizenship by January 1, 2008. We believe the Intelligence Reform bill gives DHS and State discretion to develop low-cost and easily obtainable documents for US travelers.

Unfortunately, DHS and the State Department are pursuing a deeply-flawed plan that will negatively impact cross-border commerce with minimal gains to border security. The Government Accountability Office concluded in May that DHS and State have made no key programmatic decisions and are not likely to meet the 2008 deadline. In addition, former 9/11 Commissioner Slade Gorton has stated that WHTI is not what the Commission intended and has called on DHS and State to rethink their position.

The Senate's Homeland Security Appropriations bill wisely contained language that would extend the WHTI deadline and give DHS and State clear instructions for establishing low-cost travel documents.

Sixty-two members of the House, including 24 Republicans, sent the Homeland Security Appropriations Chairman and Ranking Member a letter in July urging them to include in the Homeland Security Appropriation Conference Report the WHTI deadline and parameters for alternative travel documents passed by the Senate. We have included this letter for your review. Members from both parties recognize that we need a smart and secure US border, and that WHTI as currently envisioned fails to uphold both principles.

The conferees to the Homeland Security Appropriations bill reportedly agreed to include key elements we have sought in the final conference report, including a harmonization of the sea and land deadline and an extension of the deadline until June 2009. Unfortunately, we understand that there are some in the House Leadership that oppose the conferees' decision to extend the deadline, and are considering measures to strip out the language before the bill reaches the House floor for a vote. We urge the Leadership not to rewrite the conference report, and to accept the bipartisan agreement reached by the conferees.

The WHTI provision is a necessary first-step toward ensuring that WHTI strengthens border security without unintentionally closing our borders to legitimate trade and travel. Accordingly, we strongly urge you to ensure that the language agreed to by the Homeland Security conferees remains in the final bill. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

(signed)

1. Rep. Louise M. Slaughter

2. Rep. Bart Stupak

3. Rep. Silvestre Reyes

4. Rep. John Dingell

5. Rep. James Oberstar

6. Rep. Earl Pomeroy

7. Rep. Sam Farr

8. Rep. Lloyd Doggett

9. Rep. Rick Larsen

10. Rep. Ruben Hinojosa

11. Rep. Norman Dicks

12. Rep. Solomon Ortiz

13. Rep. Bernard Sanders

14. Rep. Sander Levin

15. Rep. Dale Kildee

16. Rep. Carolyn Kilpatrick

17. Rep. Raul Grijalva

18. Rep. Thomas Allen

19. Rep. Jim McDermott

20. Rep. Michael Michaud

21. Rep. Brian Higgins

22. Rep. Jay Inslee

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