

Dear Editor, Rainy River Record.

The subject of refusal of US citizens who want to visit Canada on vacation recently reared its ugly head again. We are referring to statements by CBSA at a recent Rainy River District Municipal Association meeting. While 606 visitors refused entry does not seem like a large number let's look at it from a different perspective. If we assume that all 606 visitors were visiting a resort, and would spend approx \$1,000 during their stay, the loss would represent around \$606,000.

However an important detail that CBSA does not mention or record is the number of people in the party that leave along with the individual who was refused entry. Last summer KDCA/NWOTA, Sunset Country Travel Association and Patricia Travel Region surveyed its members. The average number of people in the parties that were turned back with the person refused was 4.5 people. Taking the loss for the 606 people and factoring in those that left with the person refused entry, the loss to NW Ontario would be \$2,727,000. This is far from being a miniscule issue in our opinion.

Another issue brought out in a document sent to us by the Honorable Stockwell Day was CBSA does not record those that were not refused entry, but left. In other words, if a person removes his request to enter Canada and returns to the US he/she is not recorded in the stats. How many more fall into this category?

To put this issue in perspective, prior to 2001 this minor criminal issue was not a problem because CBSA did not access the NCIC FBI database. In some cases these so called criminals had already been visiting Canada for many years. Abruptly that all changed in the spring of 2001 when CBSA, without notice started sending visitors back home after having traveled 12 hours or more in many cases. In some cases the crime was more than 40 years old.

We are not saying we should allow criminals into Canada! We are not saying we should allow drunks into Canada! We are asking the question "When a person has done his time and paid his fine why must he pay again when he gets to NW Ontario's border?" No other country in the world (to our knowledge) restricts visitors for minor criminal issues.

Has this new policy made Canada a safer place for Canadian citizens? We don't think it has but one thing we are certain is that the policy has made us a lot poorer. The economic impacts from these enforcement actions have been much greater than what CBSA is telling us. If they were Miniscule then this issue would not have been front and centre for the past 7 years. While everyone is focusing on the CBSA on this issue, they are just enforcing the law. Our position is that the law needs to be reviewed.

We recently became aware of long time US property owner that was not allowed to visit their vacation property. In other cases, some US business owners can't get to their business. What will the impact be to direct foreign investment when this word starts trickling down to those US buyers who want to invest in NW Ontario?

In our opinion \$2,727,000 is just the tip of the iceberg. It is one year's loss that may not be complete because of CBSA's recording methods, the fact that this has been going on for 7 years, leaving a bad taste with every visitor involved and the US property and business owners not able to get to their properties in NW Ontario.

With all of the other alternatives available to today's travelers and investors, anyone thinking of NW Ontario may be saying "why bother with the Canadian border". We applaud and support Rainy River District Municipal Associations efforts to bring common sense to an issue that is costing NW Ontario millions and millions of new dollars from both tourism and direct foreign investment.

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