

December 18, 2007 - Rep. Slaughter Delays WHTI Until at Least June 2009

Washington, DC – Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today announced that language she authored delaying implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) until June 2009 was included in the Omnibus spending bill passed by Congress on Monday night. Also included is language withholding funds from the Department of Homeland Security until the Department reports on the feasibility of WHTI to Congress. The bill passed last night by a vote of 253-154.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, December 18, 2007

Rep. Slaughter Delays WHTI Until at Least June 2009

Washington, DC – Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today announced that language she authored delaying implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) until June 2009 was included in the Omnibus spending bill passed by Congress on Monday night. Also included is language withholding funds from the Department of Homeland Security until the Department reports on the feasibility of WHTI to Congress. The bill passed last night by a vote of 253-154.

“This is truly a great victory in our fight to prevent the foolishly misguided requirements of WHTI from devastating the economy of Western New York by unnecessarily hampering travel and trade,” said Rep. Slaughter. “I am very pleased that I was able to include language that prohibits the implementation of WHTI anytime before June 2009, so that we can develop a comprehensive policy that not only secures our borders, but ensures that our regional economy will be able to reap the benefits from both trade and tourism.”

“The traffic across our northern border is critical to our economy, and we must never sacrifice our relationship with Canada with an ill conceived attempt to increase border security. I have long said that economic security and physical security are not mutually exclusive. We can, and must, have both.”

In addition to delaying the implementation of WHTI, Rep. Slaughter also included language withholding \$75 million required by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to implement the program until the Department reports the outcome of their multiple driver’s license and technology trials, as well as provides a port-by-port infrastructure and staffing plan to Congress. In addition, DHS must confirm that acceptable identification cards have been adequately tested to ensure operational success and privacy safeguards. This language will make certain that DHS develops a strong WHTI implementation plan that secures our

borders while facilitating travel and trade with Canada.

“My language will help prevent the chaos that we've already seen caused with the implementation of WHTI in its current form. By fixing this initiative, we will keep our economy growing and our land borders open to the travel and trade that is a necessity and a right for border residents,” Slaughter concluded.

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 :

For over three years, the Department of Homeland Security and Department of State have been moving forward with an ill-advised plan, known as the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, which will require all travelers returning from Canada to carry a passport or yet-to-be defined alternative document as soon as the summer of 2008. To many, this plan has the potential to freeze cross-border traffic in Western New York while doing little to improve overall security.

As a result, Congresswoman Slaughter introduced bipartisan legislation earlier this year with her colleague Rep. John McHugh that sets out a responsible path for implementing WHTI effectively. Called the Protecting American Commerce and Travel Act (PACT Act), the bill serves as a blueprint for properly implementing WHTI. The PACT Act has been endorsed by 100 groups in the greater Niagara region and every major travel and trade association in the United States and Canada.

The PACT Act requires DHS to develop low-cost alternatives to a passport and test the concept of an enhanced driver's licenses prior to the implementation of WHTI. Rep. Slaughter believes that travelers should not have to purchase new documents if a common driver's license can suffice instead.

In June, Rep. Slaughter worked closely with House Homeland Security Chairman, David Price, to include key provisions of her PACT ACT in the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act for 2008.

Specifically, the language authored by Rep. Slaughter makes it known that Congress does not believe DHS is implementing WHTI in a coherent fashion, or one that is transparent to the traveling public.

DHS requested \$252 million in FY08 and FY09 for implementation of WHTI. Rep. Slaughter's language stipulates that DHS cannot have access to \$100 million of that total until it transmits a report to Congress containing: “[t]he results of pilot programs used to develop and implement the plan required by Section 7209 of the

Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (bill that mandated WHTI)..."

Furthermore, the report must include:

infrastructure and staffing required, with associated costs by port of entry;
updated milestones for plan implementation;
detailed explanation of how such section 7209 have been satisfied;
confirmation that a vicinity read radio frequency technology identification card has been adequately tested to ensure operational success;
a description of steps taken to ensure the integrity of privacy safeguard.

###