



February 22, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson  
U.S. Secretary of State  
2201 C St NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson,

Congratulations on your confirmation as United States Secretary of State. As President of Engage Cuba, a national coalition of private companies, organizations and local leaders dedicated to lifting the U.S. embargo on Cuba, I want to thank you for pledging a “top-to-bottom” review of U.S. Cuba policy in your Senate confirmation hearing.

Your review is coming at a critical time for the future of U.S.-Cuba relations given the recent passing of former President Fidel Castro and the announced retirement of President Raul Castro in early 2018. The United States has an opportunity to play a constructive role in ensuring that future changes in Cuba improve the lives of the Cuban people, strengthen private sector growth, and create a better business climate for U.S. companies. We should not miss this opportunity to effect positive change in Cuba by returning to failed isolationist policies of the last 55 years.

As businessmen, both you and President Trump understand how burdensome U.S. regulations on American companies can stifle growth in the private sector. We agree that a thriving private sector is key to prosperity in any country, particularly developing countries like Cuba. It is undeniably in the U.S. national interest to pursue policies that support the growth of Cuba’s private sector.

Entrepreneurial activity has taken off in Cuba in recent years, driving economic growth and social change across the island. Now, one third of Cuba’s labor force works in the private sector, earning considerably more money than Cubans who work for the state. There are now over 4,000 *paladares*, or privately run restaurants; 28,000 rooms in private bed & breakfasts; and over 6,000 cooperatives in agriculture and other sectors.

U.S. regulatory changes have paved the way for private sector growth across the island and have created tangible benefits for the Cuban people. Specifically, easing travel restrictions and authorizing direct commercial flights has allowed for an influx of American travelers to Cuba. This increase in travel has stimulated major growth in Cuba’s private sector. Growing numbers of U.S. travelers will continue to be crucial to the long-term growth of small businesses in Cuba.

As part of your Cuba review, we invite you to meet with Cuban entrepreneurs to better understand how rolling back additional U.S. regulations will strengthen both the U.S. and Cuban private sectors. We would be honored to facilitate that meeting and look forward to hearing back from you.

We sincerely believe that once a thorough Cuba review is complete, and the voices of the Cuban people are heard, you and President Trump will support policies that remove burdensome regulations on U.S. companies, create American jobs and support the growth of Cuba’s private sector.

Thank you,

James Williams  
President of Engage Cuba