



# Border initiative could slow binational travel and trade

by Ilene Grossman

When hockey teams from Michigan or Minnesota travel for games in Ontario, or families in North Dakota visit friends in Manitoba or Saskatchewan, they don't have to think much about crossing an international border.

That movement is part of everyday life along the border, the longest one in the world not actively patrolled or defended by military troops.

But it may change in fundamental ways under the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative.

Being implemented as part of the U.S. Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act, the WHTI will require people entering the United States from Canada and Mexico, including U.S. citizens, to show a passport or other accepted travel document.

The two-year implementation process calls for these documents to be required at airports at the beginning of 2007 and at land borders by Jan. 1, 2008.

The initiative is an effort to secure the U.S. border, but it also raises concerns about longer lines at crossings as well as declines in tourism, family visits and binational economic activity.

"Effective measures are essential to maintaining security at our borders, but impeding trade and the reasonable passage of people and goods is not a practical solution," North Dakota Republican Gov. John Hoeven said in a joint statement with Manitoba Premier Gary Doer about the WHTI.

The two leaders note that at a single port of entry (Pembina), 100,000 people travel between North Dakota and Manitoba every month.

"We are worried about losing the sense of community that spans the border," Doer said in the joint statement, "whether it's visiting friends or family in a nearby town, playing in a weekend hockey tournament or attending a concert."

Under the current system, people entering the United States from Canada have been able to use a certified birth certificate to show proof of citizenship.

In some cases, border stations at land ports have just asked for photo identification.

Requiring a passport or other formal travel document, one that people would have to apply for and not have readily available, could have a negative impact on movement and trade between the two countries. Only about 20 percent of Americans and 40 percent of Canadians have passports.

"We want to make sure that whatever is imple-

mented does not slow things down at the border with respect to trade," Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan Speaker Myron Kowalsky says.

"The movement of goods and services across the border is paramount for our mutual prosperity, so we want to work together to see if we can assist in providing security while at the same time assuring a smooth flow."

He and others are urging the U.S. government to seek solutions that don't interfere with cross-border relationships.

Michigan Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm says a passport requirement would have "potentially damaging effects on our workforce, economy, health care system and tourism."

"Michigan relies on our traditionally open border with Canada to maintain and grow strong economic, social and cultural relations," she wrote in a letter to federal officials.

## Alternative travel plans

Finding the right balance between security and openness, between the need to protect the border and to ensure the smooth flow of people and goods, is an ongoing struggle for the U.S. and Canadian governments.

With the WHTI, some state and provincial officials worry that the balance will be tipped too much against economic security. They say low-risk travelers could be deterred from crossing the border while high-risk individuals will find other ways of entering the United States.

Because of these concerns, these officials hope the law's "other secure, accepted travel document" provision ultimately results in a more usable alternative to the passport requirement.

One idea is to create a secure border-crossing card that would establish identity and citizenship.

The U.S. departments of State and Homeland Security may also decide to accept documents, such as the NEXUS card, that already are issued through binational programs for fast-lane passage.

While less costly to obtain than a passport, border-crossing or fast-lane cards would still require individuals to go through an application process.

Another alternative is to incorporate the federal government's Real ID program into the new travel initiative.

Passed last year, and scheduled to be implemented by May 2008, the Real ID Act prohibits federal agencies from accepting state-

issued driver's licenses or identification cards unless they meet certain standards set by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

At the very least, the state licenses and identification cards will have to be machine-readable, contain anti-fraud measures and incorporate certain data. States also must check the validity of the documents used to obtain the IDs and verify that the applicant is in the United States legally.

If these new IDs became "the other accepted travel document," any person with a government-approved driver's license or identification card could cross the border.

"We need a secure document, but I believe it would be preferable to have one that is used every day, such as a driver's license that might have universal standards on both sides of the border," Nebraska Sen. Pam Redfield of Omaha says.

"This would be convenient, it would be less costly, and it would not discourage the movement back and forth [between the countries]."

The trick for state governments would be to ensure that the documents proving identification and nationality are valid. Given that even birth certificates come in many formats, this would be a major undertaking.

And it is likely that the United States would require similar efforts from Canadian governments in order for documents other than passports to be accepted. ✈

### Facts on bustling U.S.-Canada border

✓ More than 50 million Americans and 30 million Canadians live in states and provinces along the border. Ninety percent of Canada's population lives within 100 miles of the U.S. border.

✓ More than 5 million jobs are supported by the \$1.2 billion in trade that occurs every day between the United States and Canada.

✓ In 2004, bilateral tourism between the two countries accounted for 29 million visitors, with a near-equal number of Americans and Canadians visiting the other country.

✓ Michigan is the second-most visited state by Canadians, with an economic impact estimated at \$165 million.

✓ In 2004, nearly 16 million passenger vehicles and more than 5 million commercial vehicles crossed the bridges and tunnels at the Detroit-Windsor and Port Huron-Sarnia border crossings. About \$450 million worth of trade passes through these two crossings every day.

✓ The U.S. Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative will require visitors and U.S. citizens to show a passport or other accepted travel document in order to enter the country.

✓ One in five U.S. citizens has a passport, which costs \$97 to obtain. About 40 percent of Canadians have passports.

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