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PENNSYLVANIA LEADERS LAUNCH ENGAGE CUBA STATE COUNCIL

~ Council of local business leaders and elected officials will build statewide support for lifting U.S. embargo on Cuba ~

HARRISBURG, PA – Today in Harrisburg, prominent leaders from across the commonwealth launched the bipartisan Engage Cuba Pennsylvania State Council. The council will build statewide support for pro-engagement policies and urge Congress to lift trade and travel restrictions on Cuba that disadvantage Pennsylvanians and Cubans alike. Removing sanctions on Cuba could both expand opportunities for Pennsylvania businesses and empower the Cuban people. Pennsylvania is the 18th state to join [Engage Cuba](#), a D.C.-based advocacy organization dedicated to advancing federal legislation to lift the embargo on Cuba.

"Removing trade restrictions on Cuba could bring new opportunities to Pennsylvania's agriculture, manufacturing, and other top export industries while creating jobs across the commonwealth. At a time when certain industries have become collateral damage in trade disputes, opening up additional markets is the key to strengthening Pennsylvania's economy," **said James Williams, President of Engage Cuba.** "But in order to create that boost for Pennsylvania farmers and improve the lives of the Cuban people, Congress must lift arbitrary trade and travel restrictions that prevent U.S. competition in Cuban markets. We applaud Sen. Bob Casey and Reps. Glenn Thompson (R-PA-05) and Mike Doyle (D-PA-14) for their support in advancing legislation that would begin to dismantle 56 years of failed policy."

Pennsylvania has long been a pioneer of U.S.-Cuba trade and cultural exchange. In 2015, a Western Pennsylvania trade delegation, organized by the Pittsburgh-Matanzas Sister Cities Partnership and led by Congressman Mike Doyle and Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, explored opportunities for business collaboration in Cuba. The trip followed an earlier visit by Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto and former PA Secretary of Agriculture Dennis Wolff, a founding member of the Engage Cuba State Council.

Pennsylvania began signing agricultural contracts with Cuba as early as 2004, but their shared history dates back even further. A 1916 settlement dubbed "Hershey, Cuba" helped Milton Hershey's chocolate business boom. This year, Pennsylvania's Hershey Museum debuted an exhibit featuring its Cuban counterpart. Cuba and Pennsylvania are also partners in academia and research through several of Pennsylvania's universities, including the University of Pennsylvania and Penn State.

"Pennsylvania and Cuba have a rich history, and our Commonwealth has been at the forefront of building a strong U.S.-Cuba relationship. Economic and cultural exchange has been integral for both Pennsylvania and Cuba, and I am hopeful that the Engage Cuba PA State Council can serve as a catalyst for strengthening that relationship," **said Jim Cawley, former Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania.** "For sectors as diverse as agriculture to industrial manufacturing, there is a wide open

market in Cuba that can bolster our economy and deliver Pennsylvania products to some of the people who need them most."

As a port state, Pennsylvania has a unique opportunity to export goods and services from a wide variety of industries to Cuba and expand its commercial shipping capacity out of the Port of Philadelphia. Not only would increasing exports to Cuba help Pennsylvania's shipping industry, but also Pennsylvania's top export industries, agriculture and industrial machinery. Cuba imports \$1.8 billion in agricultural products annually and has requested \$6.5 billion in FDI for industrial machinery.

"We are proud of the work and relationships we've developed with Havana over the years, but our work is far from finished," **said Dennis Wolff, former Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture.** "I am honored to serve on the Engage Cuba Pennsylvania State Council to help break down barriers and finally normalize trade between the U.S. and Cuba. During my time in Cuba, I saw firsthand the demand and enthusiasm for U.S. agricultural products. Pennsylvania has a real opportunity to give a boost to our world-class dairy industry, as Cuba imports \$188 million in dairy products from around the world. I hope Congress recognizes the importance of allowing our farmers to compete in Cuba and works to remove financing restrictions on U.S. commodity exports."

Besides dairy, Pennsylvania is a top producer of poultry, corn, and soybeans, which are top commodity imports for Cuba. Cuba has seen a steady decline--exacerbated by last year's hurricane--in domestic production capacity, and imports roughly 80 percent of its food.

"Pennsylvania commodities are of higher quality and are more affordable than much of the food that Cuba is importing from the rest of the world," **remarked Joe Scarnati, President Pro Tempore of the Pennsylvania Senate.** "It is clear that Cuba and Pennsylvania should be natural trading partners, and thanks to the efforts of a long line of Pennsylvania officials, the foundation for that relationship is already in place. I am optimistic that the formation of the Engage Cuba State Council is a step in the right direction toward a positive trading relationship for both of our countries."

In addition to Pennsylvania, Engage Cuba has launched state councils in 17 states, including Arkansas, Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. More information on Engage Cuba State Councils is available [here](#).

While Engage Cuba will continue to add members, the founding members of the Engage Cuba Pennsylvania State Council are listed below:

David Argall, Policy Committee Chair, **Pennsylvania Senate**

Jim Cawley, **Former Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania**

Deno DeCiantis, Former Director, **The Pennsylvania State University Center Pittsburgh**

Pam DeLissio, **Pennsylvania House of Representatives**

James Diamond, Former Dean, **Delaware Valley University**

Mike Diven, Former Representative, **Pennsylvania House of Representatives**

Jennifer Eckinger, Executive Director, **Pennsylvania Winery Association**
Jim Ferlo, Former State Senator; President, **Pittsburgh-Cuba Partnership**
Rich Fitzgerald, County Executive, **Allegheny County**
Kurt Fuchs, Government Affairs Officer, **MidAtlantic Farm Credit**
Vince Gasteb, VP of Government Affairs, **Allegheny County Airport Authority**
Jack Gombach, Manager of Public Policy Outreach, **Pennsylvania Association of Realtors**
Chris Heck, President, **Pittsburgh Airport Area Chamber of Commerce**
Jay Howes, Former Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture, **Pennsylvania Association of Dairy Cooperatives**
Robert Hurley, Director, **Allegheny County Department of Economic Development**
Dave McElhaney, Board Member, **National Institute for Animal Agriculture**
Mathew Meals, **AgChoice Farm Credit**
Tom Mehaffie, **Pennsylvania House of Representatives**
John Nichols, Professor Emeritus of International Affairs, **The Pennsylvania State University**
Donna Oberlander, GOP Caucus Secretary, **Pennsylvania House of Representatives**
Pennsylvania Chamber of Labor and Business
Pennsylvania Farm Bureau
Guy Reschenthaler, **Pennsylvania Senate**
Mike Pries, County Commissioner, **Dauphin County**
Greg Rothman, **Pennsylvania House of Representatives**
Joe Scarnati, President Pro Tempore, **Pennsylvania Senate**
Lisa Valenti, **Pittsburgh-Cuba Partnership**
Elder Vogel, **Pennsylvania Senate**
Judy Wojanis, Former CEO, **Wojanis Hydraulics**
Dennis Wolff, **Former Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture**

About Engage Cuba

Engage Cuba is the leading coalition of private companies and organizations working to end the travel and trade embargo on Cuba. As a 501(c)(4) bipartisan non-profit, Engage Cuba is the only organization whose focus is U.S.-Cuba legislative advocacy. Engage Cuba is also committed to supporting the Cuban people and helping organizations and businesses navigate Cuban and U.S. regulations. The organization has the largest bipartisan lobbying operation working on U.S.-Cuba policy. To learn more, visit: www.engagecuba.org.