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Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI)
testimony before the
Senate Subcommittee on International Operations and Terrorism
Chairman: Senator John E. Sununu
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In July 2004, the 9/11 Commission recommended that the U.S. federal government take a series of steps to protect the nation against future terrorist attacks. With respect to international travel, the report states that Americans should not be exempt from carrying biometric passports or “*otherwise enabling their identities to be securely verified when they enter the United States; nor should Canadians or Mexicans.*”

The 9/11 Commission also stated that “*Our border screening system should check people efficiently and welcome friends. Admitting large numbers of students, scholars, businesspeople, and tourists fuels our economy, cultural vitality, and political reach.*”

In addition, the Commission pointed out that “*programs to speed known travelers should be a higher priority*” and that the “*daily commuter should not be subject to the same measures as first-time travelers*”.

Just a few months later, Congress passed the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, calling on the Department of Homeland Security and Department of State to

“*develop and implement a plan . . . to require a passport or other document, or combination of documents, deemed by the Secretary of Homeland Security to be sufficient to denote identity and citizenship, for all travel into the United States. . .*”

The regulations proposed by the Department of Homeland Security meet the first of the 9/11 Commissions recommendations, but not the second or the third.

Mr. Chairman, I am Slade Gorton, a United States senator from Washington from 1981-87 and 1989-2001. I was thereafter a member of the 9/11 Commission and subscribe to all of its recommendations. Here today I also represent Business for Economic Security, Tourism & Trade, a coalition concerned about the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, especially with respect to its effect on U.S.- Canada travel.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks awakened us to our vulnerability to terrorism, and the need to protect our people and our infrastructure from terrorists attacks, as terrorism will last for the foreseeable future. Today’s system simply does not meet that need. According to a February

2006 Zogby International poll conducted among likely voters living along the U.S./Canada border, only 59% of Canadians and 58% of Americans have been asked even for their driver's license or photo ID when crossing the border, meaning that an estimated 40% of the time even this basic document is not requested. Meanwhile, fewer than 40% of Canadians and 20% of Americans have been asked to show their birth certificates.

In spite of this continuing informality, there have been no successful terrorist attacks in either country since 9/11, but the system is nevertheless clearly inadequate. What is the optimal solution?

In April 2005, when Department of Homeland Security and Department of State suggested that a passport might be the only option for getting back and forth across the border, there was a huge public outcry, and rightly so. The U.S. and Canada have enjoyed hundreds of years of harmonious border relations, longer than any other in the world. That border is the conduit for \$1.2 billion in trade every day and supports 5.2 million jobs. Going from never having requested a formal border-crossing document to a passport-only option would be disastrous. The president agreed, sending DHS and State back to the drawing board.

Now the departments are moving forward with the People Access Security and Service Card, or PASS Card. That card requires all of the same information and processing time as a passport but is approximately half the cost, fits in a wallet and works only at land crossings. To determine whether this option is a feasible alternative, one might well ask why only 23% of Americans carry a passport today. Again, the Zogby International survey revealed that cost is an issue: only 30% of Americans are willing to spend even \$25 or less on a land-border crossing card; 49% want the document for free. Even at half the cost of a passport, nearly 80% of likely voters along the northern border are not inclined to obtain the document, and even fewer are inclined to do so for everyone in their families.

While Canadians are more willing to pay for such a passport alternative, their federal government has indicated no plans to reciprocate the PASS Card. What this means is that the U.S. federal government is investing millions of dollars in creating a document that only a fraction of Americans are willing to buy, while Canadians will have no choice but to buy a passport if they wish to visit the U.S. Though the proposed regulation lives up to the call for enhanced border security recommended by the 9/11 report, it does not take into account the justified expectation of both Americans and Canadians that the historic policy of easy access to one another's countries is too dear to all of us to be abandoned.

Ultimately, both sides of the border stand to lose by current plans to implement the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. Canadian visitors spend \$10+ billion in the states annually. And not only border communities stand to lose—states like Florida, Nevada and California are most Canadians' greatest spending destinations, and most Canadians drive to these locations—passing through northern land border crossings nearly 75% of the time.

Is the sacrifice worth it if it means greater border security? Many say, "yes," but current proposed options both go too far and not far enough.

The U.S./Canada border is 4,000 miles long, 5,500 miles counting Alaska. Along the way there are an estimated 140 formal crossing sites, many in remote areas. Anyone looking to hurt the United States can still find a way to get here without passing through a formal crossing area at all. And let's not forget that each of the 9/11 terrorists possessed a passport, as did yet another would-be terrorist, who crossed into the City of Port Angeles in my state of Washington, hoping to blow up the L.A. Airport. It was not failure to have proper documentation that arrested that individual, but an alert border agent who noticed the suspect appeared nervous.

Greater emphasis must be placed on securing the Western Hemisphere perimeter and weeding out troublemakers within. Steps to improve intergovernmental information sharing, resource allocation, and general collaboration are all positive in this regard. But we cannot afford to inconvenience and deter innocent visitors to our country because we suffer from a case of security mono-vision.

Recent Congressional pushes to extend the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative deadline back make sense, but only if combined with a mandate to consider other more feasible alternatives and to explore these alternatives with our neighbors, and as long as measures to secure our nation continue to move forward.

This brings me to another 9/11 Commission recommendation—that Secure Identification should begin in the United States. The federal government has set standards for the issuance of birth certificates and sources of identification such as drivers licenses. Fraud in identification documents is no longer just a problem of theft. At many vulnerable points, sources of identification are the last opportunity to ensure that people are who they say they are and to check effectively whether they may represent a threat of terrorism.

I know that many in New Hampshire and elsewhere have opposed the security-enhanced drivers licenses that will take effect under the REAL-ID Act, but this new law does come with benefits. First, it creates a more secure foundation document for all of our nation's security cards, whether the passport, the PASS Card, or other options. Second, it allows us to consider how, on an individual, voluntary basis, drivers' licenses themselves can be combined with other requirements, like the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, for purposes like border crossing. Listening to, and working closely with states to realize the potential benefits of REAL-ID will greatly aid in adopting practical and effective policies.

Whatever, the ultimate answer is to securing cross-border travel, we must assure that people know in advance what they need to cross so that they do not come to the border unprepared. Currently, 87% of Americans and 83% of Canadians have little-to-no idea about new documentation requirements (again, according to the Zogby Poll). Processing individuals who come to the border unprepared at secondary facilities—whether for a day pass or any other option—is infeasible given space limitations and the extremely high volumes at many major crossing areas. Moreover, possible wait-times and hassle deter visitors, who want

nothing more than to be with friends and family and who, in the process, do great good for our national economy.

The 9/11 Commission was charged with making recommendations to secure our nation's citizens, but we did not do so in a vacuum. There are ways to be both secure and smart about how we address our security challenges. Sometimes the answers lie in front of us, if only we care to look.

Thank you once again, Senator Sununu, for the opportunity to share these remarks and for your important interest in this matter.