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We wish to support this vital and growing private sector in Cuba

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Mr. Thomas J. Donohue, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, is visiting Cuba for the second time. The organization that runs entirely autonomous and independent of the U.S. government represents 3 million businesses of the most diverse sectors. His first visit was in 1999, at that time he met with Fidel Castro and spoke in the Aula Magna of the University of Havana, a place he visited again this Thursday to deliver a lecture .

" 15 years ago, I visited Cuba and spoke in this extraordinary building of the University of Havana, at the time said it was time to open a new chapter in the history of relations between the U.S. and Cuba , and that changes were needed in both countries to make that happen, and to happen soon. We have already opened this chapter, but we have not closed it. Progress has not been as fast as I would have wanted, but at least it's happening, "Mr. Donohue said in the conference offered today.

The President of the Chamber of Commerce has been accompanied by a small delegation that has also included Steve Van Andel , chairman of Amway Company and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States and Marcel Smits , Executive Vice President and delegation Financial Officer of Cargill, one of the largest private agro companies in the world and that since 2000 has been exporting food and other products to Cuba .

"Cuba is changing some of its economic policies and the private sector is growing and the United States have also reviewed some of the restrictions on the movement of people and money, but much remains to be done by both sides," said Donohue, who also said that his mission " is to support private companies and persuade governments, not just the United States, to adopt policies that allow these companies to be successful. We believe that countries with strong private sector, free from excessive control and ownership by the government, will have the most successful and productive economies"

"We've heard that the Cuban government is making major changes in economic policy that could encourage

entrepreneurship and open up opportunities for trade and investment and accelerate economic growth and modernization. We come here to assess the seriousness of this effort and to encourage and support it in the way that we can. We hope to leave Cuba with a clearer understanding of the reforms that are taking place and assess the way in which the private sector of the United States could provide support. We are trying to link Cubans from all walks of life and explain how private companies could dramatically improve the lives of citizens," he said.

He said he had met with several Cuban private entrepreneurs ' their efforts to start their own businesses show that entrepreneurship is alive and well in many of the hearts of the people of Cuba , and when that spirit is encouraged in the right way , the country as a whole can progress . "He added he had seen this development in countries politically closer to Cuba than to the United States, China and Viet Nam as "The same will happen in Cuba if reforms are serious and overarching "he said.

"Cuba has come to realize that the government does not have to have a control over all aspects of the economy. We were pleased to see several state companies making a transition to private cooperatives "he said.

The U.S. delegation visited some non-agricultural cooperatives, Mr. Donohue said he was particularly impressed by the CRB Cooperative that repair vehicles and praised the significant changes in agriculture and the increase in private business.

The delegation also visited the new port of Mariel, which the President of the Chamber of Commerce said, " could become the main trading center for the Caribbean region , while with the new Law on Foreign Investment, Cuba is inviting foreigners to invest in new sectors of the economy. The passage of this law states that Cuba's leaders understand that FDI can be a powerful tool for economic development and job creation. "

"These are positive experiences, but many challenges remain," he said. "Many observers consider to enhance the economic growth of the private sector, Cuba needs to adopt a single currency, working to make agriculture more productive and do more for the state enterprises that have long survived on subsidies"

The President of the Chamber of Commerce said that the U.S. business community and the organization he chairs" would like to support this vital and growing private sector in Cuba. We believe it is time to remove political barriers and work to save our differences. For many years the House has pressured our government to remove the trade embargo on Cuba, it's time for a new approach. Attitudes are changing towards the embargo in the U.S., and that includes the younger generations of Cuban Americans, however it remains an issue fraught with emotion and political views held with fervor on both ends of the conflict" .

"It is worth noting that the Cuban-American community is actively seeking opportunities for greater links. Over 300,000 Cuban Americans visited the island last year, filling about 40 flights a week from Miami, many others are investing in family businesses in Cuba and helping their loved ones to buy, build or renovate houses on the island. Some important Cuban American business leaders are leading efforts to reanalyze the relationship between the U.S. and Cuba and they are considering the impact and potential of more moderate policies toward Havana. "

According to Donohue, there are other aspects that the U.S. government should consider in relation to Cuba. Although President Obama has taken some initial steps, easing travel restrictions and remittances, " it could take additional steps to facilitate increased travel between the two countries , could create new pathways for the import and export of goods and services starting with the new private sector in Cuba , could expand diplomatic relations between the two governments and promote the kind of personal exchange between citizens that encourages understanding and common purpose . "

"The President should consider taking these steps, first, because they are of interest to the American people , our businesses , our competitive position and our constructive leadership in this hemisphere. Similarly Cuba should extend and accelerate economic reforms that are beneficial to the Cuban people, "he said.

"We at the Chamber of Commerce of the United States believe in the power of private enterprise to help societies to advance and improve and it is in that spirit that we have come to your country and your university and have offered these observations. Based on what we know and what we have seen we believe that this transition period of its economic system will also possibly transition in policy and is very promising for both countries. This could take a chance on a new generation of Cubans and Americans to know, to learn from each other, do business together, and help thrive together as friends and neighbors. For a long time the relationship between our nations have been defined by our differences and tied to our past, it does not have to be that way. It's time to start another chapter in

relations between the U.S. and Cuba and the time to start is now, "he said.

Mr. Donohue, after concluding his lecture on campus, told reporters that Cuba could be a much better country to invest if it takes into account the arbitration laws, protection of intellectual property and other aspects, but it is undoubtedly a country with great potential for the proximity to the United States for the changes that are happening and the port that is being built. He also said that if he had a group with capital and could come and invest in Cuba, it would in telecommunications.

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