



GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC
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**The position of the Government of Québec
on the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI)
submitted by the Québec Delegate in Boston, Mrs. France Dionne**

**Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Western Hemisphere Subcommittee Field Hearing
Concord, New Hampshire**

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The Government of Québec firmly believes that security is a prerequisite for trade and fully supports the underlying objectives of the WHTI, namely those related to enhancing security and harmonizing identity document standards between Canada and the United States. However, we are very concerned about the negative impact that the current proposal would have on trade, tourism and the daily lives of thousands of citizens in border communities in both the United States and Canada, including Québec communities. For example, a study published last year by the Conference Board of Canada estimated that the implementation of the WHTI would result in a reduction of approximately US \$265 million in expenditures in the United States by Canadian tourists in 2008.

To a large extent, our mutual economic prosperity depends on our ability to maintain a Canada–U.S. border that is secure, open and free flowing. Significant progress has been accomplished in this area, particularly through the implementation of the Canada-U.S. Smart Border Action Plan, to which Québec is a contributor. Major infrastructure investments made by governments in both Canada and the United States since 2001 have facilitated cross-border travel and have contributed to a more secure border.

The Canada-United States border relationship is unique with more than 300,000 business people, tourists and regular commuters traveling between Canada and the United States every day, and more than \$1.1 billion in two-way trade each day, contributing therefore to a real improvement in the standard of living of Canadians and Americans. Québec is a key economic partner of the United States and of New England, in particular. In 2004, Québec alone was the fourth-largest destination for American exports. We import annually more than \$20 billion in goods from the United States. Close to 2 million trucks cross the Québec–U.S. border in both directions every year, as an estimated 64% of trade in goods between Québec and the United States is shipped by truck.

Québec is a particularly important international market for New England businesses. In 2005 alone, it has imported more than \$3.5 billion in New England products. Thousands of jobs in the United States also depend on investments by Québec companies and the ability of these businesses to export products back to Canada. This economic relationship goes beyond trade, however. On average, some 3 million Quebecers visit annually the United States: these trips generate over \$1 billion in yearly revenues for the U.S. tourism industry. Last year, 320,000 Canadian citizens visited the Granite State, and, with the stronger Canadian dollar, we can anticipate that this number will increase this year. As well, important and vibrant cultural and family relationships exist between Québec and New Hampshire. Some 25% of New England population is from French-Canadian origin.

We believe strongly that the Canada–U.S. border must be secure, open and free flowing. In response to the changing security environment, the Government of Québec has implemented, over the past few years, critical measures in order to make a tangible contribution to continental security. On the domestic front, the Government of Québec has updated its legislative framework, upgraded its operational capabilities and strengthened cooperation among all security and law enforcement agencies. In the area of identity, the Government has devoted considerable efforts to ensure that civil status documents are delivered only to authorized individuals, and to strengthen their authenticity and traceability. These foundation documents are the cornerstone to an effective harmonization of identity document standards.

Cooperation with north-eastern U.S. states is a key component of Québec's security strategy. Since December 2003, we have signed bilateral security cooperation agreements with all four bordering States, including with New Hampshire. Québec, along with ten U.S. states, is a member of the Northeast Regional Homeland Security Directors Consortium. We are cooperating with New England states through the Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers. Québec is also participating with the State of New Hampshire in the Canada-U.S. Cargo Security Project (CUSCSP), which aims at providing a rapidly assembled prototype test-bed for elements of cargo container supply chain security. The CUSCSP is a bi-national public-private partnership and is coordinated by the NI2 Center for Infrastructure Expertise located in Portsmouth, NH. Furthermore, last week, the Government of Québec has released its new International Policy, which recognizes the transformation of the international security environment since September 11, 2001. In fact, one of the core objectives of our International Policy is to contribute to the security of Québec and the North American continent. Key initiatives in this area include measures aimed at strengthening our collaboration with the north-eastern states, at both the bilateral and regional levels, as well as securing Québec electricity infrastructures, some of which serve the New England market.

In our opinion, the WHTI does not fully take into account the special nature of the Canada–U.S. border, notably the economic interdependence between the two countries and transborder regions, including the broader northeast of the continent, which is more and more integrated through trade and investment, as well as on the energy front. These bi-national regions are key engines of economic growth. The WHTI could therefore have a highly negative impact on the flow of cross-border traffic and harm North America's economic competitiveness. In our view, the initiative would have a significant impact on our citizens and economies located in the first 250 miles on both sides of the border because of the frequent movements that this easy car driving range offers to support international trade, investment and tourism activities. As well, the Government of Québec is very much aware of the particular relationships that unite border communities and the unique set of challenges they would face with the implementation of the current WHTI proposal.

Furthermore, very important questions remain regarding the way the U.S. Government intends to implement the WHTI. The procedures for checking the new travel documents at the border have not been determined; the feasibility of deploying the technology is still unknown; the impact on border infrastructures and cross-border flows has not been assessed; and, most importantly for border states, the economic and social impact of the WHTI has not been fully studied.

Given these deficiencies, we feel that the timetable set forth under the *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act* is unrealistic. Hasty deployment of the WHTI, as currently outlined, would significantly limit the benefits of efforts devoted in recent years to improving security and enhancing the flow of traffic at the Canada–U.S. border. On October 28, 2005, the Premier of Québec, Mr. Jean Charest, wrote to the U.S. Secretary of State and the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security to encourage the U.S. Government to adopt a flexible and reasonable approach in implementing the WHTI which would meet security imperatives while minimizing the negative impact on border crossings by legitimate travelers.

It is important to note that numerous governors, premiers, U.S. and Canadian legislators, and representatives of bi-national regional forums, including the Conference of New England Governors

and Eastern Canadian Premiers (NEG/ECP), and the Council of State Governments' Eastern Regional Conference, have expressed similar views with regard to the WHTI. On May 13, 2006, in Newport, Rhode Island, the NEG/ECP adopted an important joint resolution concerning the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. More specifically, the resolution, which was adopted on a proposal by Québec and Vermont:

- request the United States Government, following the Regulatory Planning and Review process outlined in Executive Order 12866, to conduct an economic and social analysis of the anticipated impact of WHTI on cross-border trade, tourism and local community activities;
- urges the United States Government and the Government of Canada to fully explore, in close consultation with states and provinces, options with regard to the implementation of the WHTI, including timelines, terms, technologies, transition measures and alternative identity documentation;
- confirms the NEG/ECP's intention to work with other interested parties and organizations to urge Congress to delay the implementation of the WHTI;
- urges the United States Government to revise the terms of the implementation of the WHTI, to ensure that the border between Canada and the United States remains secure and open.

Recent legislative initiatives in Congress indicate that its members are paying increasing attention to the legitimate concerns that have been expressed by border communities, as well as by business and the travel and tourism industries about the implementation of the WHTI. We are encouraged by these proposals, which represent, in our view, steps in the right direction. We are also encouraged by recent statements by President Bush confirming his Administration's intention to work closely with the Government of Canada. We are very confident that through close collaboration between governments on both sides of the border, we will succeed in implementing the right measures.

The Government of Québec, for its part, wants to participate actively in the search for practical solutions that reconcile security imperatives with maintaining an open, free-flowing border. We share the United States' security concerns and will continue to contribute actively to continental security. We nevertheless feel that it is very important that any new measures taken by American authorities to control travellers' identity take into account the unique nature of the border between our two countries, and avoid any negative impact on the tourist industry, on good-neighbour relations between border communities and on North American competitiveness.

A copy of the Premier's Charest letter to Secretary Rice and Chertoff, as well as the resolution adopted by Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers are included as part of our submission.