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April 14, 2009

Secretary Gary Locke
United States Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20230

RE: President Obama's Direction for Cuban American travel – addition of Tampa International Airport as authorized departure point

Dear Secretary Locke:

I respectfully request the addition of Tampa International Airport to the current list of cities designated under Title 19 CFR, Chapter 1, Part 122, Section 122.153 as authorized ports of entry/exit for U.S.-Cuba air charter flights. Only three airports currently are authorized to serve as departure points of entry/exit to Cuba - Miami, New York and Los Angeles.

With President Obama's direction to lift travel restrictions to Cuba so families can visit their relatives, the number of U.S. travelers to Cuba is expected to nearly triple from the current 10,000 per month to nearly 30,000 per month. In the hours after President Obama's announcement travel agents in the Tampa area were already reporting record phone calls and requests for flights to Cuba.

According to the U.S. Census data, the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater SMSA has the 5th largest population of Cuban-Americans (66,963) of the SMSA's within the United States. When nearby Orlando-Kissimmee (25,417), Lakeland (7,146), Jacksonville (7,541) and Sarasota-Bradenton (3,797), are included over 110,000 Cuban-Americans would have easy access to Tampa International Airport.

This dramatic increase for travel to Cuba will create a need for a substantial increase in the number of direct air charter flights from the U.S. to Cuba. Currently, there are several air charter companies operating flights from Miami to Cuba, but none from the Tampa Bay area which has one of the largest concentrations of Cuban-Americans in the United States.

My office deals with the personal family struggles that past limited travel opportunities brought on a regular basis. Sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, and grandsons and granddaughters were unable to visit sick or dying relatives in Cuba. In their quest to travel to

Cuba to say goodbye or comfort a loved one, they were subjected to the worst kind of bureaucratic red tape because of those restrictions I am convinced that the lack of departure point to Cuba in our area will continue to be a barrier for many families. The addition of Tampa International Airport as a departure point for charter flights to Cuba will be one less burden these families have to face.

Implementation of this nonstop air charter service from Tampa International Airport would be fully coordinated with Tampa International Airport, Transportation Security Administration and Customs & Border Protection officials to ensure that flights are scheduled during standard airport operating hours avoiding additional costs that might result from officials having to work overtime. Louis E. Miller, the Executive Director of the Tampa International Airport, is in full support of this request that could provide an added access point to the thousands of Cuban-American families that live in and around my Tampa Bay district.

I appreciate your consideration of this request. If you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to contact me or Louis E. Miller at your convenience. His email address is lmiller@tampairport.com and his telephone number is (813) 870-8705.

Respectfully,



Kathy Castor
U.S. Representative
Florida – District 11

CC: Timothy Geithner, Secretary of the Treasury
Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State
Rahm Emmanuel, White House Chief of Staff
Louis E. Miller, Executive Director, Tampa International Airport
Frank Sanchez