

Lifting History:

Why it's time to end the Cuban trade embargo



By **Rep. James Comer, R-KY**
Special to Jobe Publishing, Inc.

I recently traveled to Havana, Cuba as part of a five-member Congressional team on a trade mission to begin talks to lift the United States embargo against Cuba. As a farmer, former Kentucky Commissioner of Agriculture, and representative of a large agricultural district, I was supportive of reopening trade with Cuba long before I ever actually visited Cuba. After spending five days meeting with Cuban government officials, small business owners, and various Cuban citizens, I am now strongly supportive of lifting the embargo, or the “blockade” as the Cubans call it, and intend on making it a major legislative priority of mine in the 115th Congress.

The biggest surprise I had from visiting Cuba was how many tourists were already visiting the country. There are now 110 airline flights each day into Cuba. Most of the tourists are from other countries, but many are from the US. I was also surprised to see how many small restaurants were owned by individual Cubans and the quality of food that the restaurants were serving. It was not surprising to find the majority of the agricultural products imported by Cuba to feed their population and their booming tourist industry are from China. China, Canada, and Europe are Cuba's major agricultural trade partners.

Cuba has a population of over 11,000,000 and is located 90 miles south of Florida. To put that into perspective, Kentucky's population is only 4,400,000 and I travel 125 miles north from Tompkinsville to the Louisville Airport every Monday morning to fly into Washington. In recent years, the US has eased many decades of restrictions against Cuba. The US is currently exporting \$150 million worth of agricultural goods to Cuba, but if the embargo is lifted the estimated value of US exports skyrockets to an estimated \$2.2 billion.

Cuba was a booming economy throughout the 1800's and all the way up until 1959. In fact, my grandparents traveled to Havana in 1958 for a Caribbean vacation. Then in 1959, Fidel Castro led a revolution which overthrew the government. Castro seized control of every private investment in Cuba, most of which were American interests, and transitioned the government to a Socialist state. The U.S. government responded and rightfully declared an embargo against Cuba. In 1961, President Kennedy launched the failed Bay of Pigs Invasion. In 1962, Cuba and the Soviet Union came to the brink of a nuclear war with the United States.

Through the Fidel Castro years, Cuba's economy tanked and the Cuban people suffered. Fidel Castro's Socialist Cuba relied heavily on the Soviet Union to subsidize its failing economic system until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. After the Soviet collapse, Cuba entered what the government calls its “Special Period” which is similar to our American Great De-

pression. That was when tens of thousands of Cubans fled their country on rafts to Florida, Mexico, and the Caribbean. As Fidel Castro's health deteriorated, his brother Raul Castro assumed his office in 2008. In February of 2018 a new Cuban leader will supposedly be elected.

The foreign policy position of every American President from Eisenhower to Obama has essentially been to shut off Cuba's economy through an embargo, thereby starving its people and hoping the people would rise up and overthrow the Castro Regime. However, what would transpire over the years with the embargo is that the Castro Regime blamed the blunders of the Cuban economy on the American embargo. Thus, the regime remained in power despite horrible economic conditions and standards of living for Cuban citizens. In other words, U.S. policy toward Cuba actually helped Castro remain in power and keep Cuba a socialist state.

Lifting the US embargo against Cuba is an overall win-win. It is a win for foreign policy because countries that the US trades with are countries with which we have good relations. Similarly, countries we ban trade with are the ones where conflict often arises. Noting Cuba's proximity to the US, the last thing we need is for China or Russia to establish its own Guantanamo Bay Military Base pointed right at us. It is also a win for trade, especially agricultural trade.

Full, free agricultural trade with Cuba would be a great deal for American farm families because Cuba is no threat to American agriculture. The crops that Cuba needs to import from America include corn, soy, wheat, lumber, bourbon, beef, and poultry – all of which cannot be grown in Cuba in any measurable quantity. These are all major crops in Kentucky. The agricultural crops Cuba could potentially export to America include coffee, tropical fruits, rum, and premium cigars which are commodities already being imported to America from other countries.

Opponents of lifting the embargo argue that we should not trade with a socialist country led by a Castro. I will argue that Cuba is a country in transition. The 2016 election signaled a strong desire by the American people to change the way Washington does business in every form and fashion. The people voted for a leader who campaigned on renegotiating bad trade deals and putting Americans first. Lifting the outdated and obsolete Cuban trade embargo would be a great deal for American workers – particularly American farmers.

President Trump has the ability to change the course of history in Cuba as well as open up a major new market for American goods. Donald Trump campaigned on renegotiating bad trade agreements in the past, such as NAFTA and TPP. He also said that he would renegotiate trade agreements bilaterally between countries instead of multilaterally, as has been the case in the past. I agree with this new way of thinking toward trade, and I encourage President Trump to negotiate a better deal in Cuba – one that would benefit both the United States and the Cuban people.

Rep. James Comer is the Congressman for the first district of Kentucky.

Last Week in the Legislature

Special to Jobe Publishing, Inc.

FRANKFORT -- This has been a year for early arrivals at the State Capitol.

Within a week of the 2017 legislative session's start in January, bills started arriving in the governor's office to be signed into law, an extraordinarily quick start for a session of the General Assembly.

We've had more early arrivals at the Capitol in recent weeks as hundreds of the tulips in the Capitol gardens have already started blooming, a couple weeks ahead of their usual schedule.

Amid these signs that spring is coming, lawmakers continued to send a growing number of bills to the governor's office this week. One high-profile measure that's expected to soon be signed into law would allow charter schools to operate in Kentucky. House Bill 520 would allow local school boards to

authorize public charter schools in their school districts beginning with the 2017-2018 school year. The schools would be established by contract and governed by independent boards to provide Kentucky residents with educational programs that meet or exceed student performance standards adopted by the Kentucky Board of Education.

Kentucky is one of seven states that do not already allow public charter schools, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

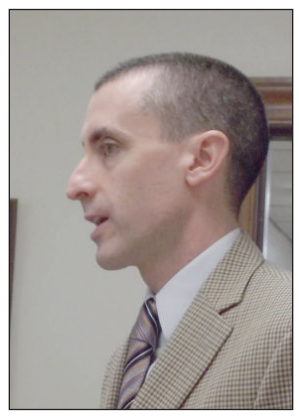
In other business, lawmakers gave final approval to legislation that would lift a moratorium on the construction of nuclear power plants in the state. Senate Bill 11 would amend statutes to change the requirement that facilities have a way to permanently dispose of nuclear waste. Instead they would only be required to have a plan for its safe storage, and that

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Fiscal Court

Focusing on road improvements

By **PJ MARTIN**
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The Monroe County Fiscal Court met in regular session on Thursday, March 16, 2017. There were four special guests at the meeting from the Transportation Cabinet for District 3: Joe Plunk, District Engineer

Kevin Gerald, Branch Manager, Aaron Wallace, and Ashley Graves of the Scottsville office.

District Engineer Plunk started the presentation by explaining, “As per KRS 177.330 the Dept of Highways is to consult with fiscal courts each year about our Rural and Secondary Roads Program and this is our recommendations for the allotment that we are receiving for the rural and secondary roads in Monroe County.” The fiscal year 17-18 allotment total is \$1,270,464 which includes carry over from last year of \$277,647 and a flex fund carry over of \$18,271. The four key points of the report are:

- * 45 percent (\$438,500) of that allotment will go toward routine maintenance and traffic on 128 miles of rural and secondary road.

- * County Judge expenses \$3,862 (every county has this)

- * Our recommendation for the fiscal funds is to resurface and failure repairs on approximately 6.3 miles on Radio Station Road, Highway 1049 minus the section the new by-pass will be crossing.

- * Flex funds equal 15 percent (\$164,453) of the overall amount for the county to use on county maintained secondary Roads.

Magistrate Mitchell Page brought up the question of repair to bridge on Hwy 100 East, “I wish we could get something done. It's so narrow that people smack mirrors all the time.” Plunk explained that it has been a high priority for some time. Gerald remarked, “It's been in the top ten.” Plunk explained that they are working with new criteria and for now there is not status.

Plunk also gave a status update on the by-pass. Out of the 64 parcels, 61 have been acquired, and we are waiting on some title issues to be resolved. Hopes are to bid the project in mid-summer. He advised that this is a 2-year construction project.

Magistrates accepted the bid from Bob Hook Chevrolet for purchase of a 2017 Silverado 3500HD, 4wd, regular cab truck for \$34,381. They also voted to accept bids on two surplus vehicles.

Tompkinsville Auto Salvage received the 2007 Dodge for \$950 and Danny Tooley received the 2005 Chevy Impala for \$850.

Darrell Jackson was approved as the new Dog Warden after the previous warden resigned.

In other business, Judge Tommy Willett reported to the court that the property being purchased for the new fire station had been appraised at \$46,000 and had been accepted by BRADD and the Department for Local Government.

Willett recommended a wage increase for the five road crew workers. These workers all have their CDL Class-A licenses. All the magistrates agreed to the wage of \$12 an hour effective April 1, 2017. Larry Graves, Road Foreman remarked, “I'm sure they'll appreciate it, they are a good crew.”

Aliens

To be a Christian is, in one way, to be a person without a country. If you really take the scriptures seriously, and try to live them, you will inevitably come into conflict with the world. You belong to Christ, and Christ alone, while many people around you give themselves to people, possessions, institutions, and things other than Christ. To be a Christian is to stand apart from the world, and yet to remain in the world. It is to dare to be different. You will look at everything through the lens of scripture, and things will look different when viewed biblically.

Success in the world means power, influence, money, prestige. Success as a Christian only means pleasing God. This determination to obey will lead you to do and think in ways that are completely contrary to what the world wants and rewards.

Determining to obey means studying and understanding scripture, and then making up your mind that you are going to live exactly as scripture teaches, in all ways. I don't believe any of us can perfectly achieve that because it's almost impossible not to get caught up in the way the world thinks, and acts. But we must make the effort to live as God would have us to in all ways, even if it flies in the face of common wisdom. This is how the process of sanctification works, learning to listen to God's word and allowing it to soak into our hearts, and

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