

Canada-US border may begin to open soon

After months of pressure from tourism organizations and from US representatives from areas that rely on Canadians for business — notably Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Congressman Brian Higgins of Buffalo, NY — it appears there is finally some willingness on the part of the Canadian government to come up with a plan for reopening the border.

Numerous reports lately out of the US stated that the US government was at the point of opening its border regardless of Canada's position. While these were not confirmed, they seem to have lit the fire under the government to start things moving.

In a recent live event presented by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC), Beth Potter, TIAC CEO, stated: "Many of these businesses have been shuttered for 15 months. They had to layoff and displace over half a million employees from our sector, and they whittled away their savings. They've taken on more debt in order to stay viable as businesses, They've already lost one summer; they don't want to lose a second summer and they certainly don't want to lose the fall."

She stated that the organization is not asking the government to open the border tomorrow; they are asking for a plan. What will need to happen for the borders to open? Is it a certain number of vaccinations in Canada? Is it that visitors need to be vaccinated?

"We want the business owners to have an opportunity to start planning. If you've shuttered your business for 15 months there are some operational things you have to do to ramp up and get ready. You need to rehire staff, and hopefully those staff are still waiting to come back because we know a lot of them have moved on to other sectors in order to continue to pay the bills. We have to communicate with our guests. So we're asking for a plan," she said.

At the same event, Rep. Brian Higgins could not quite conceal his frustration that the Canadian government has until now completely dragged its feet not just on reopening the border, but on providing any kind of blueprint for reopening. He stated that while closing the border to the US made sense while the country's cases were skyrocketing with no vaccine in sight, that is not the case now. He said it shouldn't really even matter at this point now many people are vaccinated, only that the travelers are vaccinated. "The vaccines that have been approved in the United States have been rigorously tested for both safety and efficacy, and they are between 90% and 95% effective. The seasonal flu vaccine is 45% effective, so I don't know is enough attention has been placed on the miraculous success first of developing effects vaccines quickly, and secondly as safe as powerful as they are. That should count for something, and should be the basis for the opening of the US-Canadian border."

This week, Canada's Globe and Mail newspaper reported that fully vaccinated Canadians would soon be allowed to cross the border back into their own country with a negative test and no need for quarantine. Though no specific date has been set, the newspaper stated that it would be in time "for summer," and the government has stated a likely time of early July.

The Star newspaper reported that Trudeau is expected to make a statement on border opening as early as today, Friday June 11. According to the newspaper, "multiple sources told the Star, the announcement will signal the start of what will be a long process of gradually peeling back every single layer of public health protection at the border, which has been closed to most for nearly 15 months."

While Trudeau has refused to name any date of reopening, he has stated that the fully vaccinated will

be the first across. “We need people to get the full two doses of their vaccines,” Trudeau told a news conference in Ottawa, “and that’s why easing of restrictions will be focused on Canadians who are fully vaccinated.”