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Chobani, Cayuga County dairy company among Cuomo's delegation to Cuba

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Central New York's milk and Greek yogurt industries are among the businesses headed to Cuba today with Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

Kevin Ellis, of Cayuga Milk Ingredients, and Hamdi Ulukaya, of Chobani, are going with the Democratic governor on a two-day trip to encourage trade with the island nation.

Others include leaders from JetBlue, MasterCard, the Plattsburgh International Airport, Pfizer, Regeneron, the Roswell Park Cancer Institute and Infor. State representatives include Empire State Development Corp. CEO Howard Zemsky, SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, Senate Minority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and Independent Democratic Conference Leader Jeff Klein.

Cuomo is the first U.S. governor to visit Cuba since President Barack Obama announced a new policy late last year to normalize relations with the Communist country. Cuomo's trip has been criticized by some, including Republicans, who say the visit ignores human rights violations on the island.

The governor responded to that criticism on Sunday in a statement:

"Like other places around the world that the U.S. engages with, there are strong policy disagreements between us on issues like human rights. The U.S. shift in policy recognizes that engagement is far more likely to lead to change in policies we disagree with. Our trade mission

is part of that new engagement. New York has proudly long been a leader on issues of equality and human rights and I agree with the President that engagement is the best way to promote democracy and bring about positive change, rather than continuing a failed policy of isolation.”

The trip is expected to last two days. Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul is serving as acting governor, and will be in East Syracuse later this afternoon.

Ellis and Ulukaya are not the first to visit Cuba and represent Upstate New York agriculture.

Ward Dobbins went to Havana more than a decade ago with New York Red Delicious apples, grown as part of United Apple Sales in Lyndonville, The New York Times reports.

Reporter on the trip include Capital New York's Jimmy Vielkind, Time Warner Cable News's Zack Fink, the New York Daily News's Glenn Bain, Bloomberg's Freeman Klopott, and The Wall Street Journal's Erica Orden.

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