

May 12, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President
United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

RE: Lifting of Border Crossing Restrictions

Dear President Biden,

On behalf of the Greater Nogales Santa Cruz County Port Authority, I write today to ask for the lifting of the border crossing restrictions on the US border with Mexico. While at one time these measures may have served a valuable purpose, their continued application is unfairly punishing border communities, aggravating the economic hardship resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a border community, Nogales is an essential gateway for trade and tourism for Arizona and for the United States. In 2020, more than 5 million people, 2 million cars and 352,000 trucks crossed at Nogales, representing more than \$26 billion of US-Mexico trade. Yet, since the application of the border crossing restrictions that permit only essential travel, our cross-border traffic has decreased by 51.3% - a devastating figure.

During the worst periods of the pandemic in 2020, Nogales was a critical entry point for millions of pounds of fresh produce and medical equipment that were deemed essential for our nation. In many ways, we made sure that the nation's food supply remained intact and millions of medical products were distributed to hospitals.

But our community has been suffering because of the border crossing restrictions. It is estimated that as much as 70% of the sales tax revenue generated in our community is directly attributable to the Mexican visitor – and they have not been crossing since March of last year. Our restaurants, our pharmacies, our stores, our small businesses in general, have been hit hard. Many are barely surviving due in great part to the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) and other related grants that have come into the City of Nogales and Santa Cruz County.

Our local governments were among the first in Arizona to adopt the use of face masks in public. At one point in time our positivity rate for COVID-19 was among the worse in the nation but our community came together and now, we are among the highest counties in the nation in terms of the percentage of the eligible population that has been vaccinated – 77% have received the first dose, and just shy of 60% are fully vaccinated. In fact, we worked with State of Arizona and Santa Cruz County officials to have a set aside of vaccines every day for over 1,600 Customs and Border Protection personnel (both Customs and Border Patrol) to make sure that our ports of entry remained operational, and our border protected. The flow of trade could not stop.

We were very encouraged to see that late last week, the State of Sonora, Mexico, was upgraded to green or the lowest level of positivity in Mexico. Combined with the increasing rate of vaccinations in Mexico, it helps to see a return to normalcy in our binational community. But without the reopening of the border, our local economy will continue to be punished.

We continue our business-local government partnership to promote the guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control when it comes to the use of facemasks, social distancing and hand washing. In fact, because such a large portion of our local workforce is deemed as essential (educators, produce and medical product importers and distributors, transportation and logistics service providers, health workers, local, state and federal enforcement authorities and city and county government to name a few), many establishments have adopted very strict protocols to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

But with the burden of 14 months of border restrictions, our community's economic welfare is bordering on disaster. Had it not been for a major infrastructure project that is currently underway which generated hundreds of thousands of dollars in sales tax revenues, our City and County governments would have faced major budget cuts and even the letting go of vast numbers of personnel. But as that project comes to an end, it is critical that we return to regular travel measures so that the long-term viability of our entrepreneurs, local business, and government, can continue to exist and grow. Thus, we are asking that you and your administration end the border crossing restrictions on May 21, 2021.

The Port Authority is comprised of the City of Nogales, Santa Cruz County, the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas, Nogales Customs House Brokers Association, Nogales-Santa Cruz County Economic Development Foundation, INDEX – the Maquila Association of Sonora, Nogales Community Development Corporation, and the Santa Cruz County Mining Cluster.

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Please know that we remain committed to protecting the health of our residents and continue to encourage vaccines and adopting of measures that prevent the spread of this deadly disease. But we must also protect our economic welfare. I thank you for the consideration you give to this request and know that we stand ready to respond to any questions that you or members of your administration may have on the urgent need to reopen the border.

Respectfully,



Jaime Chamberlain
Chairman

Cc: The Honorable Doug Ducey, Governor, State of Arizona
Arizona Congressional Delegation
His Excellency Esteban Moctezuma, Ambassador of Mexico to the United States