

New Cuban embargo legislation intended to create jobs, mend old wounds

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STAFF WRITER

The United States' relationship with Cuba has ranged from a capitalist interest to downright hot and hostile. Historically, the United States has opposed the establishment and development of communist nations and Cuba is of special concern because of its proximity to the United States. This tension, even further accentuated and defined during the Cold War, has led to decades of tumultuous international relations, and constrictive foreign policy.

The initial embargo was imposed in 1960 by President John F. Kennedy. In 1962, it was tightened into a full economic, commercial and financial embargo — meaning the United States did not officially condone pleasure or business travel to Cuba. U.S. policy dictated against trade with, or support for Cuba in any way for nearly 40 years. Still, the United States kept a watchful eye on Cuba, fearing the revitalization of the Cold War, just 90 miles outside of our border.

However, recent legislation has indicated a move to loosen the embargo on Cuba. Minnesota Rep. Collin Peterson, chairperson of the House Agriculture Committee, has proposed a bill that would greatly loosen the Cuban Embargo. The Travel Restriction Reform and Export Enhancement Act — H.R. 4645 seeks to relax the embargo in order to stimulate new economic and agricultural opportunities between the United States and Cuba.

"Helping feed Cuba is good for the U.S. economy and for the Cuban people," said Peterson in regards to the bill.

The U.S. government's initiative to open Cuba as a commercial entity has the potential not only to provide jobs and paying customers for Americans, but greatly improve the quality of life for those living below the poverty line in Cuba.

"U.S. producers are the closest suppliers that can help meet the food and agriculture needs of the Cuban people," Peterson said. "Opportunities to sell to paying customers

The Cuban government, currently under the rule of Raúl Castro, recently agreed to release 52 multi-national political prisoners, indicating a commitment to the lessening of age old tensions.

Under the new Castro regime, America is potentially a legitimate and logical business partner. Cuba has been a country unable to develop its natural assets due to economic constraints, but with the help of a fully developed country close in proximity, Cuba may be able to strengthen its economic stability.

Of course, not everybody agrees that opening this long-closed door would benefit Americans individually or America as a whole.

"We are deeply troubled that such changes would result in economic benefits to the Cuban regime and would significantly undermine U.S. foreign policy and security objectives," said U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, spokesperson for the House Foreign Affairs Committee. She argues that the embargo has been placed for a specific long-term reason, and to change it now would encourage the development of a communist nation, be it military or otherwise.

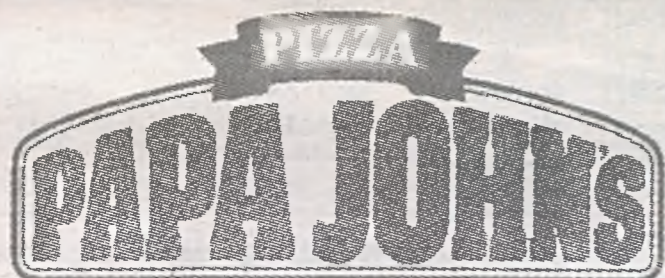
Cuban-American relations have been teetering on the picket fence for almost 50 years. For nearly half a century, our estranged neighbor, not 100 miles off our border, has struggled with economic and political hardship. Only recently have American politicians begun to approach Cuba with renewed interest and openness. To loosen the Cuban embargo could potentially mean economic benefits for Americans and Cubans alike, and it is likely that policy changes will reflect this in the near future.

"Opportunities to sell to paying customers in Cuba have been hindered by bureaucratic red tape and by arbitrary prohibitions on the ability of U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba."

Colin Peterson, chairperson of the House Agricultural Committee

in Cuba have been hindered by bureaucratic red tape and by arbitrary prohibitions on the ability of U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba. This bill cuts the red tape and allows that trade and travel to happen."

With the agricultural and food production industry, manpower is required. The implementation of the bill could create many new job opportunities, from entry level labor all the way up to management.



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