

September 21, 2009

The undersigned organizations within the travel sector of the United States economy are pleased to endorse the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act, introduced in the United States Senate (S. 428) and the United States House of Representatives (HR 874). This legislation is necessary to lift the ban on legal travel to Cuba for all Americans.

The travel sector has endorsed this legislation for three critical reasons:

1. The legislation restores to Americans their constitutional right to travel anywhere. No other country in the world restricts the right of their citizens to travel to Cuba, and neither should ours. While we applaud President Obama's decision to allow relatives to visit Cuba on an unlimited basis, only the Congress can extend this right to all citizens.
2. We also believe that freeing all Americans to travel to the island will benefit average Cubans by increasing the free exchange of information and increasing their exposure to Americans and our values. Ending the travel ban also will reduce the ability of the Cuban government to blame all of Cuba's problems on restrictions imposed by the United States. We are pleased to note that human rights advocacy organizations in the United States and Cuba both agree with this premise.
3. Finally, unrestricted travel to Cuba will be a boon for the United States travel economy. After 50 years of pent-up demand, the American Society of Travel Agents forecasts an additional 850,000 visitors to Cuba annually from the United States, not including relatives or cruise passengers, if the travel ban is repealed. Cuba will be an exciting new destination that will stimulate travel at a time when it has declined with the severe recession, thereby benefitting not only airlines, tour operators, travel agents, travel distributors and cruise lines, but also the economy more generally.

We thank Senators Byron Dorgan of North Dakota, Mike Enzi of Wyoming, and their co-sponsors in the Senate and Representatives Bill Delahunt of Massachusetts and Jeff Flake of Arizona and their co-sponsors in the House for their leadership in moving this enlightened legislation forward.

We urge all other members of Congress to join them in co-sponsoring and supporting this legislation as it moves ahead.

All of us stand ready to participate fully in the coming discussion. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly,

American Tourism Society

Common Ground Education & Travel

Cuba Travel Services

Educational Travel Communities

Expedia

Interactive Travel Services Association

International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association

National Tour Association

Orbitz

Sea Tow/Sea Spill Cuba

Sustainable Travel International

Travel Alliance Partners

United Motorcoach Association

United States Tour Operator Association