

New Senate Cuba Legislation ‘Necessary And Timely’

WASHINGTON, D.C.

USA Rice Federation described as “necessary and timely” a Senate bill introduced to open travel by all Americans to Cuba and further facilitate U.S. agriculture and medical exports to that nation.

In addition to reopening travel, the bill, S-1089 – the Promoting American Agriculture and Medical Exports to Cuba Act of 2009 – offered by Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT) and 15 colleagues, would clarify the “cash-in-advance” provision of the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000 (TSREEA) to ensure its interpretation according to the intent of Congress, a long-time USA Rice Federation goal.

“This bill is not only necessary and timely, but addresses issues that are at the very core of rice industry efforts in Washington to remove the onerous Bush administration restrictions imposed in 2005 by the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control,” said USA Rice Federation Chairman Jamie Warshaw. “Those restrictions to the cash-in-advance provisions of TSREEA led to a drop in U.S. rice shipments to Cuba to nearly zero.”

“While we continue to urge Congress and the administration to lift the U.S.-imposed embargo, this bill would allow rice producers, millers, merchants and allied industries to begin to reclaim the costly ground lost over the last four years,” Warshaw said.

“Prior to the U.S. embargo, Cuba was the largest market for U.S. rice. Were the provisions in the bill to become law, we would be well on our way to that position again,” Warshaw said. “U.S. proximity to Cuba makes us natural trad-

ing partners, and offers the Cuban people the opportunity to receive the high-quality rice we know they want, at an affordable cost.”

The bill’s original cosponsors are a group of geographically and politically diverse lawmakers, including, Sens. Mike Crapo (R-ID), Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Pat Roberts (R-KS), Mary Landrieu (D-LA), Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), Tom Harkin (D-IA), Patty Murray (D-WA), Mark Pryor (D-AR), Christopher “Kit” Bond (R-MO), Tim Johnson (D-SD) and Byron Dorgan (D-ND), Rod Wyden (D-OR), Richard Lugar (R-IN), and Claire McCaskill (D-MO).

“We are urging more rice-state senators to become cosponsors of this important legislation,” said Reece Langley, USA Rice VP for government affairs.

According to Langley, the bill’s other key agriculture provisions:

- authorize direct fund transfers between U.S. and Cuban banks for agricultural exports
- establish a U.S. Department of Agriculture program to provide technical and promotional assistance for marketing U.S. agricultural exports to Cuba
- establish a “sense of the Congress” that the Secretary of State should issue visas to Cuban officials to conduct activities related to the purchase of agricultural commodities.

“The introduction of this Senate bill is very encouraging for the rice industry, and builds hope for future business at a time when the economy clearly can use positive encouragement,” Warshaw said. △



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