



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie Travels to Canada's Capital to Make Case for Easing Reporting Requirements for Boaters

PATTY RITCHIE February 8, 2017



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In a rare and historic testimony by a New York State Senator before the Canadian Parliament's Senate Defense and Security Committee, State Senator Patty Ritchie spoke in support of a measure that would improve relations between Canada and the United States, as well as boost tourism in the Thousand Islands region by easing strict reporting requirements for boaters.

On Wednesday, Senator Ritchie urged legislators to adopt a bill introduced by Senator Bob Runciman (Ontario-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes) and Member of Parliament Gordon Brown (Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes) that would eliminate the need for American boaters to report to Canadian customs when passing through Canadian waters.

The legislation was sparked by a 2011 incident where officers of the Canadian Border Services Agency stopped an American boater in the Gananoque Narrows. The boater was told his boat would be seized and that if he didn't immediately pay a \$1,000 fine, he would be handcuffed and forced to lie on his stomach while his boat was towed to Canada, where he could face \$25,000 in penalties.

While the fine was eventually reduced to \$1 after lawmakers got involved, as Senator Ritchie stated in today's testimony, the incident has kept many American boaters from venturing into Canadian waters.

"As someone who, previous to this incident, used to take friends for boat rides along the Ontario side of the river to take in the beautiful scenery, I believe it could have just as easily been me or a member of my family," Senator Ritchie told Canadian legislators.

"For those of us who make our homes in the St. Lawrence Valley, the river is more of a neighborhood that brings us together, rather than a line that divides us. Today, your committee has a historic opportunity to bring the people we both represent back together and strengthen the ties that have made our relationship so unique in a dangerous world."

Following the 2011 incident and fearing the damage it could have on river communities, Senator Ritchie reached out to Senator Runciman. Since that time, the lawmakers—along with Member of Parliament Brown—have advocated for passage of the measure, as well as

worked together on the International Border Caucus, which allows Canadian and New York State legislators to talk about common problems and ways to work together.

“When this troubling incident happened, I asked Senator Runciman to look into it because I was very worried about how it could affect relations between our two great nations,” Senator Ritchie said. “Senator Runciman took a public stand in favor of international friendship at a time when a lot of people were willing to sacrifice our unique relationship for concerns that had nothing to do with border security.”

Senator Runciman said, “As Senator Ritchie shared in her testimony today, our two nations—and the communities we both represent along the St. Lawrence River—share a very special bond. This is common sense legislation that if approved, will help eliminate confusion and make it easier for people to enjoy the waterway. I would like to thank Senator Ritchie not only for delivering testimony today, but also for demonstrating the importance of cross-border cooperation and being such a strong advocate for issues impacting the Thousand Islands region.”

In addition to easing reporting requirements for American boaters, the proposal would also exempt Canadian pleasure boaters from reporting to their own customs officials when they return to Canadian waters, as long as they met the same conditions while in U.S. waters.

Attn. photo editors: Pictured in the above photo from left to right are Member of Parliament Gord Brown, Senator Daniel Lang (Yukon), Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on National Security and Defense and Senator Patty Ritchie