

Travel and Tourism Roundtable Speaking Notes – July 8, 2021

Presented by Sueling Ching, President & CEO, Ottawa Board of Trade

Thank you, Perrin, for your leadership, always, and especially during these last months, assisting decision makers to identify important next steps to ensure our economy thrives. Thank you to everyone with us today to participate in this critically important conversation about the impact of travel and tourism on the economy and the future of the nation's capital.

It is pretty simple. The tourism and travel sector is a top driver for our economy in the Ottawa region. As the Capital of Canada, people from every corner of the world come to Ottawa to experience the diversity and essence of our country – Canada in one city.

We have so much to offer. World class dining. Incredible attractions that bring the country's past to life through museums, galleries, monuments and of course, Parliament Hill. Our arts and culture scene, professional sport teams, world class festivals and outdoor experiences all make Ottawa a global destination.

Furthermore, what makes Ottawa a great place to visit translates into what makes Ottawa a great place to live, work, invest and study. Tourism is the front door to all forms of economic development. When people come to Ottawa for leisure, a sporting event, a business conference, they get to experience first-hand the endless possibilities of our global iconic city. And that is a top strategy for our future growth.

Businesses in the tourism sector – hotels, restaurants, retail, attractions, events and personal services provide critical cultural and economic value to Ottawa. Since the beginning of this pandemic they have been on the front lines, bearing the brunt of our decisions to reduce the spread of COVID. They have been cooperative, innovative and resilient. But they are fatigued.

For the second year in a row, these establishments – big and small – are seriously struggling. They are disproportionately disadvantaged compared to businesses across Canada and around the world. Can you even imagine owning a business knowing that more than half of your customers just won't be allowed to come this year?

It is past time for this to change.

Ottawa is one of the most vaccinated places in the world. However, our lockdown rules remain the strictest in North America, and possibly the world. This simply does not make sense. And it is untenable when Ottawa businesses are struggling to keep the lights on.

Fully vaccinated people should be able to visit Ottawa this summer. Full stop. Whether you're Canadian, Danish or Columbian, if you're fully vaccinated, you should be welcome in our country. Foreign travel fuels Ottawa's economy in the summer but the tap remains completely turned off.

Canada Day has already passed, it's almost the second week in July - the summer is, officially upon us. What's missing? Our visitors. Our prospective conference and event planners. Our potential business investors. And our future students.

Ottawa summers are stunning. This is the time we get the majority of leisure travellers. However it is a very short season. For the local economy, it is critical to optimize this time of year. One day in the summer can be equal to a week's worth of business in the winter. And it is quickly slipping away.

Ottawa's businesses are acting responsibly. They complied with evidence based recommendations and protocols of our own health officials. They have invested significantly to ensure their businesses are safe for visitors. They deserve clear communication, a solid plan and our steadfast support. We need the green light to re-open so we can recover and rebound before it is too late.

The Ottawa Board of Trade is calling on the federal government to publish a comprehensive re-opening plan for international and domestic travel, particularly around fully vaccinated foreign nationals visiting Canada. We need it now. We cannot wait. Every day that passes we are losing business and consumer confidence, we are missing domestic and international opportunities that will shape our economy and our health for many years to come, and we are jeopardizing our ability to reach our full potential as the best capital City in the world.

Thank you for your attention. Next please welcome Susie Grymol, President of the Hotel Association of Canada.