

St. Petersburg, Florida Would Welcome Cuban Consulate



St. Petersburg, October 2 (RHC)-- Mayor Rick Kriseman returned from Cuba convinced his city would be an ideal spot for a Cuban consulate and on Thursday, the City Council agreed, according to the St. Petersburg Tribune.

The council voted unanimously in favor of resolutions to bring a potential Cuban consulate to the city, and on another to endorse a bill co-sponsored by U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor to end the 55-year trade embargo that has isolated the island country from the United States.

"We think it would be entirely appropriate for a Cuban consulate to be located here," Kriseman told the council. He said Cuban and St. Petersburg officials face similar issues as coastal communities, and have vibrant arts, culture and education communities to share.

"The Cuban people don't hate Americans. They were incredibly warm and generous," Kriseman said. "There is a real desire to see a relationship build again."

The mayor led a contingent that included Deputy Mayor Kanika Tomalin, Council Chairman Charlie Gerdes, Chief of Staff Kevin King and Tampa philanthropist David Straz Jr., a board member of the Alliance for Responsible Cuba Policy, on the four-day trip that ended August 30th.

The trip to Cuba came two weeks after the U.S. Embassy opened in Havana, and amid optimism of re-establishing relationships with Cuban people and officials.

The group met with government officials, including Scott Hamilton, the U.S. deputy chief of mission in Cuba, and Gustavo Machin, deputy director for American affairs at the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which will decide where to put the first Cuban consulate in the United States since relations were severed in 1961.

City Councilman Karl Nurse, who traveled to Cuba with the city's orchestra board three years ago, said: "It would be quite a coup to get a consulate here."

Gerdes said Kriseman told Cuban officials there are about 90,000 Cuban-Americans in the Tampa Bay area.

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