

Michaud Pushes for a New Port of Entry Facility in Van Buren

Monday, July 28 2008

WASHINGTON, DC

- Today, Congressman Mike Michaud sent a letter to the General Services Administration (GSA) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) urging them to construct a new Port of Entry facility in Van Buren. The current building was damaged in the May floods and serious concerns remain about the building's structural integrity.

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"In addition to the cracks in the building and the other structural issues, the flood also disturbed the asbestos tiles in the floor. This creates a mitigation problem and other safety concerns that could potentially prove harmful to the staff of the facility," said Michaud. "I believe that temporarily fixing the damaged building doesn't make sense, since the GSA estimates that it will need to be rebuilt in a few years anyway. The safest way forward and the best use of taxpayer money would be to build a new structure now and allow the staff to continue using the temporary facility currently set up. This way the Van Buren Port of Entry can continue to function and avoid serious safety concerns."

The text of Michaud's letter can be found below.

July 29, 2008

Dear Administrator Bibb and Commissioner Basham:

I write today to respectfully request that the General Services Administration (GSA) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) prioritize the construction of a new Port of Entry at the International Bridge in Van Buren, Maine.

The Van Buren Port of Entry was constructed in 1964. It was built on top of an old dump, right beside the St. John River. Over the years some of the fill has shifted, causing some settlement in the pavement areas.

The building itself has settled, as can be seen in numerous spider cracks in the walls, and flooring that slopes in several directions. The May 1, 2008 flood caused damage to the crawl space beneath the building, with the water level rising almost to the first floor. This compromised the dirt and fill beneath the building, and caused some serious structural cracks which run across the supporting areas of the structure. It also disturbed the asbestos tiles in the floor, creating a mitigation problem and other safety concerns.

Prior to the flood, the Van Buren Port of Entry was not adequate to the performance of the Department of Homeland Security mission, the building was antiquated and there were already existing safety concerns. There was also inadequate separation between the public and the officers, and no interrogation room or holding cell. The current temporary space is much more adequate, and provides a safer working environment for the staff. With proper winterization and a canopy to protect the staff, the temporary facility could be utilized until a new port is built.

As the proposed repairs to the 1964 facility may last as little as five years, I urge that a new Port of Entry be prioritized instead. Given the increasing amount of traffic volume and the amount of cargo and variety of landings (passenger car, sea plane, snowmobile, permitted trucks and rail) that are processed through this port, I would urge that a facility be built that could adequately handle and process the passenger and commercial volume.

Thank you for your attention to this request. If you have any questions about this matter, please contact me or my staff at 202-225-6306.

With Warmest Regards,

Michael H. Michaud

Member of Congress