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February 16, 2021

Dear Secretary Mayorkas:

Congratulations on your confirmation to lead the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. I look forward to working with you to confront the many challenging issues facing our nation, and I am also writing to follow-up on a specific topic raised in our earlier meeting.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, strict travel restrictions at land ports of entry between the United States and Canada have been in effect for nearly one calendar year. While I appreciate the need to limit nonessential travel into the United States in order to prevent further spread of COVID-19, these restrictions should reflect the localized risk levels along our border, and allow for certain common-sense exceptions, such as visits among close relatives or day-to-day local commerce in low-COVID-19 transmission areas.

As you asked when we last spoke, I have attached three prior letters sent to former President Trump or former Acting Secretary Chad Wolf advocating for limited exemptions based on localized risk. It is my hope that we are able to work to an equitable solution for the communities that reside along our nation's northern border.

I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator

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June 15, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

I write concerning the temporary travel restrictions for land ports of entry (LPOE) between the United States and Canada. I appreciate the need to limit nonessential travel into the United States in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect the American people. However, the Department should carefully balance these emergency concerns and tailor solutions to reflect the actual, localized risk on both sides of the border.

For example, there have been fewer than 180 total confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Aroostook and Washington Counties, Maine and bordering New Brunswick, Canada. The risks of significant cross-border transmission among those jurisdictions appear to be low at this time. Just as American states have begun to loosen restrictions on certain activities, an absolute restriction on non-essential travel across the entire U.S.-Canada border should be reevaluated.

In addition, limiting travel has also put intense pressure on communities in northern and western Maine. These areas rely on one another for essential supplies, and family members frequently live on opposite sides of the border, creating tight-knit, cross-border communities. As states and localities in the interior of the nation continue to reopen, I am concerned that border communities that have historically depended on day-to-day cross-border commerce will be left behind, even as their risk of COVID-19 transmission appears to remain low. These impacts will become especially pronounced as Maine enters its typically busy and economically crucial summer tourist season.

Accordingly, I ask that you, together with the Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, consider designating some of the travel described above, such as among family members or to local businesses near the border, as “essential travel” in “furtherance of economic stability or social order” pursuant to the Department’s current directive that is in effect until June 22, 2020 and any subsequent extensions of that directive.

Thank you for your attention to this issue, and I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator

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July 22, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20528

Mr. John Ossowski  
President  
Canada Border Services Agency  
171 Slater Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0L8

Dear Secretary Wolf and President Ossowski:

I write concerning the temporary closure of territorial waters to foreign discretionary traffic traversing, but not docking, in both the United States and Canada. I appreciate the need to limit nonessential travel into the United States and Canada in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect the populations of our respective nations. However, the agreements governing mutual use of territorial waters for commercial purposes, including for sightseeing, touring, and pleasure fishing, must include common-sense exemptions for activities that clearly pose little to no health risks.

Many businesses in the State of Maine and the Province of New Brunswick use the territorial waters of the United States and Canada for activities such as sightseeing, pleasure fishing, and whale watching. In many cases, these boating activities embark from and return to the very same dock, without individuals ever stepping foot in another jurisdiction. These businesses provide a boon for local economies, and as our respective national economies begin to reopen, an absolute restriction on non-essential travel across national borders, especially seaborne travel that does not result in disembarkation, should be reevaluated.

As states and localities in the interiors of our nations continue to reopen, I am concerned that border communities that have historically depended on a secure, yet flexible border will be left behind, even as their risk of COVID-19 transmission appears to be low at this time. These impacts have become especially pronounced as our region enters its typically busy and economically crucial summer tourist season. For example, whale watching charter boats based out of Washington County, Maine have been severely affected as their areas of operations have been restricted, despite the fact the boats do not disembark anywhere in Canada.

Accordingly, I ask that the Department of Homeland Security and the Canadian Border Services Agency ease the restrictions on the mutual use of each other's territorial waters by their respective citizens for discretionary purposes such as tourism and sightseeing, given the minimal health risks such activity entails.

Thank you for your attention to this issue, and I look forward to working with your

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 30, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write concerning the continued restrictions at land ports of entry (LPOE) between both the United States and Canada. We appreciate the need to limit nonessential travel into the United States and Canada in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect the populations of our respective nations. However, just as individual states, provinces, and territories have taken actions to address their unique situations, we believe that border restrictions should reflect the actual, localized risk on both sides of the border.

At this time, the risks of significant cross-border transmission in numerous border jurisdictions appear to be low. Just as many American states have loosened restrictions on certain activities and interstate travel, an absolute restriction on non-essential travel across the entire U.S.-Canada border should be reevaluated. As states and localities in the interiors of our nations continue to reopen, we are concerned that border communities that have historically depended on day-to-day cross-border commerce will be left behind, even as their risk of COVID-19 transmission appears to remain low.

The protracted closure of the world's longest international land border to all but essential travel has put immense strain on the communities that straddle the border. Many people that reside along our shared border with Canada are part of remote, rural communities which rely on one another for essential supplies and services. Family members and loved ones frequently live on opposite sides of the border, creating tight-knit, cross-border communities. This isolation will risks only growing as the fall and winter seasons approach if current border restrictions remain in place.

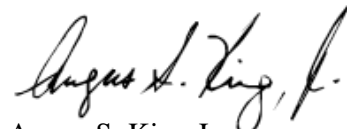
Accordingly, we ask that your administration ease the ongoing restrictions on non-essential travel, or alternatively categorize additional types of cross-border travel as essential, which we believe will recognize the reality of the health risks along much of the border while also help support our border communities as we continue the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator



Angus S. King Jr.  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator