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Trade group says top Obama officials may visit Cuba this fall

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A small trade group focused on promoting American business ties with Cuba says Commerce Department Secretary Penny Pritzker, and possibly Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, are planning to visit Cuba this fall.

John Kavulich of the U.S. Cuba Trade and Economic Council said Pritzker's travel to the island nation "perhaps" will take place in early November in conjunction with the Havana International Trade Fair.

The Commerce Department declined to comment about Pritzker's possible travel plans. But during keynote remarks at an event sponsored by the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce and the Tampa International airport, Pritzker said she anticipated regulations allowing U.S. companies to participate in upgrading Cuba's telecom infrastructure and Internet and consumer communications devices.

In April, Pritzker said she would lead a delegation to Cuba as soon as the two countries have normalized relations and opened embassies in each other's countries.

While Pritzker's schedule is likely up to her and her alone, Kavulich used his release to argue that she should travel either in December or in January, and that she should attend with representatives of the International Trade Commission and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. By that time, he said, the Cuban government may have issued regulations approving purchases relating to product exports and imports first proposed by the U.S. in December when

Obama announced the historic change to U.S.-Cuba relations.

“A visit by Secretary Pritzker should only arise subsequent to the government of the Republic of Cuba having purchased products and permitted the provision of services as outlined in December 2014, not as a means of seeking the purchase of products and provision of services,” Kavulich said. “The visit needs to be a reward, not an inducement.”

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