

Background information for proposed St. Paul City Council resolution on Cuba

In 1898, St. Paul's African-American community staged many “Cuba” pageants, featuring hundreds of performers, in support of Afro-Cuban leadership and participation in Cuba's struggle for independence from Spain in the Spanish-American War.

In the early 1900s, hundreds of Minnesota Swedish immigrants emigrated to Cuba as part of an entrepreneurial enterprise by a Minnesota doctor.

St. Paul resident Robert Butler was U.S. ambassador to Cuba from 1948 to 1951 and ". . . in appreciation of his courageous work in creating a warm feeling between our two countries . . .," Cuba presented the City of St. Paul with a bust of national hero José Martí which has stood in the northern stairwell of City Hall for many decades.

The University of St. Thomas has sponsored visiting professorships by many Cuban academics and in 2000 made it possible for historic reciprocal visits and games between the St. Thomas baseball team and its Cuban counterpart.

In 2002, Governor Jesse Ventura visited Cuba to promote Minnesota farm products.

In the gubernatorial administration of Tim Pawlenty and subsequent governors, the state's agricultural commissioners have made multiple trips to Cuba to explore business opportunities.

In 2008, the Minnesota legislature passed a resolution calling for an end to the embargo against Cuba.

In 2013, the Midwestern Legislative Conference of the Conference of State Governments adopted a resolution calling for an end to restrictions on trade with Cuba.

In October 2014, the Chief of the Cuban Interests Section (the predecessor to the current Cuban Embassy) was welcomed to St. Paul by the Ordway Center, St. Thomas University and other Twin Cities institutions and paid a visit to St. Paul City Hall where he met Mayor Chris Coleman and Ramsey County Commissioners Jim McDonough and Rafael Ortega and laid a wreath at the bust of José Martí.

The 2014 diplomatic visit included concerts and a reception at the Ordway with the Cuban National Orchestra which ushered in a season-long exploration of Cuban music and art at the Ordway.

In January 2015, Mayor Chris Coleman visited Cuba as part of a delegation that had been planned in his capacity as president of the National League of Cities which encourages city-to city relationships and was endorsed by the president of the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce as an opening for business opportunities between the City of St. Paul and Cuba.

Cuba has important market potential for Minnesota businesses, with Cargill in 2015 “leading the [launch of] the U.S. Agriculture Coalition for Cuba” which now counts over 100 agricultural businesses and organizations in its membership.

In June 2017, Lieutenant Governor Tina Smith visited Cuba along with Minnesota-based CHS, Inc.,

Minnesota State Senator Julie Rosen, Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner David Frederickson and others, to promote business and agricultural opportunities, and bipartisan efforts continue to promote these opportunities.

In October 2018, Miguel Fraga, First Secretary of the Cuban Embassy in Washington, DC, visited Minnesota on a goodwill delegation that included meetings and other events with the Minnesota Twins organization and Tony Oliva, Dorsey & Whitney LLP, the Minnesota Trade Office, the Minnesota Farmers Union, the Minnesota Farm Bureau, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, five Minnesota state senators, Minneapolis City Council members and Mayor Jacob Frey, St. Paul City Council Member Jane Prince, University of Minnesota officials, Macalester College and St. Thomas University.

Minnesota is the home of internationally renowned Cuban-American musician Ignacio “Nachito” Herrera whose December 1, 2018, concert Afro-Latin Renaissance celebrated Cuban-American relations and who was honored by a proclamation from Governor Mark Dayton declaring “Nachito Herrera Day,” and

In 1960, the United States government began its long history of strained relations with Cuba by imposing an economic, commercial, and financial embargo against the island.

The U.S. embargo against Cuba continues to inflict hardship on the people of Cuba by creating shortages of food, medicine and financial and trade opportunities.

According to the United Nations regional economic body for Latin America, the embargo has cost the Cuban people at least \$130 billion.

73 percent of Americans are in favor of ending the embargo according to a December 2016 Pew Research Center study.

Many Minnesotans are interested in traveling to Cuba, with about 600,000 Americans who did not have Cuban family ties visiting Cuba in 2016 with many more, including St. Paul residents, who would visit if all restrictions were lifted.

Many Minnesota organizations facilitate group travel to and exchanges with Cuba including Global Volunteers, Witness for Peace Midwest, Charanga Tropical, the Cuban-American Youth Orchestra, the U.S.-Cuba Artist Exchange, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Episcopal Church in Minnesota and Plymouth Congregational Church.

St. Paul-based Ballpark Tours leads baseball-oriented tours to Cuba.

Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine offers free medical education to U.S. students who are willing to serve in under-served areas of the U.S. with some of those graduates now practicing medicine in Minnesota.

Minnesota's congressional delegations on both sides of the aisle have been in the forefront of efforts to end the embargo against Cuba.

Minnesota's chapter of the Engage Cuba Coalition includes over 20 prominent Minnesota businesses

and organizations including Ecolab, Minnesota Catholic Conference and St. Thomas University, all based in St. Paul.

The Minnesota Cuba Committee, meeting since 1990 and composed of academics, students, small business owners, labor union members and people who have traveled to Cuba, has been actively working for normalizing relations between Cuba and the U.S. including ending the embargo and the travel ban and will this fall host the national conference of the National Network on Cuba.

The overwhelming majority of countries have voted for many years at the United Nations General Assembly in favor of lifting the U.S. embargo against Cuba with, in November 2018, only two countries – the U.S. and Israel – opposed.

Trade between the United States and Cuba benefits both countries, particularly in the areas of food production, education, healthcare, tourism, arts, music, biotechnological and medical research.

An end to the embargo would enable St. Paul to collaborate with Cuba's advanced biotechnical and medical research institutions in the areas of drug development, clinical tests, genetics, and medical devices, thus enhancing economic development and employment opportunities in our region.

On December 17, 2014, President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro agreed to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Despite executive actions by President Obama easing certain regulations in March and October 2016, the U.S. embargo continues to be in place, as are restrictions on travel by U.S. citizens to Cuba.

In June 2017 President Trump ordered new restrictions on business and travel to Cuba and in September 2017 ordered all diplomatic staff withdrawn from the U.S. Embassy in Havana and expelled diplomatic staff from the Cuban Embassy in Washington, DC.

Cuban academics and other Cuban citizens who were able to travel to the U.S. prior to the Trump policy changes must now travel to third countries to apply for visas because of the reduction of diplomatic staff in Cuba.

Due to increased business restrictions with Cuba, in November 2017 Minnesota-based Sun Country Airlines dropped its plans to establish routes to fly there.

Historic ties between the City of St. Paul, the State of Minnesota and Cuba are valuable parts of our mutual history and should be preserved and built upon.

Eight other cities in the U.S., including Minneapolis, have adopted resolutions opposing the US embargo.