



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **CUBA ADVOCACY GROUP LAUNCHES *ENGAGE CUBA TEXAS STATE COUNCIL*** **~ Council includes key Texas business and industry leaders calling for an end to the travel and trade embargo ~**

**AUSTIN, TX** – Engage Cuba, a leading advocacy organization, today launched the *Engage Cuba Texas State Council* to build statewide support for Congressional action to end the travel ban and trade embargo on Cuba. The founding members of the Council include Texas leaders from a broad range of sectors including agriculture, business, technology, manufacturing, education, energy and health care. The Council seeks to expand trade with Cuba in order to provide economic and educational opportunities for the people of Texas, while empowering the Cuban people.

“Texas is a leading economic driver for the U.S. economy and opening up trade with Cuba would provide tremendous opportunities for businesses across the state. However, Texans are stuck on the sidelines as our foreign competitors continue to take advantage of Cuba’s growing markets,” **said James Williams, President of Engage Cuba.** “We are very pleased to have a diverse list of dynamic and engaged Texans willing to step up and call on Congress to lift the embargo that is costing Texas jobs and preventing economic development for the Cuban people. It’s time to end fifty years of failed isolationist policy towards Cuba.”

Cuba depends heavily on agricultural imports, which average two billion dollars annually, and this number will continue to grow given the increasing purchasing power of 11 million Cubans. There is also an immediate need for infrastructure improvements to meet the rising demand of foreign travelers. Texas is well positioned to help meet these and other needs on the island.

While Engage Cuba will continue to add members, the Founding Members of the *Engage Cuba Texas State Council* are:

- **Jagdip S Ahluwalia, Founding Secretary/Executive Director**, Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston
- **Carlton Anderson, CEO and Co-Founder**, Mercurio Biotec
- **Tony Bennett, President/CEO**, Texas Association of Manufacturers
- **Daniel Berglund**, Texas Rice Farmer
- **Ric Bonnell, MD, Director of Global Health**, Dell Children's Medical Center
- **Theldon R. Branch, III, Commissioner**, Port of Houston Authority
- **John Sibley Butler, The J. Marion West Chair in Constructive Capitalism**, The University of Texas at Austin
- **Herb Butrum, Asst. Vice President, Government Relations**, Baylor College of Medicine
- **Kerry N. Cammack, Attorney at Law**, Cammack & Strong, P.C.
- **J Allen Carnes, Farmer**, Carnes Farms, Inc.
- **Felix Chevalier, Partner**, The Chevalier Law Firm, PLLC
- **Brian Craig, PhD, PE, CPE**, Professor and Chair, Department of Industrial Engineering; Director, Mariner Safety Research Initiative, Lamar University

- **Randy Cubriel, Attorney and Counselor at Law**, Law Office of Randy Cubriel
- **Dr. Bill Cunningham, James L. Bayless Chair for Free Enterprise**, The University of Texas
- **Erika de la Garza, Program Director, Latin America Initiative**, Rice University's Baker Institute
- **Lex Denherder, Vice President Government and Industry Affairs**, Universal Weather and Aviation
- **Jason Roth Fuller**, Government Affairs Consultant
- **The Honorable Antonio Garza**, U.S. Ambassador (Ret.), Counsel, White & Case, Mexico City
- **Keith Gray, Director**, Riviana Foods
- **Bill Hammond, CEO**, Texas Association of Business
- **Andy Icken, Chief Development Officer**, City of Houston
- **Bob Inman, Chairman**, Limestone Capital Advisors
- **Gerardo Interiano, Head of External Affairs, Southwest U.S.**, Google, Inc.
- **Glen Jones, Director of Research and Policy Development**, Texas Farm Bureau
- **The Hon. Ronald Kirk, Sr. of Counsel**, Gibson Dunn & Crutcher
- **John P. LaRue, Executive Director**, Port of Corpus Christi Authority
- **G. Granger MacDonald, Chairman and CEO**, MacDonald Companies
- **Dr. Molly Beth Malcolm, Vice President External Affairs**, Austin Community College District
- **Cappy McGarr, President**, MCM Interests
- **Mustafa Tameez, Advisory Board Chairman**, South Asian Chamber of Commerce
- **Wolfgang Niedert**, Private Equity Managing Consultant
- **Brian Ottis, Ph.D., Global Solutions Development Lead**, RiceTec, Inc
- **Dick Ottis**, Texas Rice Belt Warehouse, Inc
- **Joe Outlaw, Professor & Extension Economist, Department of Agricultural Economics**, Texas A&M University
- **Sanjay Ramabhadran, Managing Partner**, VERSA Group
- **LG & Linda Raun, Rice Farmers**, Texas Rice Producers Legislative Group / USA Rice
- **Jennifer Ransom Rice, Executive Director**, Texas Cultural Trust
- **Dave Shaw, President**, Texas Lyceum
- **Walt Smith, Principal**, The Mallard Group, LLC
- **Erik Stromberg, Executive Director, Center for Advances in Port Management**, Lamar University
- **Zane J. Vaughn, General Counsel**, ARMtech Insurance Services, Inc.
- **Michael Young, Vice President, Global Government Affairs & Public Policy**, Dell Inc.
- **Pat Younger, Executive Director**, Gulf Ports Association of the Americas

In addition to Texas, Engage Cuba has launched state councils in Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Louisiana. This [growing network of state councils](#) will mobilize grassroots support across the country for lifting the Cuban embargo.

Engage Cuba is advocating for three bills in Congress:

- The [Agricultural Export Expansion Act of 2015](#), which has six Texas co-sponsors, would allow American farmers to offer financing to Cuban importers and recapture lost market share.
- The [Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act](#) would expand Cuba's already growing markets and provide additional opportunities for U.S. agribusiness to export to Cuba. Bill text is available [here](#).
- The [Cuba Trade Act of 2015](#) would permit private-sector industries in the United States to export goods and services to Cuba. The bill includes language to ensure that U.S. taxpayers wouldn't be on the hook if the Cubans default on lines of credit extended by U.S. banks and businesses.

## QUOTE ROUNDUP

Take a look at what some of our Council Members have to say about their involvement:

“Agricultural exports contribute about 25 percent of the farmers and ranchers income, so you can see the importance of foreign trade with other countries, including Cuba.”

– **Glen Jones, Director of Research & Policy Development, Texas Farm Bureau**

“Trade is a huge part of the Texas economy. Opening new markets is critical to expanding trade, and Texas businesses look forward to working with Cuban businesses to build a strong trading relationship that will benefit both economies.”

– **Bill Hammond, CEO, Texas Association of Business**

“Texas is the number #1 exporting state in the United States and manufacturers are eager to explore trade opportunities with Cuba when the time is right.”

– **Tony Bennett, President/CEO, Texas Association of Manufacturers**

“The mission of the Texas Lyceum is to explore the major issues that shape the future of our state, and Cuba presents a rare opportunity for Texas to develop a new trading partner. The Lyceum is visiting Cuba to give us a window into its economy, politics and culture so we can bring a better understanding of this important neighbor to our state’s key decision makers.”

– **Dave Shaw, President, Texas Lyceum**

“Cuba is one of the last markets in the world to which Texans do not have full access to trade our goods and services. Our Port relationship with Cuba began in 2000 with the signing on an MOU with the Cuban food purchasing agency ALIMPORT after the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act passed and became a law. The Port of Corpus Christi Authority is pleased to lend its name to this effort in support of open markets and free trade. The US was the largest trading partner with Cuba prior to the embargo in 1960 and the time has come to again allow commerce with Cuba similar to our other trading partners around the world. We are pleased to continuing the support of this and any efforts to encourage removing the embargo and allowing American citizens to freely travel and conduct trade with the people of Cuba.”

– **John P. LaRue, Executive Director, Port of Corpus Christi Authority**

“Free trade is an important way in which the United States creates economic opportunity for its citizens and for those of our trading partners. The City of Houston and the State of Texas stand to benefit from increased economic opportunity that comes from opening Cuba for trade and travel, and we look forward to that expansion.”

– **Theldon R. Branch, III, Commissioner, Port of Houston Authority**

“The United States should have cancelled the embargo and established relationships the day after the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991.”

– **Bob Inman, Chairman, Limestone Capital Advisors**

“The arts are a rich and vibrant part of our culture, and also a vital contributor to our economy. Engaging with foreign cultures provides deeper and more robust arts experiences, and that is why The Texas Cultural Trust is pleased to support further trade and travel with Cuba.”

– **Jennifer Ransom Rice, Executive Director, Texas Cultural Trust**



“We have seen corporate aviation travel to Cuba increase significantly since the easing of U.S. sanctions. It is important to be patient in working with Cuban Authorities, which includes helping them understand what benefits your organization will bring to the people of Cuba. Moreover, be prepared to manage things on Cuban time and make sure you are clear on the U.S. regulations and requirements to operate to Cuba. Engage Cuba is a great and very well connected organization supporting U.S. engagement with Cuba.”

– **Lex Denherder, Vice President Government and Industry Affairs, Universal Weather and Aviation**

“There is no better way to heal relations and wounds of the past with Cuba than for our two countries to work together to heal actual wounds of the people in the US and worldwide!”

– **Carlton Anderson, CEO & Co-Founder, Mercurio Biotec**

“Prior to the embargo, Cuba was the #1 export market for Texas rice. Cuba is now forced to go half way around the world, to a communist Country, to obtain the rice they need. The best thing for the people and businesses of both countries would be to openly travel and trade with each other.”

– **LG and Linda Raun, Texas Rice Producers Legislative Group / USA Rice**

“Education is the great equalizer, and the open and free exchange of ideas helps foster a dynamic learning environment. Austin Community College District is pleased to support Engage Cuba in its effort to create more opportunities for educational exchanges that will not only benefit students and faculty, but will also help improve the lives of the Cuban people through the export of skills, innovation and knowledge.”

– **Dr. Molly Beth Malcolm, Vice President External Affairs, Austin Community College District**

“We move forward with Cuba not to rectify our past decisions nor justify our present position. But simply because liberty only knows one direction...the future. Nothing left to embargo but a bygone wistfulness.”

– **Wolfgang Niedert, Private Equity Managing Consultant**

#### **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 whose funds are entirely dedicated to advocacy efforts, 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. Together with the Engage Cuba Policy Council of renowned experts, Engage Cuba provides timely updates on opportunities for U.S. business in Cuba, regulations, and market analysis. To get involved with Engage Cuba's mission or learn more, visit: <http://www.engagecuba.org>.

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