



STATE OF WASHINGTON
— OFFICE OF GOVERNOR JAY INSLEE —

September 24, 2021

Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to urge immediate action to provide relief to residents of my state who are uniquely impacted by the ongoing restrictions on non-essential travel through land and ferry crossings by Canadians into the United States. Additionally, clarity from your administration is badly needed to understand the circumstances and conditions necessary to permit entry into the United States via these crossings. The most recent extension of these restrictions until at least October 21, 2021, taken together with the relaxation on restrictions for international travelers flying into U.S. airports, has deepened persistent confusion about what the future holds for businesses and communities who are entering their 18th month of living with these closures.

These ongoing restrictions are creating real and lasting harms for the citizens of Point Roberts, Washington, which is uniquely situated given its location below the 49th Parallel, as well as communities all along the border whose economies rely on travel and tourism by Canadian travelers. As I have communicated in letters to Secretaries Antony Blinken¹ and Alejandro Mayorkas² this summer, the harms and economic deprivations experienced by these communities grow more dire with each month – and each monthly extension of these blanket restrictions. As the Point Roberts Chamber of Commerce wrote on Wednesday, September 22, 2021, that community alone is in a “desperate” situation as 85 percent of their economy depends on commercial activity by Canadians that is now impossible.

Washington State is doing its part to help these communities weather this situation. In June, I authorized \$100,000 from the state’s Strategic Reserve Funds to prevent the closure of the only grocery store in Point Roberts due to absence of summer travel.³ This week, the Washington State Department of Commerce announced a new “Border Business Relief Program” to provide

¹ [Letter from Governor Jay Inslee to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, July 16, 2021](#)

² [Letter from Governor Jay Inslee to Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas, June 4, 2021](#)

³ [Inslee approves use of state strategic reserve funds for Point Roberts business | Governor Jay Inslee \(wa.gov\)](#)

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grants of up to \$50,000 to certain businesses impacted by the ongoing closure.⁴ The efforts of Washington State's federal Congressional delegation to identify American Rescue Plan Act resources have also been extremely welcome. Yet these measures are only a temporary solution that cannot make whole the communities that are experiencing deepening harms under restrictions that have failed to adapt to events.

To address the needs of these communities in Washington State, I ask that you work with your staff and Cabinet to swiftly consider the following options to improve this situation:

- A targeted exception for the Point Roberts community that would allow fully-vaccinated Canadians to enter Point Roberts, just as fully-vaccinated Americans may travel to Canada by land.
- Identifying options to at least partially re-open the U.S.-Canada land border, with a general reopening of the border remaining our ultimate goal.

Additionally, I reiterate the request⁵ made by myself and the governors of Alaska, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, and Vermont to Secretaries Blinken and Mayorkas for additional information on the long-term strategy regarding these restrictions. It would be highly valuable to understand what specific metrics are being evaluated in determining the status of the land border, what obstacles must be resolved to make possible intermediate steps to provide relief, and how the state and federal governments may work together to resolve those obstacles. In the continued absence of this information, states and communities will experience deepening and permanent hardship with little to no insight on how to improve their circumstances.

We in Washington State share your administration's commitment to following the best science available and implementing strong public health guidance to curb the COVID-19 pandemic. To that end, I am pleased to note that, as of September 20, 2021, 69 percent of Washingtonians ages 12 and over are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and just under 76 percent have received at least one dose.⁶ Similarly, in British Columbia, 88 percent of people ages 12 and over have received at least one dose, and 80 percent are fully vaccinated.⁷ I believe these high rates are a testament to communities on both sides of the border, and I firmly believe that it is within our power to safely ease these restrictions. If, as White House COVID-19 Coordinator Jeffrey Zients said regarding relaxed air travel restrictions, an "individual-based, rather than country-based"⁸ approach is consistent with scientific evidence, I can think of few communities better prepared to be reunited on that basis than Washington State and British Columbia.

⁴ [Coming soon: Working Washington grants for businesses impacted by U.S.-Canadian border closure - Washington State Department of Commerce](#)

⁵ [Letter from the Governors of Alaska, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Vermont and Washington to Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas, July 30, 2021](#)

⁶ [COVID-19 Data Dashboard: Washington State Department of Health](#)

⁷ [British Columbia Vaccination Data – COVID-19 Tracker Canada](#)

⁸ [Roll Call, "Biden Administration Eases COVID-19 Ban on International Travel", September 20, 2021](#)

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Thank you very much for your attention to this matter, and for your continued strong leadership to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic and protect the lives of the American people. I would welcome the opportunity to receive a briefing from your administration on this topic. If your staff have any questions, please direct them to my Deputy Director of Federal and Interstate Affairs, Geoff Potter, at (360) 867-8690 or Geoff.Potter@gov.wa.gov and my Director of International Relations and Protocol, Schuyler Hoss, at (360) 239-1317 or Schuyler.Hoss@gov.wa.gov.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Inslee", written in a cursive style.

Jay Inslee
Governor

CC: Antony Blinken, Secretary of State
Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security
Jeffrey Zients, White House COVID-19 Coordinator