

U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, Inc.

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What Governors Should Consider For A Visit To The Republic Of Cuba

Be Transparent. Fully-Disclose. Limit Staff. Maximize Business Outreach.

With Embassies operational in Washington, DC, and in Havana, Republic of Cuba, there are two fewer impediments (others remain) that may be used by the government of the Republic of Cuba as reasons for not seeking to commercially engage with United States companies where permitted by United States law, regulations and policy.

If the government of the Republic of Cuba views United States initiatives as a means for it to influence the political process in the United States, then likely will be increased purchases of products and services.

The government of the Republic of Cuba may determine that greater leverage exists from neither creating nor increasing product and service purchasing levels as a means of encouraging those impacted United States-based parties to seek further statutory, legislative, regulatory and policy changes.

The role of the Governor is that of Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) of the state.

Or, is the Governor a future candidate for an office where traveling outside of the United States is a means to demonstrate an appreciation of the global political and commercial marketplace? Is the visit to deflect media attention from a current/future issue? Is there a compelling reason(s) to visit the Republic of Cuba?

Important for staff to have transparent discussions as to reason(s) for visiting the Republic of Cuba. Is the state exporting now? How likely will exports be in one year, two years? If a longer term is expected, wait.

Governors who have traveled to the Republic of Cuba are generally from states that are the source of agricultural commodities and food products exported to the Republic of Cuba or have ports that are engaged with exports to the Republic of Cuba. The total value of agricultural commodity and food products exported from the United States to the Republic of Cuba since December 2001 exceeds US\$5.3 billion; the total value of healthcare products exported from the United States to the Republic of Cuba since October 1992 is approximately US\$19 million.

| Name | Date(s) |
|---|----------------|
| George Ryan (R- Illinois) | 1999/2002 |
| Jesse Ventura (I- Minnesota) | 2002 |
| John Hoeven (R- Nebraska) | 2002 |
| David Heineman (R- Nebraska) | 2005/2006/2007 |
| Kathleen Blanco (D- Louisiana) | 2005 |
| John Balducci (D- Maine) | 2005 |
| Butch Otter (R- Idaho) | 2007 |
| Mike Beebe (D- Arkansas) | 2009 |
| Bill Richardson (D- New Mexico) | 2009/2010 |
| Sonny Perdue (R- Georgia) | 2010 |
| Jay Nixon (D- Missouri) replaced by wife, Georganne Nixon | 2015 |
| Andrew Cuomo (D- New York) | 2015 |
| Asa Hutchinson (R- Arkansas) | 2015 |
| Greg Abbott (R- Texas) | 2015 |
| Terry McAuliffe (D- Virginia) | 2016 |
| Jay Nixon (D- Missouri) | 2016 |
| Lt. Governor Brad Owen (D- Washington) | 2016 |
| John Bel Edwards (D- Louisiana) | 2016 |
| Earl Ray Tomblin (D- West Virginia) | 2016 |
| John Hickenlooper (D- Colorado) | 2017 |
| Phil Bryant (R- Mississippi) | 2017 |

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Expenses of the official traveling party should be paid for with funds from the state; if the political calculation for the visit to the Republic of Cuba is the visit should not be paid for with state funds, but should/can be paid with campaign funds or private sector funds, then the visit be delayed until there is a change in those calculations. If the visit is indefensible as a cost to the taxpayers of a state, then don't embark on the journey until the journey can be defended to the taxpayers of the state.

When a governor and staff spend considerable time and taxpayer resources marketing a visit to the Republic of Cuba- in advance, during, and upon return, all information relating to the visit should be disclosed in a timely manner- without requiring the Freedom of Information Law [or Act] process.

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo (D), Governor of the State of New York, and The Honorable Terence McAuliffe (D), Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, used the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) and the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (VFOIA), respectively, to shield, delay and prevent the disclosure of financial and operational information relating to their visits to the Republic of Cuba.

Both governors have released information without use of the FOIL/VFOIA process; Governor McAuliffe's staff provided meaningful information, although the staff knew that a VFOIA request would be used if the information was not provided. One year after Governor Cuomo's visit concluded, FOIL requests remained unfulfilled.

Each governor used their respective laws to shield, delay and prevent the disclosure of amounts, sources, and uses of state/commonwealth taxpayer funds and operational information (contracts, etc.) relating to their visits to the Republic of Cuba.

That the governors (and their staffs) know the information should be disclosed, likely will be obtained and disclosed creates an unnecessary adversarial relationship between them and their employers, the taxpayers, and media organizations who seek to publish the information.

There is no reason for a state to make a payment to an individual/organization/consultant/company to assist with the preparation and implementation of a visit to the Republic of Cuba. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba (MINREX), through its representatives in Washington, DC, can and will provide assistance at no cost to the state, as will the Ministry of Foreign Trade of the Republic of Cuba (MINCEX) and the Chamber of Commerce of the Republic of Cuba.

If considered necessary, one or two security officers will suffice. There are no security issues in the Republic of Cuba; and the Ministry of the Interior (MININT) will generally assign one or two officers. Not useful to create a security spectacle so as to impart the importance of the Governor; the more distance between the Governor and public and media, the less impactful will be the visit.

No spouses, significant others, children, friends or celebrities. This is not a sightseeing visit and inclusion(s) will undermine the credibility of the visit.

No other elected politicians should accompany the governor to the Republic of Cuba; the visit is about marketing companies within the state, not marketing politicians.

The visit should be for two nights; there is rarely reason for additional days. A visit for one-night is defined as a marketing visit about the Governor, not about representing the interests of the state taxpayers.

Governors should try to use regularly-scheduled commercial flights from the United States to the Republic of Cuba. General aviation aircraft (or sole-use commercial aircraft charter unless the aircraft can be filled) should be avoided as it's a visual reminder for constituents and the media of the distance between politicians and those who vote and those who pay their salaries. Experience what United States citizens (taxpayers) experience when traveling to, visiting, and returning from the Republic of Cuba.

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There are United States-based air carriers serving the Republic of Cuba, there are United States-based hotel management companies with properties in the Republic of Cuba.... **Use them.**

What no other Governor has done.... arrive to or depart from a city other than Havana... Santiago de Cuba is the country's second-largest city and has a majority Afro-Cuba population. Holguin and Cienfeugos are also options.

The governor should not stay at the residence of the United States Ambassador; this presents a portrait of unnecessary isolation and a perception of an inflated ego.

Consider not having any formal media interactions (press conferences) during the visit... The Governor is in the Republic of Cuba to work. Wait until returning to the state for formal interviews.... However, speaking with journalists while going into or coming out of meetings presents no issue. A formal press conference is not required. Make the interactions casual.

Avoid any overt religious component during the visit. Serves no value and provides distracting commentary. If the visit includes a Sunday, attending a public mass is an option.

There is no reason for a governor to have a staff member(s) visit the Republic of Cuba in advance of a visit. There is no reason for a media representative of the governor to arrive in advance of the governor. A waste of state taxpayer time and money.

The delegation should only include state officials who have specific portfolios including what can be exported and/or provisioned (services). Beneficial for the delegation to include men and women.

The names and titles of all who accompany a governor must be made public well-in-advance of the visit; not only official delegation, but staff.

The projected costs of the visit should be available before the visit commences; and the final costs should be available within two weeks of returning from the Republic of Cuba. No governor should require a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request for this information.

Suggestion to bring gift presentation boxes consisting of authorized products representing, if possible, each county of the state.

If representatives of state companies are accompanying the Governor, they should be from companies that can currently conduct transactions and/or will likely be perceived as having products/services that are permitted to be exported and that the Republic of Cuba is likely to import. If there is a delegation, it should represent all regions of the state.

A governor should travel with minimal state-staff and maximum number of company representatives; a productive number is at least fifteen (15) companies.

The Republic of Cuba is not Dubai ninety-three (93) miles south of Key West, Florida. This is a developing country with chronic shortages of foreign exchange for commercial debt payments.

Important to be cognizant of state-to-Republic of Cuba delivery issues.... How will the product be delivered to the Republic of Cuba... If it will likely cost too much, then do not focus upon it. The goal is to find opportunities that can be developed and implemented reasonably.

Upon arrival, after a first meeting with a representative of MINREX, the second meeting should be with the United States Ambassador at his office. Important for a governor to be seen entering the United States Embassy.

A meeting list might include Ministry of Foreign Trade's food/ag import company, Alimport; Ministry of Public Health (since healthcare products can be exported); Ministry of Communications (as

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communications equipment/services may be exported/provided); Ministry of Finance (as credit cards/charge cards are permitted to be used and direct correspondent banking relationships are authorized); Ministry of Transportation (relating to airlines, ships); and presidents of CIMEX and Gaviota; each of which have large retail/healthcare/financial/hospitality operations.

Consider a haircut at a barber shop- one of the 205 self-employed categories permitted in the country. A means to bring visibility to President Obama’s initiatives and President Castro’s initiatives.

Consider lunch at El Ajibe, a famous outdoor restaurant known for its roasted chicken with orange sauce and coconut ice cream.

Visit a one of the self-employed vehicle repair shops. Visit as many self-employed operations as possible- especially restaurants.

A visit to a law firm (Bufete) to reinforce the importance of the rule of law and the importance of transparency that is critical for United States companies.

Consider hosting a reception at a private restaurant (paladare) for officials of the government of the Republic of Cuba, bureau chiefs representing media organizations, local entrepreneurs, and non-Republic of Cuba nationals who reside in the Republic of Cuba and manage companies, joint ventures, etc.

Refrain from agreeing to overtures to return to the United States and actively advocate for further changes in United States law and regulations. The focus should be on how to maximize existing export/service opportunities for state companies. Encouraging a “lobby-for-purchase” relationship is not productive and can result in a corruption of the commercial process.

And... remember that while a governor and staff may want to believe that the visit to the Republic of Cuba is about he/her or them.... It is not. It’s about providing value to companies located within their states.

And... for those fond of using a gardening analogy.... Remember that there are no plants that take a year to grow; so refrain from using the phrase that seeds are being planted and they require time to grow.

| Participants | Andrew Cuomo (D- New York) April 2015 | Asa Hutchinson (R- Arkansas) September 2015 | Greg Abbott (R- Texas) November 2015 | Terry McAuliffe (R- Virginia) January 2016 |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| State GSP Ranking | 3 | 34 | 2 | 12 |
| Duration (Nights) | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Aircraft Used For Visit | Airbus-320 Charter | Miami Charter | Boeing 737 | Beechcraft King Air 350/Miami Charter |
| Personal | 1 | 1 | 2 (wife) | 2 (wife) |
| Executive Staff | 16 | 2 | 13 | 2 |
| State Agency Staff | 2 | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| Legislature Elected Officials | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Legislature Elected Officials Staff | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Educational Institution Staff | 2 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| Airport Authority | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Port Authority | 0 | 0 | 5 (four ports) | 1 |
| Paid Organizing Consultant | 1 (US\$25,000.00) | No | 1 (US\$5,000.00) | 1 (Not Yet Disclosed) |
| Private Sector | 13 (seven companies) | 24 (thirteen companies) | 3 (two companies) | seven companies |
| Media | 18 | DND | 1 (newspaper pool) | 2 |
| Healthcare (non-profit) | 4 (two organizations) | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Cost | US\$150,000+ (est) | US\$30,000.00 (est) | US\$55,000.00 (est) | US\$60,000.00 (est) |
| Export Agreements Confirmed | 0 | 0 | 0 | TBD |

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| Private and Public Sector Entities Accompanying Governors To The Republic Of Cuba | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Andrew Cuomo (D- New York) | Asa Hutchinson (R- Arkansas) | Greg Abbott (R- Texas) | Terry McAuliffe (D- Virginia) |
| Cayuga Milk Ingredients Chobani Empire State Development Corporation Infor JetBlue MasterCard Worldwide NY Genome Center Pfizer Plattsburgh International Airport Regeneron Roswell Park Cancer Institute State University of New York (SUNY) | Arkansas Department of Agriculture Arkansas Economic Development Commission Arkansas Farm Bureau Arkansas World Trade Center ATA International Bio-Tech Pharmacal, Inc. CJRW ETW Enterprises, Inc. Hanna's Candle Company Hunt Ventures In Good Spirits (McDonald's franchisee) Keith Smith Company Mannco Fertilizer New Road Ventures Riceland Foods, Inc. Safe Foods Corporation Simmons Foods The Winrock Group University of Arkansas System | AWSCI LLC Houston Airport System Port of Beaumont Port of Corpus Christi Port of Houston Texas Economic Development Corporation, Inc. Vaughn Farms, Inc. | Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Department of Agriculture and Forestry Department of Health and Human Services Department of Technology Forever Oceans Mountain Lumber Company Onduline North America, Inc. Perdue Agribusiness Smithfield Foods T. Parker Host Virginia Commonwealth University Virginia Economic Development Partnership |

| Andrew Cuomo (D- New York) | Asa Hutchinson (R- Arkansas) | Greg Abbott (R- Texas) | Terry McAuliffe (D- Virginia) |
|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| | University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture West Fraser Winrock Farms Winrock International | | Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Virginia Natural Beef Virginia Port Authority |
| State Entities- 4 | State Entities- 3 | State Entities- 4 | State Entities- 6 |
| Non-Profit Entities- 2 | Non-Profit Entities- 2 | Non-Profit Entities- | Non-Profit Entities- 2 |
| Companies- 7 | Companies- 17 | Companies- 2 | Companies- 7 |

| Participants | John Bel Edwards (D- Louisiana) October 2016 | Earl Ray Tomblin (D- West Virginia) November 2016 |
|--|---|--|
| State GSP Ranking | 24 | 40 |
| Duration (Nights) | 4 | 3 |
| Aircraft Used For Visit | Charter flight | State King Air, commercial and private charter Miami-Havana |
| Personal | 6 (spouse & 4 security) | 2 (spouses) |
| Executive Staff | 5 | 3 (includes security) |
| State Agency Staff | 13 | 3 |
| Legislature Elected Officials | 1 (former) | 0 |
| Legislature Elected Officials Staff | 0 | 0 |
| Educational Institution Staff | 3 | 0 |
| Airport Authority | 0 | 0 |
| Port Authority | 10 | 0 |
| Paid Organizing Consultant | 1 | 1 |
| Private Sector | 17 | 4 (three companies- paid own expenses) |
| Media | 2 | 0 |
| Healthcare (non-profit) | 0 | 0 |
| Cost | US\$150,134.00 | US\$74,000.00 |
| Export Agreements Confirmed | 0 | 0 |

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| Private and Public Sector Entities Accompanying Governors To The Republic Of Cuba | |
|---|---|
| John Bel Edwards (D- Louisiana) | Earl Ray Tomblin (D-West Virginia) |
| | Industrial Bolting Technologies, Inc. Multicoat Products Pilgrim's Pride West Virginia Dept. of Commerce |
| State Entities- 7 | State Entities- 1 |
| Non-Profit Entities- 2 | Non-Profit Entities- 0 |
| Companies- 17 | Companies- 3 |

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http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2016/12/john_bel_edwards_cuba_1.html

Louisiana Politics & Government

Louisiana state government spent more than \$150,000 on Cuba trip



Gov. John Bel Edwards, a Democrat, and Agriculture Secretary Mike Strain, a Republican, lead a delegation to Cuba in October. The trip cost the Louisiana state government \$150,000. (Photo by G. Andrew Boyd, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune) (G. ANDREW BOYD)

By Julia O'Donoghue

The Louisiana state government spent at least \$150,134 on a five-day trade mission in October to Cuba for Gov. John Bel Edwards, Agriculture Commissioner Mike Strain and 20 other state workers, according to public records obtained by NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune. Of the total expense, over 23 percent was for the governor's security personnel.

Edwards, a Democrat, and Strain, a Republican, took the trip in part because the GOP-dominated Legislature charged the Edwards administration with strengthening the state's relationship with Cuba. Lawmakers last spring approved a resolution requiring the Economic Development agency to "develop and improve trade relations with Cuba" and return with a full report to lawmakers by February. Louisiana is Cuba's leading trade partner in the United States, exporting about \$1.4 billion worth of goods to the Caribbean country in the past decade. If the federal government relaxes its restrictions on trade with Cuba, it's thought Louisiana could exponentially expand its import and export business there, particularly in the agricultural sector.

While in Cuba, Edwards and other Louisiana officials signed agreements with the Cuban government to expand the state's trade relationship with Cuba, if the federal government ever relaxes its policy toward the country. "We have to find a way forward, and we need to work diligently to increase trade," Strain said in an interview last week.

NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune obtained records of public spending on the trip through public records requests to LSU and four state agencies. The state government ended up paying travel bills for 22 state employees, including the governor and agriculture commissioner. It also covered expenses for the governor's wife, Donna Edwards.



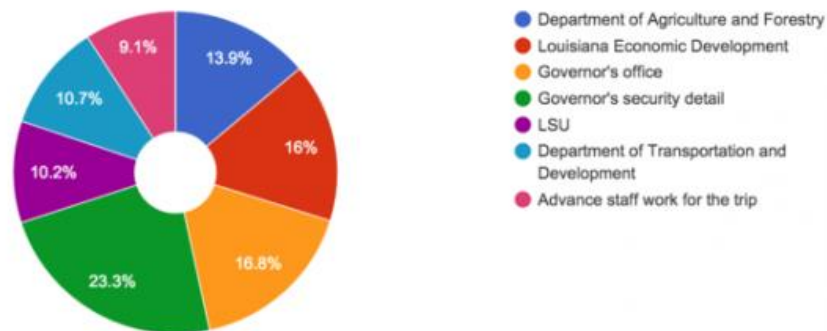
Louisiana, Cuba commit to trading more -- if embargo is lifted
The governor is visiting Cuba all week.

The cost of most state employees on the trip amounted to at least \$5,275 each, according to the records. All employees on the trip, including the governor, had their travel booked through Cuba Educational Travel LLC. This covered a seat on the charter flight for the Louisiana delegation, four nights at a hotel in Havana, breakfast and some other meals, bilingual guides, transportation in Cuba and museum admissions, among other things.

Some officials on the trip - including Strain and Transportation Secretary Shawn Wilson - also had their tips, additional meals, taxi fares and some of their parking fees at the New Orleans airport reimbursed by state government. Those expenses - not submitted by every person on the trip - ranged from \$87 to \$187 for the five-day period, according to a review of public records.

The Louisiana government also gave out several hundred dollars worth of small gifts - including pens, notebooks and coffee table books -- in Cuba. The items typically have a Louisiana seal on them and have been used on a variety of economic development trips over the year. About 200 Spanish coloring books were also purchased to be distributed in Cuba, according to public records.

Breakdown of Cuba trip expenses by agency



Unelected state employees on the trip were three members of the governor's staff; three members of the Agriculture and Forestry Department; four members of the Economic Development Department, including Secretary Don Pierson, two members of the Department of Transportation and Development including Secretary Wilson, former state Sen. Robert Adley, R-Benton, from the Louisiana Offshore Terminal Authority; two LSU professors and an LSU administrator.

The governor's security staff accompanied him on the trip. When a governor goes on a trade mission, it often drives up the expense considerably. Edwards' security personnel alone cost about \$35,000 on the Cuba venture, the largest single expense of the trip. About \$13,600 of that bill was for paying state troopers' overtime while abroad.

The Cuba trip was Edwards' first trade mission since taking office in January. Previous governors also have racked up charges when they traveled abroad on official business. The state spent \$73,000 on former Gov. Bobby Jindal's security personnel when Jindal went on a trade mission to Europe in 2015; about \$36,500 of that bill was just for the troopers' overtime.

This trip was supposed to demonstrate Louisiana's seriousness in doing business with Cuba, should the federal government loosen current restrictions. In 2005, then-Gov. Kathleen Blanco, a Democrat, also

traveled for three days to Cuba to establish a relationship, but Jindal, the Republican governor from 2008 through 2015, completely avoided contact with the communist country.

Delegations from other states - Arkansas, New York, Missouri, Texas and Virginia --- also have traveled to Cuba, according to Louisiana's economic development staff. But the Edwards administration thinks the Louisiana group enjoyed better access to high-level Cuban officials.

"We believe Louisiana is the only U.S. state to succeed in arranging meetings with all of the top Cuban government ministries for which we requested an audience," Pierson said.



Bobby Jindal spends \$73,000 in taxpayer funds on state police protection in Europe

Gov. Bobby Jindal's state trade mission to Europe in January cost Louisiana taxpayers \$73,000 for the governor's security detail alone. The seven state police officers who provided personal protection for the governor during the 10-day trip earned some \$36,500 in overtime pay. Another \$36,500 was used to cover the troopers' travel, housing, meals, transportation and other expenses in Europe, according to documents received through...

State employees weren't the only people to accompany Edwards and Strain on the October trip. Thirty-two people from the private sector and Louisiana ports also attended. They, too, booked their trip through Cuba Educational Travel, LLC for \$5,275 per person and took the same charter flight and stayed in the same hotels as the state employees. The state government did not pay for their travel, according to the Edwards administration.

The private sector representatives included people from Louisiana's rice industry and ports as well as The Water Institute of the Gulf, New Orleans Zephyrs, Baton Rouge Area Foundation, CenturyLink and lobbyist Randy Haynie. Two members of the news media also attended.

People attending Louisiana trade mission to Cuba in October 2016

| Organization | Last Name | First Name |
|---|-----------------|-------------|
| Office of the Governor | Edwards | John Bel |
| Office of the Governor | Edwards | Donna |
| Office of the Governor | Scott | Roderick |
| Office of the Governor | Carbo | Richard |
| Office of the Governor | Monroe-Wesley | Erin |
| LED - Louisiana Economic Development | Pierson | Don |
| LED - Louisiana Economic Development | Collins | Larry |
| LED - Louisiana Economic Development | House | Richard |
| LED - Louisiana Economic Development | Marshall | William |
| LED - Louisiana Economic Development | Fournierat | Lauren |
| LDAF - Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry | Strain | Mike |
| LDAF - Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry | Strain* | Susan |
| LDAF - Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry | Simon | Rene |
| LDAF - Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry | Mosgrove | Veronica |
| LDAF - Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry | Ribera | Michelle |
| Committee of 100 | Olivier | Michael |
| Committee of 100 | Clark | Tom "Verne" |
| Committee of 100 | Schneckenburger | Robert |

| | | |
|---|-------------|---------------|
| Port of New Orleans | Christian | Brandy |
| Port of New Orleans | Landry | Robert |
| Port of New Orleans | Kearney | Michael |
| Port of Greater Baton Rouge | Marionneaux | Robert |
| Port of Greater Baton Rouge | Hardman | Jay "John" |
| Port of South Louisiana | Aucoin | Paul |
| Port of South Louisiana | Robichaux | Dave Paul |
| Port of Lake Charles | Sanchez | Walter |
| Port of Lake Charles | Burckel | Daryl |
| LSU - Louisiana State University | Valsaraj | Kalliat "KT" |
| LSU - Louisiana State University | D'Elia | Christopher |
| LSU - Louisiana State University | Earle | Jonathan |
| Louisiana Offshore Terminal Authority | Adley | Robert |
| Biehl | Gonzalez | Roy |
| Haynie & Associates | Haynie | Randy |
| Breazeale, Sachse & Wilson | Newsome | Saul |
| CenturyLink | Koecher | Derek |
| Roy O. Martin | Byrd | Bobby |
| Powell Group/Farmers Rice Milling Co. | Lefort | Ana |
| Kennedy Rice | Kennedy | William Elton |
| New Orleans Zephyrs | Leger | Walter |
| Waggonner & Ball Architects | Waggonner | Joseph David |
| FSE Energy | Thibaut | James "Jim" |
| FSE Energy | Thibaut II | James "Bo" |
| Baton Rouge Area Foundation | Spain | John |
| All Star Automotive | McKay | Matt |
| Engage Cuba | Bryant | Adelina |
| Engage Cuba | Jorgensen | Gabrielle |
| Engage Cuba | Williams | James |
| LDOTD - La Dept. of Transportation and Dev. | Wilson | Shawn |
| LDOTD - La Dept. of Transportation and Dev. | Clark | Tommy |
| Water Institute of the Gulf | Speyrer | Nick |
| The Advocate | Crisp | Elizabeth |
| WAFB | Frey | Kevin |

*Commissioner Strain's wife Susan attended the trip, but the couple paid for her expenses personally. State government didn't.

Nor was this the state's first official trip to Cuba this year. Strain lead an even larger delegation, of about 95 people, in July. The costs of that trip haven't been calculated, but it included Strain, one member of his staff and four legislators - Sens. Conrad Appel, R-Metairie, and Sharon Hewitt, R-Chalmette, and Reps. Patrick Connick, R-Harvey, and Marcus Hunter, D-Monroe. A couple of employees of the University of Louisiana at Monroe also went on the trip.

The July trip was supposed to lay the groundwork for the governor's visit three months later. It also included private sector representatives from the Louisiana rice industry, the Farm Bureau Federation, Cox Communications and former U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., now a lobbyist in Washington with the Van Ness Feldman firm.

U.S. Rep. Ralph Abraham, R-Alto, has also gone to Cuba in trips separate from the state delegations and is pushing in Congress to relax trade restrictions with the country. But it's not clear where the U.S. policy toward Cuba is headed.

At the time that Edwards and Strain took their trip in October, it was assumed Hillary Clinton would be elected president Nov. 8. Clinton was expected to continue President Barack Obama's trajectory on Cuba, by relaxing restrictions on travel and trade.

President-elect Donald Trump threatened during the campaign to revert to more restrictions on travel and trade with Cuba. He said he would undo Obama's warming of the U.S.-Cuba relationship.



Why a New Orleans-Cuba cruise could soon become reality (again)
A measure allowing Americans to travel freely to Cuba has won U.S. Senate approval.

In Louisiana, the push for a more open relationship with Cuba is bipartisan, led by two Republicans -- Strain and Abraham -- in part because of the opportunities it presents for Louisiana agricultural industry. But not all Republicans in Louisiana are on board. U.S. Rep. Garret Graves, R-Baton Rouge, said in an interview last month that he was "open" to the idea but still had concerns about human rights violations in the country. And House Majority Whip Steve Scalise of Jefferson said in an interview he was not interested in improving U.S. diplomatic relations with Cuba at all until that country addressed its human rights problems. Scalise is not only the most powerful member of the Louisiana congressional delegation but also the member with the best access to Trump.

Trump's stated views on Cuba haven't deterred Strain from pushing for a relaxed relationship between the U.S. and the island country. Strain went to the White House in both November and December to talk Cuba relations, albeit with the Obama administration. The most recent meeting took place Dec. 15. The trips were paid for by the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, which Strain leads.

Strain remains positive about the U.S.-Cuba relationship. He said the next step is to have Cuban officials visit Louisiana. The 2017 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival will highlight Cuban culture, so any delegation would likely coincide with that event this spring, Strain said.

Edwards has not yet scheduled another trip abroad. In October, he said he might consider a visit to France, where several other governors have led delegations.

But state officials are certainly aware their communications might be monitored. In emails released through a public records request, Wilson warned about communicating over government email. "Please do not use this email for personal communications as it is all subject to public records laws," Wilson wrote on Sept. 8.