

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 22, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

On January 21, 2021, you issued the Executive Order on *Promoting COVID-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel*, in which you directed members of the Cabinet to submit a plan to implement appropriate public health measures at land ports of entry. Our state shares a major border with Canada, and our constituents have close relations with our Canadian neighbors. As members of the Washington State delegation, we write to urge your Administration to prioritize working with the Canadian government to create a plan, guided by public health, to safely re-open the United States – Canada border, and to increase the number of essential traveler exceptions as we work towards re-opening the border.

On March 18, 2020, the United States – Canada border was closed to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus, affecting many border communities. These restrictions have been extended by 30-day increments throughout the course of the pandemic, with the most recent extension leaving the restrictions in place through March 21, 2021.

Minimizing the risk presented by COVID-19 and prioritizing the safety of our communities remains of utmost importance while the U.S. and Canada work to overcome this public health crisis. However, as we approach one year of restricted travel, individuals, families, businesses, and communities on both sides of the border have been significantly impacted by these restrictions. In 2018, nearly 7 million trips were made into Whatcom County by visitors from Canada, with approximately one-quarter of these visitors spending an estimated \$138 million in local stores and businesses. Crossings from Canada into Whatcom County were down to a mere 2% in 2020, severely restricting the economic activity and tax revenue of this border community. Likewise, communities and businesses in Clallam and Jefferson Counties are experiencing similar economic consequences due to the suspended ferry operations between Port Angeles and Victoria, BC.

These communities continue to face hardship and uncertainty as the restrictions are repeatedly extended on a monthly basis with no plan or certainty as to when things may change. Many have family members, spouses, or children on the Canadian side of the border, including those families whose children attend school across the border. During the pandemic daily life has been uprooted in many ways for all of us, but for communities dependent upon cross-border interactions, life has completely halted. The United States, and Washington state specifically, share a deep social and economic bond with our neighbors to the North, and we must make meaningful progress in shaping a collaborative plan for safely reopening the border.

The ongoing border closure has uniquely and severely impacted Point Roberts, WA, an enclave city with no direct land crossing to the mainland United States. Constituents in Point Roberts

must cross the border into Canada and then cross the border into mainland United States to reach the nearest U.S. city for essential trips like grocery shopping or medical appointments. Point Roberts has seen businesses shutter, school children fall behind, an emerging food scarcity crisis, and deteriorating community mental health, while not contracting a single case of COVID-19. These problems have been exacerbated by inconsistent application of the border restrictions at the Boundary Bay Port of Entry. We appreciate the decision by the Canadian government to exempt the Point Roberts residents from the COVID testing requirement, and request that the Biden administration push for further flexibility in border crossing for our constituents that live in severely isolated geographies.

Since the border closure, our offices have received dozens of reports of inconsistent application of the restrictions by Canadian Border Services Agents (CBSA). Because the Canadian government gives the right of personal discretion to their CBSA agents in determining what is or isn't an essential crossing, our constituents have been turned away from the border and therefore forced to go without essential medical care or food access, as examples. The inconsistency on behalf of CBSA agents is particularly harmful to Point Roberts residents, who need to cross through Canada to reach the mainland United States for almost anything essential to the daily functioning of their lives. We need Canada to apply border restrictions uniformly, no matter which CBSA agent meets an American at the border crossing.

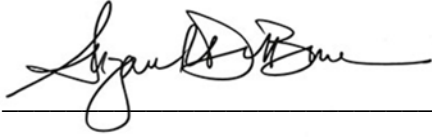
As the world works to emerge from this global crisis, we respectfully request that you make collaborating on safely reopening the United States – Canada border an immediate priority. We request that you prioritize:

1. Establishing a bilateral plan for easing restrictions and restoring travel.
2. Vaccinating and testing all necessary CBP staff to safely reopen travel.
3. Reciprocate the Canadian travel exemptions to allow families and loved ones to reunite.
4. Develop a policy for property owners to cross the border to maintain their properties.
5. Work with Canada to develop reciprocal access to transit through boundary waters.
6. Permit Point Roberts residents to cross through Canada and into the mainland United States.
7. Advocate for American schoolchildren living in border communities and enrolled in Canadian schools to cross into Canada to attend school.
8. Upon the safe resumption of cruises in the United States, ensure that U.S. homeported cruise ships required to stop in Canada are able to make technical or service stops if the CDC and Canadian health authorities agree that all protocols have been established and are being met by cruise ships and cruise ports.

The United States and Canada have a special partnership and a long history of close cooperation. We hope this close relationship can lead to swift action between our two countries to safely restore cross border travel while continuing to protect the health and safety of our communities.

We appreciate your consideration of these requests. Please let us know if we can be of any assistance moving forward.

Sincerely,



Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress

Rick Larsen
Member of Congress

Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress

Adam Smith
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Marilyn Strickland
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