

Governor Abbott visits Cuba to talk trade

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Governor Greg Abbott arrived with a trade delegation in Havana, Cuba on Monday for meetings on travel and exports from Texas.

Abbott was accompanied on his three-day trip by agriculture, port and business leaders from Texas.

The governor's visit comes less than a year after President Barack Obama re-established diplomatic relations with Cuba. This is one of the few issues President Obama and Governor Abbott agree on.

"Anything that is done with Cuba will certainly help agriculture. It will certainly be a big boost to our ports, and our financial centers," said former Texas Agriculture Secretary Todd Staples.

Texans have tried to build up a partnership with Cuba before. Staples led a delegation in Cuba in 2008.

Now president of the Texas Oil and Gas Association, Staples stands by the same opinion he had back then.

"I think what Cuba needs is a good dose of capitalism," Staples said.

According to a new report from Texas A&M University, Texas could see a total economic impact of \$43 billion and more than 200 new jobs from increased trade with Cuba.

“It’s better to do that now and make that connection,” said Jonathan Brown. A History professor at the University of Texas-Austin, Brown said he believes a trade partnership would benefit Texas more than Cuba.

“Cuba cannot feed itself. Therefore, it has to import its food,” Brown said. Cuba gets rice from Vietnam, “which is half a world away. We could get some products to Cuba in a matter of days through the Port of Houston and Corpus Christi,” Brown said.

Only congress can lift the trade embargo, which was enacted in 1960. Until legislation is passed to end the so-called boycott, the U.S. cannot import anything from Cuba and can only export pharmaceuticals and food.

“It’s setting the stage for good things to happen,” Staples said.

The purpose of this delegation is to make sure Texas is in the right position at the right time.

“We know what can be accomplished with free market economics and the United States has a great story to tell,” Staples said, “Texas is a leader and Governor Abbott can help deliver that message.”

This is the governor’s second trip outside of the U.S. since he took office. He went to Mexico in September to look at ways to expand on the state’s trade there. Abbott is the first Texas governor to visit Cuba since the revolution nearly 60 years ago.
