

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

R. BRUCE JOSTEN
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20062-2000
202/463-5310

February 3, 2015

The Honorable Jeff Flake
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Flake and Leahy:

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the world's largest business federation representing the interests of more than three million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations, and dedicated to promoting, protecting, and defending America's free enterprise system, thanks you for introducing S. 299, the "Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act," which would remove barriers on American citizens from traveling freely to Cuba and on related transactions incident to such travel.

Cuba is the only country in the world where the U.S. government restricts travel by American citizens, who are able to travel freely even to Iran and North Korea. There is a strong case to be made that additional people-to-people contacts, such as those encouraged by the U.S. government in Eastern Europe during the Cold War, would lead to Cuba becoming more open and democratic. Greater engagement with U.S. citizens, school and church groups, and cultural institutions would benefit many Cubans.

Restrictions on the ability to travel for the purpose of establishing commercial relationships also significantly impacts the ability of U.S. firms to export to Cuba. U.S. exporters often lose out to third-country competitors because of the significant delays travel restrictions place on the ability to transact commercial sales.

The opportunities for growth and job creation in the travel industry are real for both U.S. businesses and Cuba. The U.S. International Trade Commission estimates that lifting the travel ban would increase U.S. visitors to Cuba from 171,000 in 2005 to between 554,000 and 1.1 million. An increase in U.S. citizens traveling to the island would create a demand for more and higher quality American food products for tourists.

Lifting the travel ban could help thousands of Cubans improve their standard of living and their economic independence from the state. Cuba's hospitality sector pays significantly higher wages than other sectors. Growth in the job market, higher wages, and increased access to hard currency for the Cuban people in the forms of tips and direct payments from tourists would improve the quality of life of many Cubans.

Additionally, Cuba's small entrepreneurs, artists, taxi drivers, family restaurants, and people who rent rooms in their homes would benefit from an influx of American visitors. These self-employed Cubans, who are licensed by the state, are evidence of the Cuban people's resourcefulness and desire to create a better life for themselves. Lifting the travel ban would allow the American people the opportunity to serve as ambassadors of democracy and freedom and American businesses to spread the values of entrepreneurship and free enterprise.

The Chamber appreciates your leadership on this important issue and looks forward to working with you and your colleagues to enact these important reforms.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Bruce Josten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "R." being particularly prominent.

R. Bruce Josten

cc: The Honorable John Boozman
The Honorable Dick Durbin
The Honorable Mike Enzi
The Honorable Jerry Moran
The Honorable Tom Udall
The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse