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**The answer must be yes for tourism support. We all stand to lose otherwise.**

By Paul Nursey, CEO Destination Greater Victoria and Bruce Williams, CEO Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce

Imagine a situation where 95% of your revenue, your wages, your benefits were taken away from you through no fault of your own and with very little opportunity to prevent a frightening outcome. That is the situation right now for many tourism and hospitality operations in the Capital Region where two in five working residents depend upon tourism for their livelihoods. These businesses may be your employers, or they may employ your family, friends and neighbours. For those who feel that there might be little meaningful impact, think again. These tourism businesses provide amenities and experiences you would miss greatly if they were gone. They are a source of important tax revenue and provide us the quality of life we have come to rely upon.

The COVID-19 health pandemic is impacting all of us and has crafted this perfect storm in communities across the province - especially here in the Capital Region where our tourism sector is disproportionately represented.

The provincial government's hope that tourism would struggle this year but survive based on local and regional travel is proving untrue for the Capital Region, and for the majority of communities in B.C. Domestic travel is not making up for the absence of visitors from Canada, USA and international sources. With inbound travel down by 98% and the border remaining closed for the foreseeable future, the harsh reality is that too many of our businesses are tracking at 10% of previous years' numbers. Add to these pressures the looming August 31<sup>st</sup> deadline for temporary lay-offs along with the wind-down of the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and our economic curve for tourism is falling off a cliff. Without government support, we can expect massive job losses and business closures before the end of the year here at home and across the province.

Tourism has for decades been the face of British Columbia and Canada around the world contributing more than \$5-billion in taxes annually to all levels of government. Tourism helps attract investment and talent to our province, and our businesses are the amenities that contribute to a vibrant economy and a high quality of life that our residents enjoy. If tourism businesses fail, the consequences will be broadly seen and felt. With the magnitude of business failures projected over the coming year in the Capital Region, the quality of life that we have come to enjoy will erode quickly. We are already beginning to see impacts in our downtown core.

Our message to government and to the public is simple: our employers and their employees need help now. The Tourism Industry Association of British Columbia (TIABC) has asked the Province for a \$680-million recovery package. This is a fraction of what our businesses have contributed over decades. Without financial support this year, thousands of tourism businesses will not make it to 2021 and the ramifications of these mass failures will be far reaching. With targeted investment to help our tourism

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businesses get through the winter and into next spring, our visitor economy will rebound and be a net contributor once again.

Earlier this year, when completing its service plan with Destination British Columbia the Province of British Columbia asked for a 6% increase in tourism-related revenue from the Provincial Sales Tax and Municipal Regional District Tax (the accommodation and lodging tax). This demonstrates that governments are comfortable to benefit from the revenues of the industry, but the question now is will they stand with a key industry that they have relied on for decades as a revenue generator in its hour of need? The answer must be yes.

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