



## Point Roberts Chamber of Commerce

PO Box 128, Point Roberts, WA 98281

# MEDIA RELEASE

## POLITICAL ACTION REQUIRED NOW IF EXCLAVES ARE TO SURVIVE FUTURE EXTENDED BORDER CLOSURES/RESTRICTIONS

**September 27, 2022 – For Immediate Release.** Point Roberts, WA – US/Canada border communities are breathing a sigh of relief after the Canadian Ministry of Health’s recent announcement that it will abandon Covid-19 travel restrictions such as vaccinations, testing, quarantine requirements and switch to discretionary completion of ArriveCAN.

“We have been waiting for this news for over two years!” exclaimed Brian Calder, President of the Point Roberts Chamber of Commerce. “We are ready to showcase our community which was virtually impossible over the past 2-1/2 years with border closures and restrictions. But while we do this, we have a responsibility to ensure we are prepared in the event of a future pandemic or global issue that could result in border closures. Exclaves such as Point Roberts, WA, Stewart, BC, Campobello Island, NB and the North West Angle, MN were disproportionately affected by border closures and restrictions for well over two years and suffered unprecedented losses. We simply cannot survive another shutdown!”

These isolated communities with small populations and few services faced critical issues such as limited access to health care and other professional services, elderly and disabled care, cross-border schooling and employment, transportation, food security and economic devastation. While most cities, towns and communities throughout the US and Canada are now experiencing higher economic activity than before the start of the pandemic, Point Roberts’ businesses report that they are at only approximately 50% of pre-pandemic levels.”

There is no doubt that the safety of everyone must remain a top priority in the event of a pandemic. But this encompasses more than just ensuring that everyone is safe from exposure to the virus – it must include a commitment to making sure all citizens in every community have ongoing access to the basic necessities of life – access to medical care; that the most vulnerable receive the help and emotional support they need from both health care providers and loved ones; that mental health is monitored and addressed; that the community has continued access to ample food; and that property is safe and secure.

Mr. Calder believes there are solutions and is calling on Federal and State governments to work with Canadian authorities and exclave communities on a complete and thorough post-mortem for all exclaves along the US – Canada border. Ideally, he would like a detailed analysis completed for each exclave that will prioritize cross-border access for the following in the event of a future pandemic or other global emergency:

- family support and medical care for at-risk elderly, ill and disabled residents,
- unrestricted access to medical professionals/hospitals/pharmacies,
- food security and critical items (e.g., home repair supplies) not available in the community,
- schools and jobs,
- transportation,
- plummeting economies,
- inconsistent application of rules by border services agencies, and
- deterioration of properties by out-of-country owners.

“In my opinion, the reason the exclaves were reeling during this pandemic was a failure by decision-makers to learn and understand the unique needs of exclave communities before decisions were made,” added Mr. Calder. “Early and ongoing governmental/community communications before a crisis is essential to ensure the health and welfare of citizens and their communities. Because Point Roberts is geographically isolated from mainland Washington State, neither Federal, State nor County elected officials have first-hand knowledge about the idiosyncrasies and nuances of life in an exclave that they would have if they lived here. This is not a criticism – it’s merely an observation. Decisions that were being made were not based on first-hand community experience, so we were constantly left dealing with critical issues that could have been avoided if key stakeholders in our community had been consulted before border restrictions were implemented.”

“It is impossible to apply the same restrictions across an international border without consequences,” added Mr. Calder. “These exclaves or small pockets of communities are not self-sufficient. I communicated with community leaders in the other exclaves to discuss how the border closures had affected each of our communities and while some issues we faced are similar, others are region-specific. To classify all the exclaves into the same category without thoroughly understanding the anomalies of each would not be an accurate representation of the extent to which border closures have impacted each.”

“We are moving forward, but we need assurances from our elected officials that they will do the required work to make sure that the issues exclaves had to deal with as a result of border closures and restrictions since March 2020 will not happen again. We must learn from past mistakes and be prepared for future events. The safety of our citizens and the economic health of our small communities depends on this work,” added Mr. Calder. “Anything short of this will no doubt result in a repeat occurrence and the collapse of our most vulnerable, isolated communities.”

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