

ANSWERING THE CRITICS OF MORE OPEN AG TRADE AND TRAVEL TO CUBA

- 1) **Tourist travel to Cuba has nothing to do with agriculture exports. Why is travel on this bill?** U.S. food sales to Cuba are down more than 25% since 2008. But in 2009, the U.S. International Trade Commission estimated that U.S. exports to Cuba could *increase* by nearly \$500 million if restrictions on the transactions *and* the U.S. ban on travel were lifted. Increased tourism in Cuba means Cuba will have more resources to pay cash-in-advance for U.S. agriculture products - instead of buying from our competitors in Europe, Asia and Latin America who give Cuba credit. By breaking down export and travel barriers, this bill will create more jobs in US agriculture and add new routes and revenues for US airlines and the travel industry.
- 2) **Does the Peterson-Moran bill offer credit to Cuba or lift the cash in advance requirement?** The Peterson-Moran bill clarifies the terms under which Cuba must pay cash in advance for U.S. agricultural products. U.S. law requires that Cuba must pay cash in advance for purchases of food and medicine, and the Peterson-Moran bill would not change this requirement.
- 3) **Easing restrictions on agriculture trade and travel to Cuba is tantamount to lifting the U.S. embargo on Cuba.** On the contrary, agricultural exports and travel to Cuba are just a small component of the near total embargo the U.S. maintains against Cuba. Though Congress has previously authorized some travel and food exports to Cuba (and is considering further facilitating both in 2010), these incremental policy changes would not affect the larger import and export ban on Cuba.
- 4) **Lifting the travel ban won't help the Cuban people, and would only throw an economic lifeline to a regime on the cusp of collapse.** The demise of Cuba's economy has been predicted since the Soviet Union withdrew its financial support in the early 1990s. While the Cuban economy is under strain – the Cuban government still has favorable trade relationships with China, Russia, Vietnam, Canada, Brazil and the European Union, among others. Expanded tourism in Cuba benefits ordinary Cubans who desperately need access to hard currency income just to make ends meet. Claims of “tourist apartheid” in Cuba are unfounded – Cubans *are* allowed to patronize tourist hotels – but few have the money to do so.
- 5) **Shouldn't the U.S. restrict travel by Americans to Cuba out of solidarity with the oppressed people of Cuba, in particular with Cuban dissidents who languish in jail or carry out hunger strikes?** Cuba's poor record on human rights shows why we should be *increasing* contacts with the island, not further *isolating* the Cuban people. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Human Rights Watch, and Freedom House agree with many Cuban dissidents that lifting the U.S. travel ban would be good for human rights, and ending travel restrictions will let us reach out to *all* 11 million Cubans living under the system.
- 6) **We should not change U.S. policy toward Cuba unless Cuba makes concessions first, especially since we already made concessions to Cuba.** Insisting on concessions from Cuba puts Havana in the driver's seat when it comes to U.S. policy. We should be prepared to take steps that are in the national interest, and a majority of Americans support. Sending food and U.S. tourists to Cuba will provide direct assistance to ordinary Cubans and create jobs here in the U.S.
- 7) **The December 2009 arrest of an American citizens shows that Americans are not safe traveling in Cuba.** We hope the Cuban government releases Alan Gross immediately. But his case shows why we should rethink the strategy of holding back ordinary Americans and only send government-paid contractors. We promote democracy more effectively in far more dangerous countries like Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan or Yemen, but Americans are not prohibited from traveling to any one of them except Cuba.
- 8) **We should not engage Cuba because it remains on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism.** Although Cuba was put on the terrorism list in 1982 for its support of leftist rebel groups in Latin America and Africa, the State Department has found that Cuba no longer supports such groups, and has participated in peace efforts with the affected governments. The United States government does not regulate U.S. citizens' travel to any other countries on this list – including Sudan and Iran.