



CHELLIE PINGREE
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
1ST DISTRICT MAINE

August 29, 2025

Commissioner Rodney S. Scott
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20229

Dear Commissioner Scott,

I write to express my deep concern regarding the reported treatment of David Slagger—a disabled U.S. veteran, respected Wabanaki elder, and former Representative in the Maine State Legislature—by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) personnel. In a conversation I had with Mr. Slagger on August 28, 2025, he described his experience of being detained earlier this month at a U.S.-Canada border crossing in Maine where he was denied access to insulin for his Type 1 diabetes and watched as his ceremonial drum and feathers were disrespectfully handled by CBP officers.

In addition to endangering his health and demeaning his cultural identity, these actions raise serious concerns about whether CBP agents are properly following the treaty obligations of the United States—and respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples who have lived on this land since long before our Northern Border was drawn.

The Jay Treaty of 1794 explicitly affirms the right of Native peoples to freely cross the U.S.-Canada border. It is binding federal law. Yet Mr. Slagger's experience suggests that CBP officers either lack adequate training on these rights or are willfully disregarding them. This is unacceptable. Treaty rights are not optional; they are the law of the land under Article VI of the Constitution, and CBP has a legal and moral duty to honor them.

The implications of this incident reach far beyond this one specific case. The relationship between Maine and Canada is historic, deep, and consequential, and the border is crossed daily for work, school, medical care, and for many to remain connected to family and loved ones in both countries. Maine's identity and economy are inextricably tied to this cross-border relationship. CBP's actions directly defy these long held traditions. To detain a Wabanaki elder, deny him life-saving medication, and mishandle sacred items undermines the mutual respect and trust that sustain this international relationship.



I therefore request that CBP provide a full and transparent explanation for whether the treatment of Mr. Slagger reflects standard practice and, if not, what corrective actions are being taken to ensure it does not happen again. I also ask that you disclose the training agents receive on cultural competency and the Jay Treaty rights, as well as what corrective actions are taken if these obligations are not upheld. Finally, I request that you issue a formal apology to Mr. Slagger for the unlawful and demeaning treatment he endured at the hands of CBP personnel.

It is deeply troubling that, in 2025, Native elders are still subjected to humiliating and dangerous treatment at the hands of federal officials whose duty it is to uphold the law. CBP must act immediately to investigate this incident, strengthen officer training, and restore confidence that Indigenous rights and Maine's centuries old ties with Canada are respected without exception.

I thank you for your prompt and urgent attention to this matter. Do not hesitate to reach out to my staff should you have further questions, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress