

Testimony of

Bill Stenger

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Good morning Senator Leahy and other members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. I want to first thank you for bringing this hearing to Newport. It clearly shows me and all members of our community that you are fully engaged with the serious concerns we all feel with the impending WHTI policies effecting cross-border travel. I want to express my sincere appreciation to you and your very effective Staff for the work you are doing on our behalf.

I'd like to share with you how the WHTI policies can affect Jay Peak.

We are a company that has been operating since 1955. We have grown from a modest local recreation area to an International Resort where 300,000 skiers visit in winter and now with a widely acclaimed Championship Golf Course we are attracting record numbers of summer visitors.

Fifty percent of all guests to Jay Peak come from Canada. Seventy-five percent from the Province of Quebec and twenty-five percent from Ontario.

Jay Peak employs 550 Vermonters in winter and over 150 in summer. These numbers are on the increase because millions of dollars of investment is planned for Jay Peak in the next few years.

All of our work in developing business momentum at Jay Peak and the Northern communities that surround Jay Peak in Orleans and Franklin counties will be at serious risk if the WHTI is implemented as now planned.

Here are my concerns:

? Guests from Canada are not compelled to come to Vermont for recreation. Québec has a vibrant and healthy ski industry. Canadian skiers choose to come to Jay Peak because they love our product and our welcoming service attitude toward them. They feel like a guest and they look at Jay Peak as their own local Vermont area, a very special place for them.

This vibrancy can be lost in a very short time if crossing into Vermont becomes an unpredictable, time consuming and unfriendly experience. Skiers know the best experience at an area is in the first hours of each day. If they are blocked at the border with inefficient crossing restrictions and technology that is untested in winter environment, those Canadians will stay home where they know they can get swift access to their resorts.

? I became very alarmed this spring when the initial implementation of WHTI was implemented for the cruise industry. The D.H.S. was totally unprepared for the volume of passports required and thousands of American's plans were disrupted and all because D.H.S. under-estimated the impact.

Senator Leahy, I and my fellow Vermonters can't afford D.H.S. to misjudge the impending policy changes and what will be required to implement them. They will not get a second chance. We will be fatally harmed economically if the new protocol is not right the first time.

I fear they haven't tested the technology in winter conditions. They also haven't taken into consideration what Canadian Immigration must do to comply to our new plans. It is embarrassing how little communication has occurred with our Neighbor to the North and how little evaluation of the importance the economic impact Canada has on our State and across the nation.

D.H.S. thinks exclusively about security and I respect that but someone needs to go beyond just security and recognize that the lives and livelihood of tens of thousands of Americans will be sharply and negatively impacted if the economic well-being of the border communities is not taken into consideration. We can't afford to miss getting this balance right the first time.

This whole issue gives one pause to consider just what will be accomplished by this massively expensive and bureaucratically heavy process. Will hardened professional terrorists really be deterred from entering the United States? Won't the impending change simply create a high tech underground document forging business?

Last spring 17 terrorists were arrested in Toronto for plotting to destroy landmark buildings in Toronto. Everyone of them had a valid Canadian passport. Everyone of them could have legally passed into the united States.

What really is going to be accomplished here? We haven't thought this through correctly and at the very least the implementation should be delayed until a year of testing is fully complete so border crossing is enhanced and not crippled. I urge you to seek finalization to the Leahy-Stevens Amendment delaying and deferring WHTI's detrimental implementation impact.

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