



March 29, 2021

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

Dear Mr. President:

As a follow-up to our January 25, 2021 letter regarding your Executive Order Promoting COVID-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel, we write today to urge your administration to communicate its plans for the safe, responsible, and swift resumption of what has previously been referred to as so-called “non-essential” travel.

The communities along our nation’s borders with Canada and Mexico have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic that, since March 2020, has brought non-commercial cross-border travel to a halt. While currently defined by the United States, Canada, and Mexico as “non-essential,” such travel is anything but for the businesses that depend on customers from the neighboring country and for local governments whose sales tax bases rely on robust cross-border commerce and, some states, crossing tolls. For many border businesses and border region governments, the pandemic has resulted in an economic calamity.

The Border Trade Alliance, which for 35 years has represented public and private sector stakeholders along the U.S. northern and southern land borders, believes your administration, in consultation with state and local governments and your counterparts in Canada and Mexico, should now begin to lift travel restrictions and allow cross-border travel to resume.

Medical ingenuity has brought to market three highly effective vaccines in the U.S. and we know more each day about how to control the spread of Covid-19 and treat positive cases. We are encouraged that in some border communities that positivity numbers have plummeted, in some cases below 5 percent. There is no indication that a resumption of non-commercial cross-border traffic would have any material effect on ongoing efforts to end the scourge of the pandemic. It would, however, allow the many livelihoods that depend on cross-border commerce to begin down the path to economic recovery.

In anticipation of a resumption of travel, the BTA must reiterate its previous opposition to any plan that would call for travelers to demonstrate proof of a negative Covid test, especially for trips limited to the border area for a short duration. As we discussed in our January letter, not only would such a requirement be too unwieldy and likely lead to congestion at the ports of entry due to the additional documentation requirement, but there is nothing more remarkable about a shopper crossing from Tijuana, Baja California into San Ysidro, California to purchase groceries than there is about a shopping trip across town in any American community; neither is likely to

contribute to the spread of Covid if normal public health protocols and commonsense acts like mask-wearing and social distancing are followed. CBP Officers at the ports of entry should require travelers to wear face coverings in the port facilities; officers should continue to set a good example by doing the same, just as they have done over the course of the past year.

Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy analyzed the economic impact of the travel restrictions between March and November of 2020 (8-months). The study focused on the economic implications of the travel restrictions on the nine counties across the Texas-Mexico border. Mexican tourists and shoppers are a key component of these economies and, without them, the losses are likely to be unprecedented, causing an estimated reduction of nearly \$4.9 billion in GDP of these border communities. The retail sector could experience economic losses exceeding \$2.0 billion during the eight-months that were part of the study.

CBP personnel at the ports of entry during the pandemic have not escaped the virus' impact. Too many officers have lost their lives. The BTA strongly supports efforts to ensure they have the necessary protective equipment – face coverings, face shields, sanitizer – and that they are prioritized in vaccination efforts. We acknowledge that we are requesting officers to increase their interaction with the traveling public beyond current levels, but we believe they can perform their jobs safely with the proper resources.

Now is the time to resume regular cross-border non-commercial travel. We can do so safely and without compromising the sustained efforts to return to some semblance of normalcy. Your administration can count on the Border Trade Alliance and our private and public sector members as ready and willing partners in this effort.



Sergio Contreras  
Chair



Britton Mullen  
President

CC: Hon. Alejandro Mayorkas  
Hon. Pete Buttigieg  
Hon. Gina Raimondo