
January 24, 2008 - Slaughter and 33 Reps. Call on DHS to Retract Misguided Border Policies

Thursday, January 24, 2008

Rep. Slaughter and 33 Representatives Call on DHS to Retract Agency's Misguided Border Policies

Washington, DC – Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, along with over 30 Members of the bipartisan Northern Border Caucus, today sent a letter to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff calling on the Department to halt its plan to institute new requirements for border crossing documentation at land and sea ports of entry beginning January 31, 2008.

The letter expresses contempt for DHS' actions in not only violating the intent of the United States Congress, but threatening the nation's economic security by implementing a new, resource intensive system without ensuring a smooth transition. The letter calls on the Secretary to continue accepting oral declarations and government issued photo identification cards as proof of citizenship until full implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative in June 2009.

"As

a northern border community, we truly understand the unique relationship we have with Canada

and see ourselves as one community with a river running through it," said Rep. Slaughter.

"Because of this

relationship, it is vital that all we keep our borders open for the trade and travel."

"I

am especially concerned by the new requirements that travelers, including children, will need a proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate. It is absolutely absurd

to ask our teenagers traveling for school or sporting trips to Canada to hold-on to their birth certificates so they can enter back into the US. What happens if they lose those documents and are detained at the border?"

"We must work on a smart and secure border,

because it is not only important to

those who live near the northern border, but to the working families across the country who are being affected right now by our nation's fragile economy," concluded Slaughter.

"The DHS proposal

will do more harm than good," said Representative Bart Stupak. "The agency has not met its obligation to inform travelers about the new requirements which will lead to confusion, increased delays and disrupted commerce. This is an ill-advised policy that will significantly limit trade and tourism."

"Ending the

practice of allowing oral declarations at the Northern border and imposing

onerous requirements in its place just doesn't make sense," Rep. Earl Pomeroy said. "We will keep pushing the administration to take enough time to get this right and make sure that we secure our border in a way that does not economically disadvantage U.S.-Canada border communities."

Congresswoman

Slaughter has been the leader in Congress fighting for a smart and secure

northern border and is working to make certain that the economy of Western New York is protected and that the region

remains an international gateway for tourism and trade.

BACKGROUND:

Last November, the Government Accountability Office reported that

Customs and Border Protection is understaffed and is simply unable to review and verify the influx of required documents without significantly increasing wait times and crippling legitimate trade and travel.

The letter to Secretary Chertoff can be found below in its entirety:

The Honorable Michael
Chertoff

Secretary

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff,

We are writing to express our strong disapproval with the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) plan to proceed in instituting new border crossing documentation requirements for land ports of entry beginning January 31, 2008. Your imminent actions not only violate the intent of the United States Congress, but threaten our nation's economic security by implementing a new, resource intensive system without ensuring a smooth transition.

Actions that effect cross border travel must strike the right balance between protecting our national security and ensuring the economic vitality of border communities. Unfortunately, the impending documentation requirements do not take both considerations into account. These ill-conceived and unnecessarily cumbersome travel requirements will have a deleterious effect on our nation's weakening economy and will adversely affect the economies of the border communities. The US-Canadian border is a vital channel for travel and commerce. In fact, Canada and the United States are both each other's largest trade and tourism partner, with over 1.5 billion dollars of trade crossing the border every day. DHS must recognize that communities across the country, particularly along the Northern border, depend on the economic relationships with our largest trading partners.

The implementation of the new requirements by January 31, 2008 is simply irresponsible. A recent Government Accountability Office report found that Customs and Border Protection, the agency charged with enforcing this new mandate, is lacking in resources, suffering from severe understaffing, and is simply unable to review and verify the influx of required documents without significantly increasing wait times and

crippling legitimate trade and travel. Furthermore, DHS has not met its obligation to inform travelers regarding the new documentation requirements, leading to confusion, adding to delays, and hampering the cross border activity that is so important to our economy. We are very concerned by the demand that travelers, including children, will need a proof of citizenship such as a birth certificate and a state-issued photo ID for border crossings. US citizens have a right to return to the US. With this new policy, what will happen to US citizens when they try to return to their country without the proper documentation? We fear this unwise requirement will most certainly result in lost documents, deterring travel and devastating the economies of border communities.”

The recent omnibus appropriations bill passed by Congress and signed into law by President George W. Bush included a provision stating that the Administration may not implement the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), the requirement for Americans to show identity and citizenship documents at the border, before June 1, 2009 or three months after the Administration makes certain required certifications to Congress, whichever date is later. This provision further requires DHS to report on the results of the pilot programs used to develop and implement Section 7209 of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act, as well as infrastructure and staffing requirements, updated milestones on the implementation plan, confirmation that a vicinity read radio frequency technology identification card has been adequately tested to ensure operational success, and the steps taken to ensure the integrity of privacy safeguard. DHS has not met, nor made significant progress toward meeting, the requirements necessary for full implementation, including offering an affordable, secure alternative passport card and installing infrastructure necessary to process passport cards. Thus, it is not reasonable for your Department to move forward with these new documentation requirements when you have not demonstrated that border communities will not suffer undue economic burdens.

We strongly urge you to continue accepting oral declarations and government issued photo identification cards as proof of citizenship until full implementation of WHTI.

Sincerely,

Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY), Bart Stupak (D-MI), Earl Pomeroy (D-ND), Jim McDermott (D-WA), Steven LaTourette (R-OH), Dale Kildee (D-MI), Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA), Collin Peterson (D-MN), James Oberstar (D-MN), Mike Michaud (D-ME), John Dingell (D-MI), Dennis Kucinich (D-OH), Edolphus Towns (D-NY), Mike Doyle (D-PA), Brian Higgins (D-NY), Thomas Allen (D-ME), Betty McCollum (D-MN), Jose Serrano (D-NY), Peter Welch (D-VT), Jay Inslee (D-WA), Carol Shea-Porter (D-NH), Paul Hodes (D-NH), Donald Manzullo (R-IL), Carolyn Kilpatrick (D-MI), Norm Dicks (D-WA), Dennis Rehberg (R-MT), Adam Smith (D-WA), Thaddeus McCotter (R-MI), John McHugh (R-NY), Thomas Reynolds (R-NY), Sander Levin (D-MI), Brian Baird (D-WA), Rick Larson (D-WA)

###

To be removed from this email list please reply with the word "Remove" in the subject line.

United States House of Representatives

2469 Rayburn House
Office Building
• Washington, DC 20515

(202) 225-3615 phone • (202)
225-7822 fax • www.louise.house.gov