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A. Border Related News Media

Study offers fixes for border congestion Buffalo News - November 3, 2011

Better information about traffic conditions at the border crossings, coupled with improved coordination for local events and increased customs staffing during busy times, would ease congestion at the Buffalo Niagara region's international bridges, a new study recommends. The study, expected to be released within two weeks by the Binational Economic and Tourism Alliance, also calls for increased use of new technology to speed border crossings and inspections, as well as increased use of trusted traveler programs. "It's really important that we get this right," said Arlene White, the alliance's executive director. "There is no magic bullet here, and we're all responsible for fixing it," she said. "We have to pitch in now at the business and community level." The economic stakes are high, with the region's four international bridge crossings ranking as the busiest for passenger traffic and second for truck traffic. An estimated \$70 billion in trade crossed the bridges in 2010, down from a peak of \$80 billion in 2008. The report said 15 percent of all trade between New York and Canada crosses the bridges in the Buffalo Niagara region. But crossing the bridges has become much more complicated because of the heightened security measures that have been put in place since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center a decade ago. Those heightened security measures -- and the more frequent backups at the bridges that have resulted from them -- have cut deeply into quick day trips across the border by residents and also reduced the number of truck crossings by about a quarter from their peak before 9/11. More than half of the 800 U.S. and Canadian residents surveyed for the report said they had the proper documents now required to cross the border but still weren't venturing into the other country. "Crossing the river has become just difficult enough to prevent people on both sides of the border from making the effort. We're all the poorer for that," said John J. Wood, the senior associate vice provost at the University at Buffalo. The report, prepared by consulting firm Deloitte & Touche, found that same-day trips from the United States to Canada have dropped by more than two-thirds over the last decade, although the pace has rebounded somewhat this year. While same-day trips from the United States to Canada are down nearly 3 percent through August, day trips from Canada to the United States have increased by 21 percent to their highest level in at least six years, according to Statistics Canada. The rising value of the Canadian dollar, which makes goods in Canada more costly for Americans, is partly to blame for fewer Americans crossing the border, along with fluctuations in the economy. "It's the day traffic that has shifted. People just aren't jumping across the border anymore," White said. "People are worried about how long it will take them to get back." In addition, the report found that more than 50 percent of American travelers surveyed for the study said border identification issues were the main reason for not crossing the border, compared with 34 percent of Canadians. "That's a psychological change in travelers that you can't easily displace," White said. The second-biggest reason among Americans -- and the reason cited by half of the Canadians surveyed -- was that they weren't interested in any tourist sites or events on the other side of the border -- a finding that White said reflects the drop in tourism marketing over the last decade. "If you don't talk to your customers, you're going to lose that customer," she said. White said the Buffalo Niagara region and southern Ontario can learn lessons from the generally positive experiences during the World Junior Hockey Tournament held here last December, when extensive planning and heightened collaboration helped avoid major border snags during the 11-day event. That type of coordination and planning is beneficial for any special events that are likely to lead to increased bridge traffic, she said. The report, citing previous studies that estimated that border-crossing delays cost U.S. and Canadian trucking firms more than \$9 billion, recommends that both nations continue to invest in new technology that can make inspections more efficient. It calls for increased use of hand-held scanners, preclearance programs and trusted traveler initiatives. The report recommends better, more informative highway signs listing the amount of time needed to cross the border at the various bridges. Those signs now occasionally focus on wait times at the bridges. The report calls for regular updates, on a 24-hour basis, on the information signs now located on many local highways, as well as providing that information on highway signs far from the border so travelers can adjust their routes to avoid the

bottlenecks, White said. "It's not until you get to the border that you know there's a problem at the border," she said.

US northern border checks scaled back **Buffalo News - October 28, 2011**

The U.S. Border Patrol has quietly stopped its controversial practice of routinely searching buses, trains and airports for illegal immigrants at transportation hubs along the northern border and in the nation's interior, preventing agents from using what had long been an effective tool for tracking down people here illegally, The Associated Press has learned. Current and former Border Patrol agents said field offices around the country began receiving the order last month - soon after the Obama administration announced that to ease an overburdened immigration system, it would allow many illegal immigrants to remain in the country while it focuses on deporting those who have committed crimes. The routine bus, train and airport checks typically involved agents milling about and questioning people who appeared suspicious, and had long been criticized by immigrant rights groups. Critics said the tactic amounted to racial profiling and violated travelers' civil liberties. But agents said it was an effective way to catch unlawful immigrants, including smugglers and possible terrorists, who had evaded detection at the border, as well as people who had overstayed their visas. Often, those who evade initial detection head quickly for the nearest public transportation in hopes of reaching other parts of the country. Halting the practice has baffled the agents, especially in some stations along the northern border - from Bellingham, Wash., to Houlton, Maine - where the so-called "transportation checks" have been the bulk of their everyday duties. The Border Patrol is authorized to check vehicles within 100 miles of the border. The order has not been made public, but two agents described it to the AP on condition of anonymity because the government does not authorize them to speak to the media. The union that represents Border Patrol agents planned to issue a news release about the change Monday. "Orders have been sent out from Border Patrol headquarters in Washington, D.C., to Border Patrol sectors nationwide that checks of transportation hubs and systems located away from the southwest border of the United States will only be conducted if there is intelligence indicating a threat," the release says. Those who have received the orders said agents may still go to train and bus stations and airports if they have specific "actionable intelligence" that there is an illegal immigrant there who recently entered the country. An agent in Washington state said it's not clear how agents are supposed to glean such intelligence, and even if they did, under the new directive they still require clearance from Washington, D.C., headquarters before they can respond. A U.S. Customs and Border Protection spokesman, Bill Brooks, repeatedly insisted that any shift in enforcement tactics does not amount to a change in policy as local commanders still have authority to aggressively pursue illegal immigrants near the border and at transportation hubs. "It's up to the local commander to position his agents the way he wants to position them. What we've done is gone to a risk-based posture," he said. In a separate statement, the agency said, "Conducting intelligence-based transportation checks allows the Border Patrol to use their technology and personnel resources more effectively, especially in areas with limited resources." Shawn Moran, vice president of the union that represents agents, was outraged at the changes. "Stated plainly, Border Patrol managers are increasing the layers of bureaucracy and making it as difficult as possible for Border Patrol agents to conduct their core duties," the National Border Patrol Council's statement said. "The only risks being managed by this move are too many apprehensions, negative media attention and complaints generated by immigrant rights groups." The Border Patrol, which patrols outside the official ports of entry handled by customs officers, has dramatically beefed up its staffing since 9/11, doubling to more than 20,000 agents nationally. Along the northern border, the number has jumped from about 300 in the late 1990s to more than 2,200. At the same time, the number of Border Patrol arrests nationwide has been falling - from nearly 1.2 million in 2005 to 463,000 in 2010, and 97 percent of them at the southern border, according to the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics. The office cited the recession as a likely factor in the drop. Along the northern border last fiscal year, the agency made 7,431 arrests. It was not immediately clear how many stemmed from routine transportation checks. The public affairs office for the Border Patrol's Blaine sector said it doesn't break down the data that way. But of 673 arrests in the sector, roughly 200 were from routine transportation checks, according to a Washington state-based Border Patrol agent who has been with the agency for more than 20 years and spoke to the AP. Until receiving the new directive, the Bellingham office, about 25 miles from the

Canadian border, kept agents at the bus and train station, and at the local airport 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Now, the agents have little work to do, the agent said. The situation is similar in upstate New York, where an agent told the AP - also on the condition of anonymity - that a senior manager relayed the new directive during a morning roll call last month. Since then, instead of checking buses or trains, agents have spent shifts sitting in their vehicles gazing out at Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, where few illegal immigrants cross. "They're already bored," the agent said. "You grab the paper every day and you go do the crossword." In the Buffalo sector, where there were more than 2,400 arrests in fiscal 2010, as many as half were from routine transportation checks, the agent estimated. The change was immediately obvious to Jack Barker, who manages the Greyhound and Trailways bus station in Rochester, N.Y. For the past six years, he said, Border Patrol agents boarded nearly every bus in and out of the station looking for illegal immigrants. Last month - one day after the 10th anniversary of 9/11 and all of the hype that surrounded it - the agents stopped coming. They haven't been back since, Barker said. "What's changed that they're no longer needed here?" Barker asked. "I haven't been able to get an answer from anybody." Doug Honig, spokesman for the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, welcomed the news. "If the Border Patrol is indeed not boarding buses and trains and engaging in the random questioning of people, that's a step in the right direction," he said. "People shouldn't be questioned by government officials when there's no reason to believe they've done anything wrong." Kent Lundgren, chairman of the National Association of Former Border Patrol Officers, said the transportation checks have been a staple of the agency for 60 years. His organization has heard from agents around the country complaining of the change, he said. Gene Davis, a retired deputy chief in the Border Patrol's sector in Blaine, Wash., emphasized how effective the checks can be. He noted that a check of the Bellingham bus station in 1997 yielded an arrest of Palestinian Gazi Ibrahim Abu Mezer. Abu Mezer skipped out on a \$5,000 bond - only to turn up later in Brooklyn, where New York police shot him as he prepared to bomb the city's subway system. Davis also noted that would-be millennium bomb suspect Ahmed Ressam was arrested at the border in late 1999 when he left a ferry from British Columbia to Washington in a rented car full of explosives. "We've had two terrorists who have come through the northern border here. To put these restraints on agents being able to talk to people is just ridiculous," Davis said. "Abu Mezer got out, but that just shows you the potential that's there with the transportation checks." The Border Patrol informed officials at the Bellingham airport on Thursday that from now on they would only be allowed to come to the airport "if there's an action that needs their assistance," said airport manager Daniel Zenk. "I'm shocked," Zenk said. "We welcome the security presence the Border Patrol provides."

Owens talks issues with constituents

Watertown Daily Times – October 30, 2011

If the U.S. Postal Service insists on closing the Cranberry Lake post office as planned, Rep. William L. Owens, D-Plattsburgh, said, postal officials better be prepared to talk when they come seeking help from Congress. "They're not going to get a very good hearing from me," Mr. Owens said during an hourlong town hall meeting with constituents Saturday afternoon at SUNY Canton. Mr. Owens was responding to a question from Katherine Johnson, a Cranberry Lake resident, who wondered what could be done to save the post office. "We have a lot of older senior citizens, some handicapped," she said, noting the next closest post office is nearly 15 miles away, causing a hardship for residents who would have to travel that distance, particularly in the winter. Cranberry Lake isn't alone, though. Among other post offices on the list the Postal Service plans to close are DePeyster, Parishville, Lorraine, Dickinson Center, Fine, Newton Falls, Rainbow Lake, Piercefield, Pyrites, Brier Hill and Wanakena. Ms. Johnson told Mr. Owens she would appreciate "anything you can do to help us keep our post office open." She said residents would be inclined to back a five-day delivery schedule rather than targeting their post office for closure. Mr. Owens said his efforts so far have met with little success. He said he has written letters to the postmaster general, but information he has received back has been "not particularly clear and not particularly forthcoming." He suggested that the Postal Service had other options rather than closing post offices. Among them, Mr. Owens said, was to co-locate post offices with other facilities. "They have largely ignored those suggestions," he said. "I understand it's very frustrating. I'm hoping they will look at this whole issue of co-locating when there is another building where the post office could be placed." On another topic, Mr. Owens said he spent two days in Ottawa last week to discuss issues regarding the relationship between Canada and the United States. Among the topics they discussed, he said, was the case of Roy M.

Anderson, a 22-year-old Baldwinsville resident who sparked an international incident by fishing in Canadian waters and had to pay a fine to get his boat back from Canadian officials. Mr. Anderson was fishing in the Gananoque Narrows, believing that as long as he didn't set anchor or dock on Canadian soil he didn't have to check in to Canada. But his boat was boarded by border officials from Canada, who demanded he pay \$1,000 for not having reported. His fine was later returned. Mr. Owens said there had been "anxiety it will be repeated," but at this point, there had not been another incident. "That would tell you we're evolving back to where we were," he said, suggesting it was "not likely to happen again." Mr. Owens also touched on the Colombia Free Trade Agreement recently enacted by Congress that imposes a \$5.50 customs user fee on all passengers arriving from Canada by sea or air. "I'm in the process of drafting a letter to a variety of folks" inquiring whether Canadian border officers should be taking on the role of fee collector or protecting the borders and ensuring traffic was flowing smoothly along the crossing, he said. "I don't think it was thought out. Who's going to determine what the exchange rate is? There's some real practical problems we need to get resolved and hopefully get it repealed," he said. Responding to concerns about the SUNY Canton and Potsdam campuses sharing one president, Mr. Owens pledged he would contact H. Carl McCall, who was appointed this month as the chairman of the State University of New York board of trustees. In previous conversations with SUNY officials, the congressman said, he had been "assured SUNY Canton would maintain its identity and independence." However, he said, the issue was "complex" as state universities deal with declining sources of revenue. "Hopefully, they will allow all (state universities) in my district to retain their identity and administrative staffs," Mr. Owens said. "I think these are complicated issues, but I will be happy to talk to Mr. McCall."

Cuomo names Eve as development adviser
Buffalo News - October 30, 2011

Leecia Eve, the daughter of the former influential assemblyman from Buffalo, is Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's new senior economic development adviser. Eve, who has served as senior vice president of the Empire State Development Corp., will replace Patrick Foye as a member of Cuomo's executive chamber staff in charge of job creation and retention efforts. Cuomo recently tapped Foye to be executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the big downstate transit operator also in charge of bridges, tunnels and the rebuilding efforts at the World Trade Center. Eve is the daughter of former Deputy Assembly Speaker Arthur O. Eve. She previously worked on then-Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton's staff, at the Hodgson Russ law firm and on the staff of then-Sen. Joseph Biden. The new job for Eve was confirmed by an administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity. Her salary was not available. The appointment of Eve comes at a time when Cuomo has been trying to broaden his support among black leaders in the state. A recent Newsday article focused on black lawmakers' criticism about the pace of the administration's urban agenda. Eve ran for lieutenant governor in 2008 and received backing from key New York City Democratic leaders. But former Gov. Eliot Spitzer cut a deal to take on David Paterson as his running mate. Two years later, Paterson was governor after Spitzer resigned in disgrace. Eve's resume is long and includes work as a clerk for a judge on the state's highest court and as leader of a foundation. She is a 1990 graduate of Harvard Law School. She had been named earlier this year to the Empire State Development Corp.'s staff.

Port director stresses the importance of shipping
The Palladium-Times - November 2, 2011

The significant economic impacts of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway System study results were revealed at the Port of Oswego Authority on Wednesday morning, but all of that could be reversed if the New York State Department of Environmental continues to stand by its strict proposed regulations on ballast water. The first-ever yearlong study was conducted by Martin Associates, based out of Lancaster, Pa., and measures the economic impact of the system on both sides of the border. The firm is known as a global leader in transportation economic analysis and strategic planning. The study included interviewing 900 different system stakeholders, and it was peer reviewed by three economists, two in the United States and one in Canada, whose discourse was made public. Addressing those in attendance Wednesday morning were Port of Oswego

Authority Executive Director Jonathan Daniels and Terry Johnson, the administrator of the Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation. Johnson noted that one of the reasons the study was conducted was to see what the impact would be if the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway System ceased to exist. Daniels addressed the crowd of local media, county legislators, city officials and representatives from state offices. The results of the bi-national study were originally released Oct. 18, but port directors across the United States and Canada were given time to examine these numbers. “You’re going to hear some pretty big numbers, and the difference is many of them are going to have ‘B,’ as in billions, following them. That will tell you some of the impact they do have,” Daniels said. “They presented a realistic assessment with numbers that we have been able to receive of the contributions made by the seaway system to the state, regional and national economies. They definitely show the impact New York state ballast water regulations would have if these come into effect as scheduled.” Johnson said that the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway System is the longest in the world, measuring 2,300 miles and stretching from Montreal, Ontario, Canada, to Duluth, Minn. Systemwide, there are 227,000 jobs in the Great Lakes shipping industry. This produces \$35.5 million in revenue, with wages and salaries for those employees coming in at \$14.1 billion, Daniels said. This industry contributes \$4.6 billion in taxes. “Shipping is a key driver to the U.S. economy, creating 129,000 jobs and \$18.1 billion in economic activity throughout the eight Great Lakes states,” Daniels said. “Wages and salaries income amounts to nearly \$10 billion. With that buying power, \$3 billion is poured back into the local economies. In marine-related industries, employees contribute \$2.7 billion in federal, state and local tax dollars. And within the state of New York itself, nearly 200,000 jobs are dependent on the shipping industry associated with the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence system.” The executive director noted that the Port of Oswego Authority has been dealing with anecdotal numbers for the last decade to decade and a half. Daniels said the last number he received was that the local port had an economic impact between \$6 million and \$7 million annually. “When I came in here almost four and a half years ago, I was walking in town and someone noticed me from my picture in the paper. They said, ‘Oh, you’re going to be running that little port at the end of the street.’ I kind of chuckled at that and said, ‘Yes. And we’re going to do our best to have an impact on that community,’” Daniels recalled. “So this is not bad for a little port at the end of the street, in that directly and indirectly, we support in excess of 500 jobs.” The Port of Oswego Authority produces more than \$42 million in personal income, with more than \$10 million spent to support local businesses, he said. Business revenue at the port is more than \$38 million, and roughly \$12.5 million is paid in federal, state and local taxes. The manufacturing output for businesses that are served by the port account for more than \$1.3 billion, with more than 7,000 jobs supported by these businesses, Daniels said. “These numbers are important not only to the shipping industry and the industries that we serve, but the government policymakers, the general public and planners as they make decisions on whether we receive funding from the state and federal government in the future,” Daniels said. He noted a recent example of this is the \$160,000 grant that Bill Scriber, manager of administrative services, obtained for the port through Federal Emergency Management Agency. Daniels warned of the negative economic impact that would affect the entire Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway System if the DEC implements the proposed ballast water regulations. If nothing is changed, as of Aug. 1, 2013, these regulations would go into effect. “Currently, the regulations would require that all commercial vessels operating in New York’s waters and traversing through New York’s waters ... they need to be able to clean and treat their water to a standard that is 100 times (greater than) current international maritime organization (IMO) standards,” Daniels said. He noted that the regulations also require that any vessel constructed after Jan. 1, 2013, would be obligated to treat ballast water 1,000 times the current international standards. “It’s a little bit of a problem — no technology exists to treat to 100 times, to 1,000 times or anything above the current IMO standards,” Daniels continued. Johnson added that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Coast Guard commissioned two studies to discover if any technology exists to support such regulations through the National Academy of Sciences and the Science Advisory Board. They found that there is no such technology. “What is interesting is the DEC’s response to that is they seem to dismiss it, which is kind of a mystery to us because that is the exact question that needed to be asked about the availability of technology,” Johnson said. “Another thing that is puzzling about this process with the American DEC is its kind of cavalier approach to Canada. Canada is our largest trading partner, our biggest ally; we have the longest unprotected border in the world. ... The notion that a set of regulations that one state would impose on a bi-national system would thereby prevent Canada from having its ships moved by its crews going to its ports is really quite startling.” Daniels noted that the numbers he reported for the Port of Oswego Authority

regarding jobs and local business revenue would be reversed if the DEC's proposed ballast water regulations stand. Systemwide, it would be a loss of \$10.5 billion in business revenue, he said. Johnson added that if the seaway system closed, 72,000 jobs between the United States and Canada would disappear completely. Johnson said that the DEC's approach to the ballast regulations — in his opinion — does not protect the environment. The best way to actually do this is through the set of rules that can be quickly installed on ships and amend them from there, he said. The Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation and its counterpart, the Canadian Management Corporation, put rules in place six years ago requiring every ship coming into the system to be inspected to ensure that the salt water flushing and ballast water have been exchanged. "We put that into place six years ago and there have been no new water-borne invasive species discovered in the Great Lakes for six years now. It's never happened," Johnson said. "Having 100 percent inspection and enforcement, that protects the environment over pie-in-the-sky regulations." Daniels reiterated that the shipping industry would be in turmoil if these DEC regulations are actually implemented. "Given the dire circumstances of these regulations, we hope some positive news will be forthcoming to the port of Oswego, because if not, Aug. 1 of 2013, the port of Oswego would be forced to cease all international shipping operations," he said. Johnson noted that by the end of this month, the EPA will release with its standard for ballast water treatment, and the U.S. Coast Guard should issue its recommendations shortly thereafter. He also said that Gov. Andrew Cuomo's administration is looking at the issue carefully. Even after the EPA and Coast Guard release their regulations, they would not supersede the DEC's in New York state, Johnson said. Daniels also noted Wednesday that he heard news that morning that a new company would travel through the St. Lawrence Seaway. He said a press conference would be held soon on the announcement.

Ontario firm to open Buffalo office
Buffalo News - November 2, 2011

A Mississauga, Ont., software consulting firm plans to open an office in downtown Buffalo that is expected to employ seven workers, the company said Tuesday. Business and Technology Resource Group will open the office in 2,700 square feet of space in the Electric Tower on Washington Street. Buffalo beat out Easthampton, Mass., and Media, Pa., where BTRG already has offices, for the \$450,000 expansion. BTRG officials have been working with the Erie County Workforce Investment Board and the University at Buffalo. "We want to attract the best quality people to work for us," said Rob Kopf, the BTRG executive who was the point person on the Buffalo project. Thomas Kucharski, the president of the Buffalo Niagara Enterprise business development and marketing group, said the BTRG project fits within the group's focus on advanced professional services and attracting Canadian companies to the region. The BNE helped BTRG assess potential incentives available in association with its move to Buffalo, as well as on work force development.

Festival of Lights sets opening ceremonies
Buffalo News - November 3, 2011

Mickey and Minnie Mouse mascots will flip the switch Saturday evening to mark the official start of the 29th annual CAA Winter Festival of Lights at the Ontario Power Generation Opening Ceremonies at 5:45 in Queen Victoria Park. In addition to the debut of the lights, a one-hour stage show will feature performances by up-and-coming Canadian singers Brooklyn Roebuck and Stephanie McIlroy, the cast of the "Oh Canada Eh?" dinner show, the Wendy Leard School of Dance, the Festival Choir and champion magician Greg Frewin. The first holiday fireworks show will follow. A second show, complete with fireworks, will start at 7. Both shows are free.

Canada ambassador: Pipeline should win on merit
Buffalo News - November 2, 2011

Canada's ambassador to Washington said Wednesday he's confident an oil pipeline from western Canada to the U.S. Gulf Coast will win approval from the Obama administration if the decision is based on merit and not the "noise" opposing it. Ambassador Gary Doer said the proposed pipeline would meet U.S. energy security needs

and passes all State Department environmental criteria. "I believe if it's on merit, it will proceed. If it's on noise it won't," Doer said. The developer, TransCanada, wants to build the \$7 billion Keystone XL pipeline to carry crude oil extracted from the oil sands in Alberta to the many refineries in Houston and Port Arthur, Texas. The underground pipeline would carry an estimated 700,000 barrels of oil a day, doubling the capacity of an existing pipeline from Canada. A coalition of environmentalists, lawmakers and landowners are fighting the proposal amid fears that the Keystone XL pipeline could leak and pollute the Ogallala aquifer, a groundwater supply that sprawls beneath eight states. A special session of Nebraska's legislature started Tuesday to consider a bill to give the state more control over the pipeline route. TransCanada and its supporters have said the project would create U.S. construction jobs, help lower gas prices and reduce dependence on Middle East oil. Alberta has the world's third largest oil reserves, more than 170 billion barrels. Daily production of 1.5 million barrels from the oil sands is expected to increase to 3.7 million in 2025. Only Saudi Arabia and Venezuela have more reserves. President Obama said Tuesday the decision will be based on what is best for the economy and the American people, including their health. The State Department is expected to make a decision on the pipeline by the end of the year, but U.S. officials suggested Wednesday it's possible a decision may not come until next year. Obama said he would get a report from the State Department "over the next several months." The decision will be a critical decision in U.S.-Canada relations, and turning down the Texas route would go over badly in Canada. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has personally pitched the pipeline to Obama. Opposition to the pipeline project has been fierce. Environmental activists, including actress Daryl Hannah and NASA scientist James Hansen, have been arrested in ongoing protests outside the White House.

Gas drillers' supply chain drives jobs
Pittsburgh Tribune-Review - November 3, 2011

Companies that supply natural gas drillers with equipment and other services for use at wellheads and pipelines are expanding and adding jobs in Western Pennsylvania. The latest is Valerus Compression Services LP of Houston, Texas, which opened a \$4 million service center on Wednesday at the Fayette Business Park off Route 43 in Smithfield. Valerus is one of about 175 companies in 10 counties that are part of the region's natural gas supply chain, said Dewitt Peart, president of the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance, an economic development group that is working to get more of those companies to move permanently to the region. Valerus Compression worked in the region's gas fields for two years before deciding it needed a local home. Valerus looked at about 10 sites before selecting the Smithfield location, which is close to drilling activity, said Daniel Cannon, senior vice president of North American operations. Its new center in Smithfield industrial park is in a Keystone Opportunity Zone, which offers businesses reduced state and local taxes. "We had equipment on the ground but no facilities. Our closest one was in Bridgman, Mich.," Cannon said. "Valerus is a great example of what lies ahead, around the supply chain for the natural gas industry," Peart said. Valerus opened the 21,000-square-foot center with a dozen employees to service compressors and 1,500-horsepower engines it leases to drilling companies. With strong growth projected in drilling in the Marcellus shale, Valerus expects to double employment next year, Cannon said. The state counts 12,586 businesses being involved in Marcellus shale natural gas exploration, production and transmission services, employing about 193,800 workers as of March, according to the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis. Those companies are involved in activities such as natural gas distribution, water supply, site preparation and environmental remediation. "There is a tremendous need for infrastructure support in this region. The compression and production aspect of the industry has a bigger long-term impact on the region than the drilling. The drilling is just one small portion," said Morris Mitchell, operations director for Waukesha-Pearce Industries Inc. of Houston, which distributes and services huge engines that run natural gas and oil field equipment. Cannon said more jobs are possible if Valerus goes ahead with a plan to build another plant on 10 acres adjacent to its new center. Compressors that Valerus sells, rents and services are assembled at a base in Texas and shipped to Pennsylvania, he said. Another building would enable Valerus to assemble equipment here. With more gas industry companies looking for space in the region, finding sites for them is becoming a challenge, development officials said. "We're running out of pad-ready sites," said Michael Krajovic, president of Fay-Penn Economic Development County, a Fayette County economic development organization that helped persuade Valerus to open its Smithfield service center. The Smithfield industrial park has a gas services plant operated by Chevron Corp., which acquired Atlas

Energy this year for \$3.2 billion, and another hydraulic fracturing services company. Mitchell said his company is looking for a site in Western Pennsylvania to build a plant that would be close to drilling activity. Companies that serve the gas industry want a 10- to 15-acre site with road and utilities in place, and developers will build it to their specifications, Peart said. "The traffic has been good in terms of inquiries, but we're having difficulties finding space that they want," Peart said. "We don't have a large inventory of sites."

Obama: What's best for US to guide pipeline ruling
Buffalo News - November 1, 2011

President Barack Obama says what's best for the American people and the economy will guide his administration's decision on whether a Canadian company can go ahead with a transnational oil pipeline to Texas. The proposed pipeline has prompted protests across the country. Demonstrators have also been arrested in front of the White House. Obama said Tuesday that among the factors to be evaluated is whether the pipeline would threaten drinking water supplies in places where it would be located. He said a decision will be based on what's best for the economy and the American people, including their health. The State Department is in leading the review because the pipeline crosses an international border. Obama commented in interviews with local TV stations from Omaha, Neb., and Houston.

House panel OKs drilling rules
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette - November 03, 2011

Local rules for gas drilling would be null and void under the Marcellus Shale legislation swiftly approved by a House panel on Wednesday, highlighting a key obstacle in crafting a drilling oversight measure. The bill's party-line vote immediately drew criticism for the meeting's hasty announcement hours after a draft of the measure was posted on the General Assembly's website. The panel approval marked the first steps that the House has taken this session toward an assessment on drillers and tougher regulations. It also means that both the House and Senate have bills primed for quick floor votes when the General Assembly returns to session on Nov. 14. The House GOP-drafted measure closely matches the impact fee plan outlined by Gov. Tom Corbett and the environmental protections suggested by his Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission. It also includes a provision to use royalty dollars from gas wells on state-owned land to fund environmental initiatives. But the section drawing the loudest concerns from Democratic members of the House Finance Committee, environmental advocates and others was a provision stating that statewide rules would supersede all local ordinances regulating oil and gas operations. Rep. Phyllis Mundy, D-Luzerne, said that would strip municipalities of their ability to protect residential areas from drilling activity. The state's township supervisors association strongly echoed that criticism after the meeting. "This would be intrusive on communities, on residents and on taxpayers," said David Sanko, the association's executive director. Republicans on the panel defended the move as similar to how the state regulates construction activities. Rep. Eli Evankovich, R-Murrysville, said if the state beefs up its Oil and Gas Act provisions to address issues like excessive noise and light, localities would feel less of a need to strengthen their own rules. His hometown of Murrysville has been crafting a drilling ordinance that would address issues including noise, traffic and use of retention ponds. "There's still work to be done," Mr. Evankovich said, noting that he's talked to his leadership and the governor's office about clarifying that section. "But it's a good start." Mr. Sanko disagreed, saying that the state is too large and diverse for "one-size-fits-all" rules from Harrisburg. The provision for superseding the local rules was circulated by the Corbett administration before it was inserted into the House measure. While Mr. Corbett has been mum as the Senate has taken several steps toward approving a fee, the House committee vote drew an encouraging statement from his office. "I applaud House Finance Committee members for moving this important measure," Mr. Corbett said. "This bill contains many of the provisions contained in our proposal, and I am pleased to see the Legislature working toward a final bill." The Marcellus Shale Coalition, representing most of the companies active in natural gas extraction, also commended the panel. That group has urged lawmakers to create more uniformity among local drilling rules. "The establishment of a predictable framework of heightened health, safety, and environmental protections will benefit all Pennsylvanians, particularly those residing in nearly half of the [commonwealth's] communities in the Marcellus fairway without formal zoning

rules," said Kathryn Klaber, the coalition's president, in a statement. The committee's chairman, Rep. Kerry Benninghoff, R-Centre, also spoke of standardization in defending the move toward state control of drilling, but he gave a political answer on why this measure was chosen for action over those that do not address zoning. "This is a collection of what could be passed in both chambers," Mr. Benninghoff said. First the measure will have to pass a House floor vote, which Rep. Jesse White, D-Cecil, predicted could prove difficult. "I heard from a lot of my municipalities, and no one is happy," said Mr. White, whose hometown has enacted a drilling ordinance. "It's the job of local government to say, 'We have some questions.'" He added: "Under this bill, it would be easier to drill and put a compressor station in than it would to put an addition on your garage." Meanwhile, Senate lawmakers appear to have found some agreement on an alternative method for preventing unreasonable local regulations while still allowing those governments to retain zoning authority. Senators involved in crafting that chamber's Marcellus bill are looking at an approach in which the state attorney general would evaluate ordinances against a set of guidelines laid out in the law, said Drew Crompton, chief of staff to Senate President Pro Tem Joe Scarnati. That plan would be similar to rules in the state's ACRE law, under which the attorney general reviews certain ordinances governing agricultural operations.

B. Border Communications

Friday, November 4, 2011

[A Bargain for a Better Border](#)

Posted by Commissioner Alan D. Bersin, U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Earlier this week I had the pleasure of speaking to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's national security task force. Before I spoke, I listened with great interest to task force chairman and former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge emphasize that U.S. ports of entry must be where both security and prosperity thrive.

I could not agree more. In fact, from my view as commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, I see that our national security and economic security mission are more than complementary activities. Securing the nation's borders—land, air, and sea—while facilitating the flow of lawful people and goods entering the United States is vital to our homeland security, as well as our economic prosperity. And, over the past several years, we have deployed unprecedented levels of personnel, technology, and resources to enhancing both security and legal commerce at our nation's borders.

As the global security and economic pictures have evolved in the post-9/11 world, so has our approach to border security. This new border paradigm has helped CBP refine *our* way of doing business by adding more time and space to our inspection process, and allowing us to identify dangerous people and goods at the earliest point possible.

Of course, this new border paradigm will not be fully embraced overnight. While we have made significant progress in the private commercial sector, we need to do more to encourage businesses and individuals to join these efforts. This week, I asked the U.S. Chamber to work with us on expanding trusted traveler and shipper programs and with building better, smarter borders that continue to strengthen security and expedite legal commerce.

Here's the bargain: If you are a frequent [international traveler](#) or U.S. border crosser, or you are involved in [importation into the U.S.](#), we urge you to join one of our trusted traveler or shipper programs. The more goods and people we encounter who participate in these programs, the more resources we can dedicate to those we know far less about. Participate because you want a safer border, or participate because you want your border experience to be faster and easier. Either way, we all win.

CBSA seizes 198 bottles of alcohol and 25 cases of beer

Fort Erie, Ontario, November 3, 2011 – The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) has charged a 60-year-old Pennsylvania man after border services officers at the Peace Bridge seized a large quantity of undeclared alcohol.

On October 31, 2011, the man arrived at the Peace Bridge in Fort Erie and declared a shotgun for a duck hunting trip. He was referred to secondary to register his shotgun and to verify his declaration. Upon examination of the vehicle, border services officers discovered 198 bottles of liquor and 25 cases of beer hidden throughout the vehicle, concealed under blankets and in a truck storage box.

The CBSA's Criminal Investigation Division charged the individual under the *Customs Act* with attempting to smuggle, making false statements, and willfully evading payment of duties and taxes.

"This seizure clearly demonstrates that our officers are vigilant when it comes to ensuring our border is not used for illegal activities. This includes prosecuting those who contravene the *Customs Act*," said Rick Comerford, Regional Director General, Southern Ontario Region.

From January 1 to November 1, 2011, there have been 553 seizures of alcohol in the Southern Ontario Region. Officers have seized a total of 3,045 litres of liquor, 582 litres of wine and 2,889 litres of beer.

All goods entering Canada must be reported to the CBSA. Failure to report all goods may lead to penalty action up to and including seizure of the goods. Smuggling, undervaluation and other *Customs Act* contraventions may also lead to prosecution in a court of law.

Anyone with information about suspicious cross-border activity is encouraged to call the CBSA Border Watch Toll-free Line at 1-888-502-9060.

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CSG/ERC Canada-U.S. Relations Update...

November 2011

U.S. – Canada Tussle Over “Buy American” Provision

The U.S. government is fighting back against Canadian complaints about the “Buy American” provision contained in President Obama’s recently-proposed American Jobs Act. U.S. Ambassador to Canada David Jacobson recently attempted to justify the provision as politically necessary to get the bill through Congress. In a speech in Ottawa last month, Jacobson said the president “had to make a tough call” in including the provision as a political expedient. As it turns out, it was insufficient for this purpose as the bill was killed in the U.S. Senate. The Administration now seeks to have portions of the bill passed as separate measures.

Jacobson argued that the president’s jobs proposals would serve to spur both the U.S. and Canadian economies and Canada should “take the bad with the good.”

This formulation was quickly rejected by the Harper government. In a statement, International Trade Minister Ed Fast registered official “concern” about the ambassador’s remarks. “The Obama administration has in the past recognized that deepened trade is a win-win for both our countries. In particular Canada was deliberately provided an exemption in 2010 to the ‘Buy American’ provisions that were proposed at that time. Trade-restrictive measures between our two countries were recognized as wrong then, and they remain wrong now,” Fast said.

The prospects for passage of individual pieces of the president’s proposal remain uncertain; and that includes the Buy American provision. However, there is no question there continues to be significant protectionist sentiment in Congress.

If such a provision does survive, it may be preempted by virtue of existing NAFTA and procurement obligations, according to trade experts.

Trade and Security Agreement Imminent

The Harper government says Canada is still negotiating with the United States on ways to improve cross-border security while reducing impediments to travel and trade. This contradicts news reports indicating the two sides had reached an agreement. The Canadian Press reported the parties had agreed to a deal but had yet to settle on a date for an announcement. Some reports suggest the Harper government has had trouble getting the White House to agree to a high-level joint appearance by the two leaders. In any event, an announcement of some kind is expected before year end.

The reports also indicate the pending agreement may not be as comprehensive as some had hoped. According to sources, the changes reflected in the pact are more incremental and gradual than was contemplated when the “Beyond the Border” talks were announced with much fanfare by President Obama and Prime Minister Harper in February.

While the agreement does reportedly envision improvements in customs procedures, particularly involving business transactions, it apparently falls short of a true perimeter security approach wherein, for example, immigration and refugee rules would be closely harmonized. Moreover, some of the changes may take months or years to implement.

Among the reforms believed to be included in the pending deal:

- More pre-clearance or pre-inspection of freight shipments entering the U.S.;
- A "one-stop shopping" feature for importers who currently must engage with multiple government agencies;
- Expedited visas for certain business travelers;
- Improved communications between U.S. and Canadian officials on terrorist and criminal threats;
- Harmonization of rules governing food and auto components; and,
- Structural improvements to border facilities.

It is unclear how much of this can be accomplished in the short term and how much may be subject to a lengthier implementation process, potentially involving legislative scrutiny and agency rulemaking.

Travel Surcharge Exemption Repealed

Canadians will pay a little more to travel to the U.S. by air and sea due to the recent repeal of a surcharge exemption.

Under a provision in legislation authorizing the U.S.-Colombia free-trade agreement, an exemption from a \$5.50 “passenger inspection fee” will no longer be available to travelers from Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean. The fee will be added to the ticket price.

The fee has been assessed on foreign air and sea travelers for some time, but since 1997, travelers from Canada, Mexico and some Caribbean countries have been exempt. The exemption will continue to apply to land travel via private vehicle.

The Harper government was quick to take issue with the U.S. action. International Trade Minister Ed Fast released a statement saying “Canadian officials have raised concerns about the removal of this exemption at the highest level. We will continue to raise Canada's concerns with U.S. lawmakers.”

According to the Department of Homeland Security, ending the exemption will generate \$110 million annually in new revenue to support border security programs.

Study Supports Quebec – Ontario Rail Link

A new feasibility study reportedly shows significant economic gains to Canada from the proposed construction of high-speed passenger rail between Quebec City, Montreal and Toronto. Media reports indicate the study, which has not yet been publically released, estimates a total cost of approximately \$20 billion.

The study, which was contracted by the Quebec, Ontario and Canadian federal governments, looked at two scenarios; one involving an electric train with speeds up to 300 km/h and a slower diesel train with a maximum speed of 200 km/h. The study reportedly found the speedier electric train to be more revenue-feasible.

The study also analyzed a proposed Windsor spur, which it reportedly found to be less viable.

U.S. to Expand Border Drone Patrols

U.S. Customs and Border Protection plans to increase its program of drone surveillance along the northern border according to testimony delivered at a congressional hearing last month. John S. Beutlich, director of the CBP's northern region office of air and marine operations told the Subcommittee on Emergency Response of the House Homeland Security Committee that the area covered by the surveillance flights, now largely limited to the area between Washington State and Minnesota, will be extended east to New York.

CBP claims the remotely-controlled drones are better than manned aircraft at spotting criminal activity along the border. However, they pose a danger to other aircraft and their use has been limited in certain areas due to safety concerns involving large volumes of commercial traffic.

Beutlich said CBP is working with the Federal Aviation Administration which is responsible for aviation safety and must sign off on the planned expansion. It was not made clear how the safety concerns might be resolved.

Higgins Asks Federal Agencies for Action on Peace Bridge Plaza Plan

Congressman Brian Higgins (NY-27) is asking the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Commissioner to begin the process of allowing pre-inspection at the Peace Bridge, a critical step to moving forward with construction on the smaller Peace Bridge plaza plan.

“Continued federal foot dragging is unacceptable,” said Higgins, a member of the House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security. “This plan is an opportunity to literally open up the gates to economic opportunity for Western New York and the nation. This community wants action, this country needs action, and that is what we are demanding.”

Federal commitment to pre-inspection on the Canadian side of the border would allow the Peace Bridge Authority to proceed with construction of a new plaza that would provide 7 additional inspection booths on a modified but smaller plaza than originally proposed.

The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20393

The Honorable Alan Bersin
Commissioner
Customs and Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NY
Washington, D.C. 20229

Re: Peace Bridge Capacity Expansion Project

Secretary Napolitano and Commissioner Bersin,

In June, I received from Customs and Border Protection (CBP) a commitment to support a smaller footprint for the Peace Bridge Land Port of Entry and work with the Peace Bridge Authority (PBA) so that they have the guidance necessary to begin this project expeditiously. I am concerned that months later, there has been no demonstrable progress on these negotiations between CBP and the PBA.

It is with regret and frustration that I am compelled to point out that we have been here before with this Department and its representative agencies. Last year, we faced delay after delay from officials within DHS and CBP on ascertaining whether support could be committed to a plaza plan that was crafted pursuant to CBP's specifications. Only after significant pressure was there finally a response that the Agency could not commit to the proposal. This dashed years of planning and funding put forth by the PBA and the State of New York.

Now I fear here we are at a similar crossroads again. A new proposal sits before you that will improve the project by implementing prescreening of trucks on the Canadian side of the bridge and has the universal support of the Western New York Congressional delegation and a broad cross-section of the community. Yet, from all accounts, your department continues to move at a glacial pace in giving the PBA guidance on exactly what specifications are necessary to approve the prescreening plan.

Frankly, the community that I serve in Buffalo and Western New York deserves more. And given the significant amount of effort we have put forth to explain how absolutely crucial this project is to the region's future, I expect a much greater degree of activity from your staff. It is not an overstatement to say that our regional economy hangs in the balance, nor is it too much to expect the federal government to recognize this and act with a corresponding level of enthusiasm.

Therefore I respectfully and strongly request that DHS and CBP engage in serious discussions with the PBA on in furtherance of moving toward a final plan for the plaza and prescreening lanes that will allow this project to advance.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

BRIAN HIGGINS
Member of Congress

Cc: Robert A. Peck, Commissioner, Public Buildings Service, General Services Administration

Congressman Higgins is a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the Committee on Homeland Security and its subcommittees on Border and Maritime Security & Counterterrorism and Intelligence. He also serves as a member of the Northern Border Caucus and the U.S. Canada Interparliamentary Exchange.

Slaughter Calls Republican Attempts to Dictate Ballast Water Policy to States “Inconsistent”

"The only consistent logic in the approach is that in both instances they are advocating the interests of respective industries, not the interest of the American people."

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today spoke on the House floor regarding Republican attempts to wrest control of ballast water standards from the states.

In part she said:

"The Republican majority earlier this year passed HR 2018 which gave power to states to decide whether or not they should follow the guidelines set forth by the EPA to regulate pollution from mountaintop mining. But when it comes to ballast water, suddenly we think it's the federal government not the states must have the final say.

"This inconsistency and war against the EPA is causing great consternation in the country.

"The only consistent logic in the approach is that in both instances they are advocating the interests of respective industries, not the interest of the American people."

The full text of the speech is below.

Video of the speech can be found here: <http://youtu.be/esWv7KXzRW8>.

Full Text of Slaughter's floor speech

Mr. Speaker,

The Republican majority's placed the house in a terrible bind this morning. They have taken a worthy bill to authorize the Coast Guard which enjoys broad bipartisan support and tied it together with an unwise, unrelated, misguided bill that will severely limit the ability of states to fight the harmful invasive species that are destroying local ecosystems and disrupting local economies.

In the majority's Pledge to America, leaders of the House promised we will advance major legislation one issue at a time. And this pledge is broken yet again today by this bill we are debating.

Ship born ballast discharge has introduced approximately 180 non-indigenous, invasive species to the great lakes which comprise 20% of the fresh water on this planet, and as long as I have been privileged to serve in Congress, members on both sides of the aisle have vigorously protected it.

In fact, during the debate on NAFTA, we discovered along with our Canadian friends that the Great Lakes water was to be sold along with any other trade agreements to other parts of the country that had shortages of water. We all banded together and had that part removed. We do have an obligation to save 20% of the planet's fresh water, which is becoming more and more scarce every day.

Nationally more than 4,500 invasive species have been introduced. In total they cost billions of dollars on an annual basis. \$5 billion alone has been spent to try to deal with the European zebra mussel which we have made barely any inroads against. It was introduced in the Great Lakes and can be found by the thousands throughout the lakes. They attach to the hard surfaces so thickly that they clog the municipal water systems and electric generation plants costing over \$1 billion a year to control.

States know all too well the dangerous threat of invasive species and are taking common sense action. But today's bill destroys the work by taking away the right of the states to have control.

We must allow states who have an equal voice in protecting their ecosystems and economies if we are truly to solve the threat of invasive species in our waters.

Despite the unique challenges facing each state, the majority's demanding all states follow one set of federal requirements. This approach is completely different from the one taken by the congressional Republicans when we were debating regulation that is would affect mountaintop mining corporation that is could take off the top of the mountain and throw it down in the valley oftentimes clogging up the water supply.

The Republican majority earlier this year passed HR 2018 which gave power to states to decide whether or not they should follow the guidelines set forth by the EPA to regulate pollution from mountaintop mining. But when it comes to ballast water, suddenly we think it's the federal government not the states must have the final say.

This inconsistency and war against the EPA is causing great consternation in the country.

The only consistent logic in the approach is that in both instances they are advocating the interests of respective industries, not the interest of the American people. I urge my colleagues to oppose today's rule and the underlying bill. And I reserve the balance of my time.

Study: Border needs manpower, technology

A new binational study calls for increased use of new technology to speed border crossings and inspections and improved trusted traveler programs Buffalo-Niagara crossings.

The study, expected to be released within two weeks by the Binational Economic and Tourism Alliance, also calls for better traffic conditions information and increased customs staffing during busy times, reports the Buffalo News.

Heightened security measures since Sept. 11 have led to more frequent backups and traffic congestion at the bridges, states the report.

The report cites statistics that show that thickening cross-border congestion costs Canadian trucking companies more than \$9 billion. It recommends new technology to make inspections more efficient, such as hand-held scanners, preclearance programs and trusted traveler initiatives.

As well, it calls for more informative highway signs listing the amount of time needed to cross the border at the various bridges.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper and President Barack Obama have been negotiating a new "Smart Border" program that reportedly could include many of these initiatives.

"There is no magic bullet here, and we're all responsible for fixing it," said BETA's executive director Arlene White.

An estimated \$70 billion in trade crossed the region's bridges in 2010, down from \$80 billion in 2008.

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Embassy: Canada's Foreign Policy Newsweekly - <http://www.embassymag.ca/>

C. Editorials/Columns

Crossing the border has never felt this bad - By Jerry Sullivan Buffalo News - October 30, 2011

Oh, goody. Another installment of the Canadian "Super Series." I'll bet you couldn't wait to pop out of bed this morning, so you could pack the cooler, get the grille fired up, call up all your buddies, then head to the back deck for another epic tailgating session. OK, so a few of the diehards actually made the ride up the QEW for this afternoon's big game. I salute you. Make sure to bring ear plugs, so you can drown out the infernal music that comes blaring over the loudspeakers, as they try to simulate the atmosphere of a real Bills home game. Evidently, the hosts will do their best to recreate the home experience outside the Rogers Centre (was Kent Hull a centre?), featuring "tailgate-style" food, Bud Girls, prizes and interactive elements, including the mechanical buffalo and some band called Finger Eleven. I'm not sure which will be the more obscure act -- Finger Eleven or the eleven guys suited up for a beleaguered Redskins offense at the Rog today. But I digress. Look, I have nothing against Canada. I love the place: The people, the culture, the countryside, the golf courses, the hockey, the Tragically Hip. Southern Ontarians are a big part of the game-day experience in Orchard Park. A handful of them even leave sober. It's giving up one of the eight home games that stinks. My position is well-established here in the fourth year. Let's just say it doesn't quite rank up with going to four straight Super Bowls. I hate it.

I've called it folly, phony, a one-week furlough for the 12th Man, a ripoff, a sad day in franchise history. This year, it seems even worse. In previous years, there wasn't a lot at stake. In '08, they were technically still alive, but Jauron and the boys were already circling the drain. The last two years, it felt like sending your kid off to camp when he'd been getting on your nerves. You want them? Go ahead, take them! But this year is different. This game actually matters. The Bills are 4-2. There's a scent of playoffs in the autumn air. They've been consistent and compelling entertainment, averaging 31.3 points a game. They're coming off the first five-game stretch in 13 years where every game was decided by a touchdown or less. They're looking to begin a season 4-0 at home for the first time since 1995. They haven't scored 30 points in their first three home games and won all three since 1991. So the Bills return "home," eager to regain their momentum after losing two of their last three overall. And they find themselves in a foreign land. "It's not ever going to be the most ideal situation," said safety George Wilson, "because there's such a strong connection between our organization and the people here in Buffalo. So any time you take away one of those eight home games, the local fans really have a hard time giving them up." The organizers talk about "expanding the footprint" of the franchise in Canada to make it more viable. I've never bought it. Farming out a home game to Toronto will do nothing to ensure the long-term future of the Bills in Buffalo. The NFL is the most powerful sports league in the world. They can't look favorably on a team that can't afford to play all its games in its real home stadium. Do you really think Jim Kelly's group, or any group interested in buying the team and keeping it in Western New York, will want to pay all that money for the franchise and continue giving away a home game? What's the point, then, if not a short-term cash grab by the current owner? The only footprint I see is the one on the necks of the players, who worked their tails off from the start of training camp to prove the skeptics wrong. Now, eager to get a win over a mediocre opponent and bolster their position in a jumbled AFC playoff race, their reward is a neutral site game. Hull passed away last week. There will be a nice tribute at the next home game. It'll likely be next week against the Jets. Ryan Fitzpatrick finally signed a long-term contract extension. Wouldn't it have been nice for fans to welcome him back to the Ralph, where he has given them so many exciting moments this year? You're right, Senator. I've known Bills home games, and this is no home game. Wilson is normally a diplomatic sort. When he seems so bitter about playing a game here, you know the players must detest it. They're extremely competitive men. Otherwise, they wouldn't be in the NFL. "I'm not going to say it's a competitive disadvantage," Wilson said, "but it's certainly not a competitive advantage." They deserve better. That was my sentiment a year ago, when the Toronto game popped up after two consecutive road overtime losses. After a three-point loss to the Bears, Donte Whitner said the home crowd would have made a difference against Chicago's erratic quarterback. It was hard to dispute. The defense could really use the 12th Man today. Shawne Merriman is done. Kyle Williams is out, and maybe done for the year, too. A rotating cast of average outside linebackers will be trying to generate pressure for the lowest-rated pass rush in the NFL. What they could really use is the 12th Man. "It's not going to be the Ralph," said inside backer Nick Barnett, who will play his first regular-season Toronto game. "It's definitely going to be different. I'm very interested to see what it's going to feel like. I love football. You can throw us out in the parking lot. I'll still play as hard as I can. But the Ralph is the Ralph. Hopefully, they can get that same kind of energy out there." The underdog Bills have earned some new fans around the U.S. with their inspired start. Maybe some of that will translate to the Canadian crowd. The crowd has been split in previous years. There were at least as many jerseys for the opponents as the Bills. But a Bills team that is perceived as a hot, exciting contender might swing more of the love their way. This year's Bills should be good enough to rise up and win despite the neutral, conflicted environment. They need this one. They have a tough road ahead. Next week's game with the Jets will be their only true home game in SEVEN WEEKS. That's another thing that makes the latest Toronto game so regrettable. The Bills don't seem like a home team. What they feel like right now is homeless.

D. Citizens Views (write-in letters)