



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-3222**

August 2, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

I write today to urge you to permit tennis superstar Novak Djokovic, among others, to enter the United States to compete in the 2022 U.S. Open. Even though several Americans who are unvaccinated will take part in the tournament this year, prominent players from around the world, including Novak Djokovic, will not be able to participate due to the COVID-19 vaccine mandate instituted by President Joseph R. Biden. I strongly urge you to issue National Interest Exemptions for unvaccinated members of the Association of Tennis Professionals who otherwise meet the high standards of eligibility to compete in the U.S. Open.

As you may be aware, the U.S. Open is arguably the premier tennis competition in the world and is a prime example of the connection between sports and international diplomacy. International competitions such as the U.S. Open allow for athletes and fans from around the world to bond over their shared love of sports. Additionally, the U.S. Open generates an economic impact of more than \$1 billion annually. Preventing top athletes, including 21-time Grand Slam winner Novak Djokovic, from competing in these high-level events will reduce their vitally important diplomatic and economic impact, with no tangible benefit to public health or safety. In the case of Mr. Djokovic, he has also reportedly contracted COVID-19 twice already, underscoring the fact that he likely has natural immunity that, as credible studies indicate, provides immunity against future infection that can be stronger than that gained through vaccination alone.

We now know that the vaccine does not prevent the spread of COVID-19 or protect an individual from getting the virus. President Biden, Members of Congress, and thousands of Americans have recently contracted COVID-19, despite being fully vaccinated and boosted. While both vaccination and prior infection has been shown to reduce the seriousness of future infection, I continue to believe that receiving the vaccine or not should be a personal choice, not a government mandate. Furthermore, Presidential Proclamation 10294 does not apply to U.S. citizens, Lawful Permanent Residents, or U.S. nationals, an exception that I strongly support. However, the scientific basis for requiring one class of visitors to receive a vaccine and not another is baffling. This is especially true of elite athletes whose very livelihood depends on maintaining the highest possible level of health and fitness.


Further, the U.S. Open does not have any vaccination requirements on its athletes or spectators, leaving Presidential Proclamation 10294 as the only impediment to these individuals competing in the U.S. Open this year. As previously mentioned, unvaccinated American tennis players will be competing in the U.S. Open; however, international unvaccinated players are being discriminated against under this duplicitous and unscientific travel policy, which is clearly an attempt to punish those who choose not to receive the COVID-19 vaccine or disclose their vaccination status. It is about control and politics, not public health.

In the long-term, I urge you to address this discrepancy and support policies based on science, not politics. At minimum, you should recognize prior infection and the natural immunity it confers. However, I would also urge you to scrap the policy altogether, acknowledging both the present shortcomings of the COVID vaccine as well as the rights of individuals to decide for themselves whether to receive it.

In the short-term, I urge you to grant National Interest exemptions to competitors seeking to participate in the U.S. Open, including Mr. Djokovic. It is time for the United States to resume its normal international travel procedures and drop all vaccination requirements for entry.

Given the urgency of this matter, I request that you respond no later than August 16, 2022. **I look forward to your prompt attention to this critical matter.**

Sincerely,

  
CLAUDIA TENNEY  
Member of Congress

CC. Lee Satterfield, Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs  
CC. Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security  
CC. Pete Buttigieg, Secretary of the Department of Transportation  
CC. Rochelle Walensky, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention