

Economic Update December 10



Tenn. Council Joins Effort to End US-Cuba Trade Blockade

Tennessee business and community leaders gathered last Monday to support a bipartisan public policy group in its effort to end the U.S. trade blockade with Cuba.

Engage Cuba held a round table discussion with the leaders and announced the formation of a 15-member Tennessee State Council, representing an array of sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, business and the arts.

Engage Cuba president James Williams said the group plans to form similar councils in Georgia, Iowa, Louisiana, Ohio and Texas, all of which he considers "natural markets to export to Cuba."

"The idea of what we're trying to do here is to show that this is a relative issue and not just for Washington, but for people all across the country," Williams told The Associated Press before the meeting.

President Barack Obama has said his administration is considering a new set of regulations further loosening the blockade, which is imposed by U.S. law. Cuban officials told reporters last month they expected deals on regularly scheduled flights, anti-drug cooperation, and environmental protection by around the end of the year.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack became the 3rd U.S. Cabinet secretary to visit Cuba this year, holding a series of meetings last month with Cuban officials on issues such as fruit and vegetable export

certification and field inspections aimed at laying the groundwork for future agricultural trade between the U.S. and Cuba.

Catherine Glover, president of the *Tennessee Chamber of Commerce and Industry* and a member of the Tennessee State Council, said last Monday that an end to the blockade would be an opportunity for the State to grow customer base and market share.

She noted that every year, Tennessee typically exports \$32.9 billion of merchandise and its export industry supports nearly 159,000 Tennessean jobs.

"If given the opportunity to expand relations with Cuba, we can only expect this number to increase," Glover said. "We're just leaving money on the table if we're not at the table right now and trying to encourage lifting the blockade."

Bill Lane, senior director of global government and corporate affairs at Caterpillar, Inc., was among the business leaders who attended the round table.

He listed a number of ways the company could help Cuba, such as providing it with equipment for mining, and assisting the country with improving its infrastructure, which he says is the foundation for economic growth.

"Caterpillar wants to do business in Cuba," Lane said. "Everything that Caterpillar makes is needed in Cuba, and we would like the opportunity to do that."

Austrian Airlines Launches Direct Flight Service to Havana

Next year Austrian Airlines will add another new tourist destination to its flight schedule. Austria's national carrier now offers flight service once a week to Havana, the capital of Cuba, beginning last October 25th. Flights will be operated on Tuesdays deploying a Boeing 767 to Havana, the largest city in the Caribbean, as part of the airline's winter flight schedule. Thus Austrian Airlines is once again including a Caribbean destination in its flight portfolio for the first time in 5 years. The last time Austria's flag carrier operated flights to the Caribbean was in 2010 when it flew to Punta Cana, Dominican Republic.

"2016 is the year in which Austria and Cuba celebrate 70 years of bilateral ties. We are pleased to link our new direct flight to Havana with this anniversary", explains Austrian Airlines Chief Commercial Officer Andreas Otto. "The launch of flight service to Cuba is another step in the consistent expansion of our long-haul route portfolio and our continuing focus on tourist destinations."

International Meeting ICOM 2015 Kicks Off in Havana

Under the motto *Information and Communication from the South: Economy, Politics, Culture, and Critical Thinking*, the *8th International Meeting of Researchers and Scholars of Information and Communication (ICOM)* as well as the *9th International Congress of the Latin Union for the Political Economics of the Information, Communication, and Culture (ULEPICC)* are running until tomorrow, December 11st at Havana's Convention Center in the Cuban capital.

Almost 20 prestigious researchers are joining the almost 400 papers from authors of more than 20 countries, including the United States.

Among the subjects to be tackled, are the communicative agenda of the country and the region, mass media as promoter of thinking, and access to information, as well as regulation and self-regulation.

FAO Acknowledges Cuba's Efforts in Soil Protection

The *Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)* acknowledged that Cuba implements different national strategies for soil protection, with encouraging results for its development.

The program designed makes it possible to recover areas affected by some degrading factors like salinity or soil erosion, asserted Theodore Friedrich, FAO representative to Havana, who recalled that December 5th marks the *World Soil Day* and that 2015 was declared *International Year of Soils*.

In his statements to Cuban press, the official pointed out that the international organization has helped Cuba in the development of its agricultural infrastructure, creating research institutes, some of which emerged from projects carried out on the island.

Friedrich recalled that recently the FAO executed a project to promote pig farming, and others to favor agricultural, aquaculture and beekeeping production, which are in various stages of implementation.

Experts in the field assert that healthy soils not only form the basis for the obtaining in the planet of food, fuel, fiber and medical products, but are also essential for ecosystems, since they participate in the carbon cycle and store and filter water, among other functions.

The 18th Habano Festival, the Countdown Begins

The *18th Habano Festival*, the most prestigious international event dedicated to premium hand rolled cigars will take place in the Cuban capital February 29th-March 4th, 2016, and will be dedicated to the most exclusive brand in Habanos S.A's portfolio, *Cohiba*, in honor of its 50th anniversary.

Speaking to Granma International, Daymí Difurniao Rodríguez, Habanos S.A. Operational Marketing expert, noted that an important focus will also be geared toward the brands Hoyo de Monterrey, which will present its *Reserva Cosecha 2012* line, and *Cuaba*, celebrating its 20th anniversary.

He highlighted that, during this edition, participants, which always include international personalities, will have the unique opportunity to enjoy some of Habanos S.A's new *vitolas* to be launched in 2016, as well as discover or rediscover the roots and secrets of Cuban cigar making, a centuries-old tradition on the island.

Interest and participation in the Festival, where cigar lovers can experience the best tobacco in the world, has grown annually with organizers hoping to surpass last year's attendance figures, which saw around 1,200 participants from almost 60 countries, in addition to wide press coverage of the event by 300 journalists and photographers representing 150 media outlets from over 40 nations.

The 2016 Festival program continues to feature its customary activities, while also presenting new options, such as a Welcome Night; visits to the best tobacco farms in Vuelta Abajo, Pinar del Río; an evening dedicated to the iconic figure of the cigar roller; tours of emblematic cigar factories; the Associated Trade Fair; International Seminar; International Habanosommelier Contest (selecting, cutting and lighting a cigar) and a Gala Evening.

Habanos S.A's Operational Marketing expert noted that the Festival will kick-off February 29th, 2016 with the inauguration of the Associated Trade Fair in the Havana Convention Center, the ideal setting for technical and commercial exchanges between businesses, producers and service providers from the world of tobacco.

He highlighted that the first day will end with a Welcome Night in the Almacén de la Madera y el Tabaco restaurant, located in Havana's port area, where participants will have the privilege of attending both the launch of the Reserva Hoyo de Monterrey, Cosecha 2012 line, and exclusive performances by nationally and internationally renowned Cuban artists.

Rodríguez likewise reported that the International Seminar will once again feature interesting conferences on diverse topics related to the world of cigars, including exquisite food and beverage accompaniments, master classes and cigar rolling competitions, among other relevant topics for cigar enthusiasts.

Furthermore, he noted that the program includes a special dinner on March 2nd, in honor of the figure of the cigar roller, during which the brand *Cuaba* will also celebrate its 20th anniversary.

The expert stated finally that the Festival closing ceremony will take place on March 4th, in the Pabexpo exposition center, with the customary Gala Dinner, which will pay tribute to Habanos S.A's signature brand: *Cohiba*.

"The night will end with the customary Humidifier Auction, with all proceeds going to the Cuban Public Health System," stated Rodríguez

Habano cigars are 100% hand crafted, using Cuban techniques which debuted in the capital over 200 years ago, and have been passed on from generation to generation, remaining virtually unchanged to date.

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