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Monday, January 12, 2009

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Blockade on Cuba Costs US Economy More

(Updated January 12, 2009, 9:30 am)



New evidence of losses caused to the US economy by Washington's blockade on Cuba are given in a letter signed recently by a dozen leading US business organizations, including the US Chamber of Commerce.

According to author Margot Pepper, a Mexican-born journalist whose memoir about her year working in Cuba, *Through the Wall: A Year in Havana*, was nominated for the 2006 American Book Award, these organizations urged President-elect Barack Obama to initiate the process of scrapping the almost half a century-old embargo, arguing the cost to the US is \$1.2 billion per year.

More recent sources, says Pepper, put the projected 2009 loss at \$3.6 billion annually in lost sales.

In addition to the millions spent by the Treasury Department in enforcing blockade rules, the United States spends \$27 million each year to broadcast Radio and TV Marti to what critics have termed a black hole, since signals are effectively blocked by the Cuban government.

According to the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, this figure reached half a billion dollars in the last 20 years.

According to the non-profit Cuba Policy Foundation (CPF), the blockade is causing the US economy to lose up to \$1.24 billion a year in agricultural exports alone, and up to \$3.6 billion more a year in associated economic output.

The CPF states that Arkansas alone is suffering half a billion dollars in lost business annually.

According to the American Society of Travel Agents, if the U.S. were to lift its travel restrictions to Cuba, nearly 1.8 million Americans would visit the country by 2010. This could add to US gross domestic product by as much as \$1.6 billion, the society says.

According to Johns Hopkins University, US. businesses have been missing out on up to \$2 billion in annual trade with Cuba, a figure which translates to \$1 billion more in lost trade for the United States than for Cuba each year.

In 2002 the Cuban government estimated the loss to the Cubans at about \$685 million annually. A December 2008 report by the BBC stated that, to date, the blockade has cost Cuba \$93 billion in lost revenue since its introduction in 1962.

No matter whose figures are used, says Margot Pepper, the cost to both countries has more than tripled in less than twenty years--



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something which neither citizenry can afford. The fact that a poor, colonized country can meet the basic needs of all its citizens, underscores how inexpensive such an undertaking really is and could prove instructive as well to the president-elect. In addition to dealing the United States an economic blow, the blockade has deprived US citizens of Cuba's medical breakthroughs such as vaccines for meningitis B, cures for retinitis pigmentosa; a preservative for un-refrigerated milk and PPG, a cholesterol-reducing drug gobbled up by foreigners for its side effect: increased sexual potency.

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The CPF also found that 52 percent of Americans nationwide say the blockade should be scrapped, and that 67 per cent of Americans want to lift the US ban on travel to Cuba immediately. **(PL)**

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