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Trade with Cuba helps both sides

30/03/2016



Cuba has become more of an economic issue and less of a political hot button in North Dakota. Leaders from both parties in the state are eager to see more trade, especially agricultural, with the island nation.

President Barack Obama's recent visit to the country highlighted the potential economic benefits of trade with Cuba. However, increased trade remains a work in progress with concessions needed by both countries.

The Tribune believes it's worth the effort and relations should be normalized. The U.S. tried an embargo for half a century and the Cuban government didn't collapse. The economy and the people suffered, but the government remains in power. It's time for the U.S. to put away the club. Flights are expected to resume soon between the countries and with that more tourism.

Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., joined Obama on his Cuban visit. She cited two developments during the trip: The U.S. Department of Agriculture announcing it would allow federal checkoff programs to use producers' dollars to promote agricultural trade with Cuba and a memorandum of understanding signed with Cuba to work toward normalizing relations in agricultural trade. Heitkamp said the two steps will improve trade prospects.

Heitkamp's not the only one in North Dakota promoting improved relations. Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., Rep. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., and Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring also favor improved relations and trade. Hoeven and Goehring have visited Cuba and Goehring says it's

likely he'll visit again.

Some barriers to trade with Cuba must be resolved by Congress. Hopefully, North Dakota's delegation can help guide them in that direction. The delegation and Congress also want Cuba to improve its record on human rights as part of normalized relations. That's important, but we need to remember that the U.S. has normal relations with many countries that we find offensive. We deal with them and work for changes.

Trying to isolate Cuba didn't work, it's time for a new policy.

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