

## **Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act Team Bios:**

### **U.S. Representative Sam Farr- 17th Congressional District, California**

Congressman Sam Farr, a fifth-generation Californian, represents the state's Central Coast. Through his work on the House Appropriations Committee and his role as co-chair of the Congressional Travel and Tourism Caucus (a position he has held since 1997), Rep. Farr has been a vocal advocate for issues affecting the travel and tourism industry. His district alone draws \$2 billion in tourism revenue.

Rep. Farr was the author of the "Improving Public Diplomacy through International Travel Act," introduced during the 110th Congress, which would create a regional travel grant program. He is also an original cosponsor of this year's "Travel Promotion Act," a bill targeted at attracting international tourist, business and scholarly travelers to the United States.

Rep. Farr's seat on the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee offers him the opportunity to influence the adoption of user-friendly visa regulations and procedures for easing U.S. entry and exit systems. He has been active in improving and expanding the Visa Waiver Program, the Model Ports of Entry program, the Global Entry Program and other federal travel programs.

Before coming to the House of Representatives in 1993, Farr served for 12 years in the California State Assembly. While in the Assembly, Rep. Farr was instrumental in creating the California Office of Tourism. Prior to serving in the California Assembly, Rep. Farr was a Monterey County Supervisor. He began his career in public service in 1964 with a two-year commitment in the Peace Corps in Colombia.

### **Angelica Salazar- Cuba policy outreach coordinator at the Washington Office on Latin America**

For almost 10 years, Angelica Salazar has worked to organize communities in grassroots political campaigns. She is currently working to educate and mobilize the U.S. public in efforts to change U.S. policy toward Cuba. She has traveled to Cuba over a dozen times in the past 13 years, developing strong relations with the common Cuban people. She even studied language at the University of Habana in 2001. She has made numerous cultural-exchange and humanitarian trips to the island. In 1999, she was one of the youngest participants in a documentary about the impact the U.S. embargo has on the common Cuban people. She recently returned from a trip to Cuba in where she interviewed several Cuban community organizers.

### **Lisa Simon, CTP- President of NTA**

Lisa Simon has been involved in the travel industry for more than two decades. Simon currently serves as the president of the National Tour Association. She began her tenure with NTA in 1985 and served as its senior vice president from 1998 to 2004. Simon has managed NTA's education, certification and marketing activities, as well as served as the director of the National Tourism Foundation and vice president of Marketing. Simon recently addressed audiences as part of ASTA's THETRADESHOW panel on Cuba: Breakthrough Opportunities for the U.S. Travel Industry. NTA is a long-time supporter of opening Cuba for travel and the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act.

### **Geoff Thale- Program Director at the Washington Office on Latin America**

Geoff Thale has followed Central America issues since the mid-1980s, and Cuba issues since the mid-1990s. In addition to working with staff on program planning and development, he directs WOLA's Central America and Cuba work. This program follows issues of human rights, citizen security and democratization in the region. The Cuba program, which Thale has directed since 1995, sees engagement with Cuba, rather than the current embargo policy, as the best strategy to encourage democratization and political opening on the island. Thale has written extensively about Cuba, taken Congressional delegations to Cuba and testified before Congress on Cuba policy. He holds a Masters degree from the University of Wisconsin.

### **Bob Whitley- President of USTOA**

Robert E. Whitley has served the United States Tour Operators Association (USTOA) since 1978. His association with USTOA is the latest in a distinguished career that spans more than 40 years in tourism. Before joining USTOA, Whitley held positions as director of the Florida Department of Tourism, director of the Pennsylvania Department of Tourism and director of the Virginia Beach Convention and Tourist Bureau. For seven consecutive years he was recognized by a leading trade magazine as one of the travel industry's 25 most influential executives, and was named in 1996, 1997 and 1999 as Person of the Year for Travel Industry Associations by Travel Agent Magazine.