

JON TESTER
MONTANA

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
BANKING
COMMERCE
INDIAN AFFAIRS
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

SENATE HART BUILDING
SUITE 311
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
202-224-2644

tester.senate.gov/contact

United States Senate

December 22, 2021

The Honorable Anthony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

As our nation enters the next phase of combatting the Omicron COVID-19 variant, I write to ask you to withdraw the “Proclamation on Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus Disease 2019,” which limits the travel of noncitizens from several countries, including South Africa, to the United States. While I understand the rationale of limiting travel immediately after the discovery of Omicron variant in South Africa, it is now clear that Omicron is the dominate COVID-19 variant in the United States. Continuing to limit travel to and from South Africa will likely do more harm than good, especially for our nation’s farmers who rely on guest workers from South Africa to make ends meet and feed America. That’s why I respectfully request that you lift the travel ban in the coming days.

Many rural areas are experiencing record low unemployment and workforce shortages as America continues its remarkable economic recovery from the pandemic. Due to the workforce shortages, many farmers and ranchers rely on the H-2A guestworker visa initiative to secure enough labor to produce a crop or raise livestock. I have spoken directly to several producers in recent weeks who expressed alarm that the travel ban may prevent their operations from accessing this essential labor next year. With South Africa, many of the estimated 7,000 workers expected to fill workforce gaps this year are scheduled to arrive in the next few months. With all of the uncertainty producers are facing with the pandemic, record corporate consolidation in agribusiness and drought, now is not the time to further disrupt farmers and ranchers by making it harder to secure necessary labor.

BILLINGS
(406) 252-0550

BOZEMAN
(406) 586-4450

BUTTE
(406) 723-3277

MISSOULA
(406) 728-3003

GREAT FALLS
(406) 452-9585

HELENA
(406) 449-5401

KALISPELL
(406) 257-3360

I applaud the steps this Administration is taking to combat the Omicron variant. The President's announcement yesterday on expanding access to testing, making vaccines more available, and providing additional support to our hospitals is welcome news as our nation braces itself for this newest variant. I continue to strongly urge every eligible Montanan to get vaccinated as soon as possible so we can end this pandemic once and for all. However, as we work together to protect ourselves and our communities now that the Omicron variant is here, I don't believe continuing the travel ban is necessary. Please support America's farmers and ranchers by lifting the ban. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jon Tester