



October 21, 2020

The Right Honourable Prime Minister Justin Trudeau
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister,

We write to you as a united delegation from Alaska, the state with the most extensive shared border with Canada, to bring to your attention some specific issues severely impacting our constituents as the border crossing restrictions due to COVID-19 continue.

Thank you, and your Canadian colleagues, for the high level of support and understanding in regard to the unique travel needs between our shared borders. As we continue to work together to address the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19, to keep our residents and citizens safe and healthy, we appreciate the consideration for reasonable land crossing exceptions for essential travel between Alaska and the contiguous United States through your country. The purpose of this letter is to highlight some of those challenges which persist, but for which we believe, through working together, we can find reasonable solutions in a safe and healthy manner.

Canadians and Alaskans alike know that winter will soon be upon us. Each year, Alaskans, many elderly and with medical conditions, pack up their vehicles and journey south to the contiguous United States. They travel south because Alaska's winter can be harsh, complicating underlying medical conditions. Their winter homes in the "Lower 48" are closer to comprehensive medical facilities which are better equipped to address their healthcare needs. There, they can receive ongoing care in a warmer climate that is easier on their health. A recent challenge expressed by many Alaskans trying to return to their winter homes relates to current cross-border travel restrictions, which presently consider this travel non-essential. We submit that such travel is essential for these senior citizens, as well as for the health and safety of broader populations in regions where access to healthcare is limited.

We understand and appreciate the magnitude of the task facing your government. Due to our own unique challenges, Alaska was the first state in the United States to require COVID-19 testing in our airports. Early on, we made the hard decision to shut down intrastate travel to

protect our rural communities. We have been relatively fortunate so far; Alaska has seen no increase in excess mortality – the gold standard by which a pandemic response can be judged.

Alaskan residents of the community of Hyder also face unique challenges. Hyder, Alaska, and the British Columbia community of Stewart, straddle the border of our two countries, and have been living as one community for generations. Hyder's children attend Canadian schools, and their only road connects solely to Canada. The town's utilities and grocery needs are wholly located in Stewart.

Hyder and Stewart remain divided by the current border closure. Families, some facing end-of-life issues, have been separated for over half the year. Hyder residents are disallowed from visiting their family down the street in Stewart, their children barred from school. Stewart's residents can walk down the road into Hyder, but must quarantine for two weeks upon return.

While there are many more individual instances of travel restrictions impacting daily lives, we highlight these two as some of the most pressing issues, but ones for which we think there are reasonable solutions to ensure the safety and health of both Canadians and Alaskans alike. We all agree that we must remain vigilant against the threats to the health and wellbeing of our people that COVID-19 has created. We have at-risk Alaskans who will soon be unable to complete their journey south by road due to snow and difficult winter conditions. We have Alaskans and Canadians, neighbors and families, separated by a single border post, unable to connect and collectively bear the burdens these global conditions have imposed on them.

In recent weeks, we have had several conversations with members of your government and provided specific suggestions, which we believe, would allow Alaskans to move forward with necessary travel while protecting Canadians from additional exposure to COVID-19. These include the following:

First, allow an exception for non-discretionary, essential travel permitting Alaskans to transit south for the winter. Currently, Canada has very reasonable travel requirements for land crossings, including limited time in which to move from border to border, limiting time within the vehicle, no stops except for non-recreational purposes, etc. Those restrictions reasonably limit the amount of time any Alaskan would spend transiting border crossings. We know many presently need to transit via motorhomes, further limiting their time outside the vehicle.

For Alaskans wishing to travel as described above, we would support a requirement that each Alaskan allowed to travel must present a negative COVID-19 test prior to transiting through Canada. This is currently a requirement that the State of Alaska has in place for all out-of-state air travelers, including Alaskans returning to the state, and is a reasonable requirement for non-residents. Alaskans currently have many means of access to free COVID-19 testing; therefore, we do not believe this would be a significant problem for such travelers. We are certain Alaskans journeying south would respect any conditions your government sets for them as they undertake passage through Canada.

Second, ease the current travel restrictions and grant a “travel bubble” to Hyder and Stewart, allowing residents to visit family and access essential supplies, schooling, medical care, religious services and other essential functions for these two highly-integrated, and very isolated communities. We are likewise confident that residents of Hyder and Stewart would adhere to any restrictions needed to facilitate their reunification. To date, there has not been a single diagnosed case of COVID-19 in either community. The current travel restrictions are having an increasingly negative impact on these communities, and for these reasons we support the request of the residents of Hyder and Stewart to ease the current restrictions, including easing the travel quarantine requirement, in a responsible and safe way.

These are starting suggestions, of course, and we are committed to working together with you, your administration, and your staff, as necessary to resolve any concerns or logistical issues. Our hope in sending this letter is to cut through the noise and bring these humanitarian issues to your attention. We each know from personal experience the many difficulties that come with managing a government during a pandemic.

Our state and federal governments and our health officials stand ready to work with our Canadian neighbors and counterparts on a humane solution to these great challenges. Our collaboration thus far has been productive, and for that we thank you. Let’s move forward together.

Sincerely,



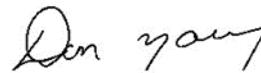
Mike Dunleavy
Governor



Lisa Murkowski
U.S. Senator



Dan Sullivan
U.S. Senator



Don Young
U.S. Representative

cc: The Honorable Bill Blair, Minister of Public Safety
The Honorable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health
The Honorable Sandy Silver, Premier of Yukon
The Honorable John Horgan, Premier of British Columbia
Her Excellency Kirsten Hillman, Ambassador of Canada to the United States
Ms. Katherine Brucker, Chargé d’Affaires of the United States to Canada