

# FDFA, border communities & tourism boards request end of testing

Last week's announcement that a PCR test would no longer be required to enter Canada for vaccinated travelers was only cool comfort for US and Canadian border communities, Canada's battered tourism industry and the country's land border stores.

Barbara Barrett began the press webinar by stating that, while the PCR test decision was a move in the right direction, it did not go far enough.

Joining Barrett were Philippe Bachand of Philipsburg Duty Free; Mayor Jim Diodati, Niagara Falls, ON; Mayor Robert Restaino, Niagara Falls, NY; Mayor Michael Bradley, Sarnia, ON; Mayor Drew Dilkens, Windsor, ON; Susie Grynol, President and CEO, Hotel Association of Canada and Beth Potter, President and CEO, Tourism Industry Association of Canada.

Mayors on both sides of the border have seen their economies – based greatly on cross-border tourism — decimated after two years of border closures. While restrictions have lessened in the past number of months, these restrictions are still onerous enough that land border travel between the two countries remains down severely, with Canada's land border stores sales remaining down a staggering 80-95% over 2019.

Leaders during this webinar stated virtually the same thing: border community economies are devastated; Canada's hotels are devastated, Canada's tourism economy is devastated and, of course, the land border stores are devastated. All of these communities have lost two full years of business, and won't survive a third.

While the removal of the PCR test requirement may seem positive, all taking part in the webinar stated that the ordinary traveler will continue to choose not to travel when faced with this regulation. Whether the test is a PCR or rapid antigen, the traveler needs to find a place to get tested, needs to make an appointment, needs to figure out correct timing based on travel and needs to pay for the test.

Additionally, travelers find the changing rules confusing; they feel unsure that the rules they are making decisions under will be the same rules when they travel. This is preventing them from booking and, as Beth Potter states, bookings are happening now for the busy summer season.

Meanwhile, regulations are being dropped around the world, a decision based not only on economics but also science. During the Omicron variant surge, border restrictions have done nothing to stop spread. Science confirms spread is happening in communities vs travel. Additionally, travel partners including hotels are doing all they can to keep travelers safe.

Windsor's Mayor Dilkens spoke passionately about the continued economic devastation to his community, where not only are those in the tourist industry unemployed, they cannot get jobs in other industries because other employers expect them to go back.

Mayor Robert Restaino of Niagara Falls, NY said that he and other leaders did all they could to convince constituents to do the right thing and get vaccinated, then get boosted, but the onerous test requirements are making some people question why they did, if that is not enough to visit loved ones.

We were also reminded about how many weddings and other family gatherings have been missed

through this time with so many family and friend groups living on both sides of the border, and how much extra financial commitment is needed by a family at large to attend such an event.

These border communities, tourism-related associations and land border stores have the same request of the Canadian government: “While the removal of the PCR requirement was a move in the right direction, please follow the science and the trend elsewhere in the world and remove the testing requirement for land border travel altogether.”