

### *Opening Remarks*

- I stand in support of employees, owners, and customers of retail and tourism-based businesses that are in dire economic circumstances due to COVID-19.
- Along with essential businesses, those deemed “non-essential” should have the right to reopen their doors immediately and continue serving their community.
- Data from the U.S. Travel Association underscores the urgent need to prioritize emergency relief for this hard-hit economic sector:
  - A staggering \$360 billion—or \$2 billion per day—has been drained from the overall U.S. economy as a result of decreased travel demand due to the pandemic.
  - From the onset of the pandemic through May 1, the U.S. travel industry lost more than half (51%) of its 15.8 million pre-pandemic jobs.
- Per TAMIU’s Texas Center for Border Economic and Enterprise Development – since 2019:

- Southbound Pedestrian Crossings here in Laredo TX have declined by 65.7%
  - Southbound Vehicle Crossings here in Laredo TX have declined by 48%
  - Southbound Truck Crossings here in Laredo TX have declined by 2.5%
- DHS continues to extend travel restrictions but has not provided a plan to resolve the issue. Restrictions may continue in perpetuity unless we find a solution.

### **COVID-19 Impact on Tourism and Retail**

- The continual depressed level of travel spending has produced a loss of \$46.2 billion in federal, state, and local tax revenue since March 1st.
- This includes \$28.7 billion in federal taxes, \$10.6 billion in state taxes, and \$7.0 billion in local tax revenue.
- COVID-19 is expected to reduce the U.S. gross domestic product, GDP, by \$2.5 trillion and employment by 19 million full-time equivalent jobs over the next year, according to a Texas A&M AgriLife coordinated study.
- Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar announced state sales tax revenue totaled \$2.82 billion in August 2020, 5.6 percent less than in August 2019.
- The majority of August sales tax revenue is based on sales made in July and remitted to the agency in August. Rising

COVID-19 infection rates in July likely suppressed economic activity.

- At the end of August 2020, Texas saw a net decrease of \$452 million in weekly travel related spending, compared to 2019. [U.S. Travel Association]
- That decrease reflects an overall 29% drop in travel related spending for the state of Texas. [U.S. Travel Association]
- During the same period, local tax revenues, in Texas, were decreased by \$8 million. [U.S. Travel Association]

### **Travel Restrictions U.S. Mexico Border**

- On March 21, 2020, the United States temporarily limited inbound land border crossings from Canada and Mexico to “essential travel”.
- The restrictions have been extended until September, 21<sup>st</sup>.
- U.S. and Mexican officials mutually determined that non-essential travel between the United States.

### **Non-Essential Travel and Retail Tourism**

- In order to limit the further spread of coronavirus, the U.S. reached agreements with both Canada and Mexico to limit all non-essential travel across borders.

- “Non-essential” travel includes travel that is considered retail or tourism in nature.
- Businesses on the border depend on these shoppers.
- These travel restrictions only apply to inbound land border crossings. The restrictions do not apply to air, rail, or sea travel.
- Because the communities along the U.S. and Mexico border are so integrated, these restrictions have created an economic calamity for an already impoverished region.
- Continuing these restrictions increases the likelihood of a prolonged economic downturn as a result of this disruption of cross-border commercial activity.
- We can safely end the current restrictions limiting all non-essential travel across borders by taking necessary precautions such as enhanced health screenings at U.S. land ports of entry.
- I’ve submitted a proposal to the Department of Homeland Security that would help provide the necessary personnel, equipment, testing and medical expertise to help ensure CBP can safely resume cross-border operations.

## *Proposal for Enhanced Screenings at Land Ports of Entry*

- To demonstrate that DHS has the capability to reduce the potential for widespread transmission of the coronavirus by non-essential travelers seeking to enter the United States from Canada and Mexico, as a pilot program.
- DHS, in close coordination with applicable agencies, will implement enhanced health screenings at a minimum of two land ports of entry on both the northern and southern borders to detect ill travelers.
- This pilot program will evaluate feasibility, duration, cost, etc., so that DHS can fully implement enhanced health screenings at all land ports of entry.
- These efforts will provide data necessary for the Secretary of DHS to make an informed decision regarding the termination of current COVID-19 related travel restrictions for non-essential travelers and safely resume cross-border operations.

## *Private Contractors*

- The recommended solution is to leverage private contractors who have the capability to rapidly deploy skilled medical and support personnel to the pilot locations and incorporate CDC-approved screening and rapid testing protocols.

- Each pilot location will require the private contractor to provide resource management of equipment, personnel, consumable supplies, as well as the overall operational and clinical management process.

### Project Organization

- The pilot project requires the contractor to provide a project management team led by Operational Medical Director and includes a Project Manager, Logistician, and Administrative support.
- The contractor will also provide Field Project Offices (FPO). Each FPO will be led by a dedicated Field Project Manager, a Deputy Field Project Manager, a Logistician, and Administrative Support personnel.
- Screening and Rapid Testing teams are composed of medical professionals and primarily staffed by registered nurses. All out staff are trained in proper methods for the prevention of infection and spread of the virus. They receive COVID-19 specific training focused on implementing a disciplined and systematic approach and procedures for the prevention and/or spread of infection. They will be issued all required PPE including reusable high-quality respirators that are N95 or greater, gloves and eyewear. These individuals will conduct all medical services required in Phase 2 and Phase 3.

### Phase 1 - Inspection

- Upon arrival at land border crossing, travelers will proceed to standard entry processing. At a primary inspection booth, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers will determine whether the traveler can enter the United States.
  - Purpose of visit
  - Length of visit
  - Destination (beyond immediate border area)
- Travelers will then be directed to an enhanced health screening area.

### Phase 2 – Enhanced Health Screening

- Screening will be conducted by a team of Registered Nurses:
  - Work at the direction and with support from the responsible regional FPOs
  - Utilize COVID-19 screening questions and handheld thermometers
  - Screen all travelers or use random approach depending on level of border traffic
- Travelers with identified risks of COVID-19 infection would be passed to Phase 3 of screening
- Travelers who are traveling beyond the immediate border area will be asked for contact information for local health authorities. This includes border crossing card holders in

possession of a valid I-94 permit who plan to visit the U.S. for more than 30 days.

- Travelers identified in Phase 2 with signs or symptoms consistent with COVID-19 will be diverted to a SARS-CoV-2 testing area. Masks will be provided to those travelers who are diverted to Phase 3.

### Phase 3 – COVID-19 Rapid Testing

- Travelers identified in Phase 2 with signs or symptoms consistent with COVID-19 are tested in accordance with CDC recommendations regarding SARS-CoV-2 testing
- The RN medical personnel will collect samples from travelers coming across the border at U.S. POEs that are diverted during phase 2 screening for additional testing. These tests include the Rapid Antibody Test and the Polymerise Chain Reaction (PCR) test. This combination of testing is a sound and proven approach to screen travelers quickly and effectively.
- RNs will administer a Rapid Antibody Test to identify travelers who may have been exposed or are currently infected with COVID-19. Rapid Antibody Testing can provide results as quickly as 10 minutes and can be performed in the field environment at the POE.

- A positive antibody test is 99% reliable. A negative test is only 83% reliable. Therefore, anyone who tests positive has been exposed to COVID and needs quarantine.
- Anyone who tests negative could immediately receive a PCR test to ensure they are not currently infected with COVID if a determination is made by the medical staff that this is the best course of action.
- PCR testing allows for operational assessment and identification of asymptomatic or minimally symptomatic spreaders who might not otherwise know they have the virus.

#### Phase 4 - Disposition

- Travelers who test positive:
  - U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, and their immediate families will be admitted and will be directed to a U.S. Quarantine Station
  - Foreign visitors will be denied entry and returned to Mexico in coordination with Mexican Government
- Travelers who test negative:
  - Travelers who are U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, and their immediate families, and who

traveled from one of the impacted areas must self-quarantine for 14 days after their arrival

- Once at their destination beyond the immediate border area, individuals must self-quarantine and monitor their health in accordance with CDC best practices

### **Local Business Owners – Opening**

- I'd now like to introduce business owners in our local community, who have felt the economic impact of COVID-19 on Non-Essential Travel and Retail Tourism directly.
- I will continue to work in Congress and with our Federal Departments to see that relief is provided to your industry immediately.