Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 27, 2006

The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
H-218
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Obey
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lewis and Ranking Member Obey,

As you begin Conference deliberations on H.R. 5441, the Fiscal Year 2007 Homeland Security Appropriations bill, we urge your support for the Leahy/Stevens provision included in the Senate-passed bill. The provision makes much-needed changes to implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) by providing DHS and State an extended deadline, as well as setting parameters for alternative documents.

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 U.S. 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 U.S. travelers. Unfortunately, DHS and State have proposed that all travelers carry a $97 passport or a loosely defined $55 travel card, commonly referred to as the PASS card. These documents are prohibitively expensive and difficult to obtain for many American families, and do nothing to encourage travel into the U.S. Should DHS and State implement WHTI as-planned, cross-border commerce will dry-up and significantly damage border communities, international trade, and the travel industry.

In addition to the serious problems with the proposed documents, DHS and State are far behind in implementing WHTI by the January 1, 2008 deadline. The agencies have not determined the type of technology to include in the PASS card or requested funding in the FY 2007 budget to install new card-readers at land and sea ports-of-entry. Such inaction has led the Government Accountability Office to state that DHS and State will likely miss the 2008 implementation date.

It is clear that Congress must step-in and provide DHS and State the direction for getting WHTI done right before it is too late. The Senate's FY 2007 Homeland Security Appropriations bill contains language that would extend the WHTI deadline and give DHS and State clear instructions for implementing the PASS card system. Specifically, the Leahy/Stevens provision establishes a uniform implementation date of June 1, 2009 for sea and land travel; sets limits on the cost of the PASS card; requires DHS to share the PASS card technology with Canada and Mexico and install PASS card readers at all

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land ports of entry; and establishes alternative procedures for groups of children traveling across the border with parental consent.

The Leahy/Stevens 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 make certain that the Senate's WHTI language is retained in the final conference report for the FY 2007 Homeland Security appropriations bill. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Louise Slaughter
Member of Congress

John McHugh
Member of Congress

Bernard Sanders
Member of Congress

Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

Henry Brown
Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

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Charles Bass
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Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

Solomon Ortiz
Member of Congress

Charlie Gonzalez
Member of Congress

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William Jefferson
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Fred Upton
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Jay Inslee
Member of Congress

James Walsh
Member of Congress

Rush Holt
Member of Congress

Diane Watson
Member of Congress

Rob Simmons
Member of Congress

Slaughter/McHugh WHTI Letter to House Appropriations Committee 07/27/06

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