

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 1, 2021

Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, Georgia 30329

Dear Director Walensky,

We write in response to the administration's recent announcement that beginning in November it will admit certain fully vaccinated travelers who have tested negative for COVID-19 who enter the United States via air, but that it would continue to ban all travelers from entering the United States for "non-essential" purposes via land. While we appreciate the need to safeguard the health and safety of the American public during a global pandemic, we continue to hear concerns from our constituents regarding the impact of the restrictions on northern border land crossings. That is why we write to seek clarification on the medical reasons and justifications for why the announced policy treats air and land border crossings differently.

As you know, in March 2020 the Department of Homeland Security imposed a temporary limit on Canadians entering the United States at land ports of entry for any reason other than "essential travel."¹ That month, bans on air travel from certain foreign countries were also put in place.² Last week, the Biden administration announced that starting in November, fully vaccinated travelers from other countries will be permitted to enter the United States via air if they complete pre-departure testing within three days prior to their departure to the United States.³ Even as the administration lifted the restrictions on air travel, however, it chose to extend the non-essential travel restrictions on foreign travelers entering by car.

The extension of the ban on land border crossings has significant impacts on states and communities along the Canadian border. Before the pandemic, Canadians regularly crossed the border to shop at small businesses, visit ski resorts and recreational areas, and see friends and family. The restrictions on land crossings have made these interactions next to impossible, putting enormous strain on border communities. Indeed, in 2020, passenger vehicle crossings of the Canadian border were down 97 percent compared to their 2019 levels in some portions of the Midwest.⁴

These economic and personal sacrifices appear to no longer be necessary now that vaccines are widely available. As you are aware, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has recommended that fully vaccinated Americans can resume domestic and international travel and "[p]articipate

¹ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/08/23/2021-18060/notification-of-temporary-travel-restrictions-applicable-to-land-ports-of-entry-and-ferries-service>

² <https://www.dhs.gov/archive/coronavirus/protecting-air-travelers-and-american-public>

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/09/20/covid-delta-variant-live-updates/>

⁴ https://cedar.wvu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1126&context=bpri_publications

in many of the activities they did before the pandemic.”⁵ Canada has a high rate of vaccination with 68 percent of all Canadians and 78 percent of Canadians over the age of 12 having been fully vaccinated.⁶ As of the writing of this letter, Canada has an average of 12 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents,⁷ which is fewer than a third of the cases per 100,000 in the United States.⁸ As you know, despite these vaccination and infection rates, in August Canada began allowing U.S. citizens and permanent residents to enter Canada for non-essential purposes, including tourism.⁹

Accordingly, we ask that you clarify whether there is any medical justification for continuing to impose more stringent restrictions on Canadians entering the United States via car than on Canadians entering via plane. We support efforts to curb the transmission of COVID-19 and appreciate the tireless, ongoing work being done to keep Americans safe and healthy. That said, we also share the concerns of our constituents and communities along the U.S.-Canada border who are being impacted by the decision to continue restricting non-essential travel at land border crossings. We would appreciate any context you can provide regarding how the disparate treatment between land and border crossings may support public health and safety efforts.

Sincerely,

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Jon Tester
United States Senator

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>

⁶ <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/vaccination-coverage/>

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/canada-covid-cases.html>

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/covid-cases.html>

⁹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sandramacgregor/2021/08/08/what-travelers-need-to-know-about-canadas-border-opening-on-aug-9/?sh=6763f0e640af>

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tina Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tina" and the last name "Smith" written in a single continuous stroke.

Tina Smith
United States Senator