

**No. R-36. Joint resolution urging the United States Department of Homeland Security not to close the international port of entry at Morses Line in the town of Franklin.**

(J.R.S.13)

By Senators Brock, Illuzzi, Kittell and Starr,

*Whereas*, the communities along the Quebec–Vermont border have been culturally and economically intertwined for generations, and many local residents are bilingual in English and French, with friends and relatives on both sides of the international border, and

*Whereas*, the United States Department of Homeland Security has announced its intention to close the small, but locally essential, port of entry at Morses Line, and

*Whereas*, this decision was reached following a locally held public hearing at which the discussion centered exclusively on the proposed federal acquisition of privately owned farmland to accommodate a much larger port of entry building and not on the question of whether there should be a port of entry, and

*Whereas*, since the closure decision was announced, there has been an overwhelming outpouring of opposition from local residents, the business community, and governmental officials to retain the Morses Line border crossing, and

*Whereas*, this strong consensus of opposition was expressed at a second public hearing held in Franklin in September 2010, and

*Whereas*, the president of the Franklin County International Firefighters Association, which includes members of firefighting companies on both sides of the Vermont–Quebec border that provide mutual aid, stated the closure would increase cross-border emergency response time, and

*Whereas*, the owners of the Tyler Place Family Resort in Highgate Springs and general store proprietors from both Highgate and Franklin spoke of their strong reliance on the Morses Line border crossing for their economic vitality, especially tourist-related business, and

*Whereas*, agriculturally, farmers would lose a local crossing to drive their equipment across the border for repairs, and the next nearest port of entry would not be legally accessible for this purpose as it is a state highway, and

*Whereas*, as a result, fertilizer deliveries from Canada to local farmers would be reduced in number and promptness of delivery, and

*Whereas*, at the second public hearing, now Governor Peter Shumlin spoke in favor of retaining the Morses Line port of entry, and a similar message of support was presented on behalf of former Lt. Governor Brian Dubie, who now serves as the governor’s special liaison with the government of the province of Quebec, and

*Whereas*, Christian Ouellet M.P., who represents the Brome-Missisquoi constituency of Canadian border communities across from Franklin and Highgate and is a member of the parliamentary border caucus, appeared at the hearing to express his support for the Morses Line facility, and

*Whereas*, staff representatives of Senators Leahy and Sanders and Congressman Welch each appeared at the meeting in support of the port of entry and subsequently sent a joint letter to United States Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, urging that the Morses Line port of entry remain open, and

*Whereas*, far less traffic passes through the Morses Line port of entry than its counterpart in Highgate at the northern terminus of Interstate 89 and should not need to be housed in as elaborate or as large a facility, and

*Whereas*, every effort should be made to minimize the amount of private farmland required for the continuance of the Morses Line port of entry, and

*Whereas*, if a minimal amount of private farmland must absolutely be acquired, then the landowner is entitled to truly fair and reasonable compensation, and

*Whereas*, the Department of Homeland Security is now receiving additional public comments on the future of the Morses Line port of entry before a final determination is rendered, *now therefore be it*

***Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:***

That the General Assembly urges the United States Department of Homeland Security to retain the port of entry at Morses Line; that any renovations to the existing building be less elaborate than previously proposed in keeping with the realistic expectation of future traffic flow; that the acquisition of private farmland for building renovations be minimized to the

greatest degree possible; and that if any land is acquired, the landowners be provided with a reasonable compensation that accurately reflects the fair market value of the land, *and be it further*

***Resolved:*** That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to United States Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, to the town clerks of Franklin and Highgate, to Christian Ouellet M.P. in Cowansville, Quebec, and to the Vermont Congressional Delegation.