

# House rejects easing exports-to-Cuba limits

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WASHINGTON --

The House on Friday rejected an initiative to ease restrictions on U.S. agricultural exports to Cuba, virtually burying any chance that U.S. policy toward the island could be relaxed by Congress this year.

By a 245-182 margin, the House voted down an amendment presented by Rep. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y., that would have allowed Cuban officials to travel to the United States to inspect U.S. export facilities and products and let Cubans make direct payments to U.S. banks for any purchases.

The initiative would have also allowed the Cubans to pay for the goods after they are shipped from a U.S. port, rather than before as now required.

Rangel's initiative was backed by a coalition of mostly Democratic opponents to U.S. policies toward Cuba and farm-state Republicans, but opposed by Cuban-American lawmakers and others.

Miami Republican Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen argued the initiative would provide Cuba, deemed by the State Department as a state sponsor of terrorism, direct access to U.S. banks, and that Havana would use the visas for its inspectors to infiltrate spies into the United States.

The vote Friday was a defeat for Rangel and other lawmakers who say the U.S. embargo against the island has failed to dislodge the Castro government. Last month, the House voted against an effort to cut U.S. aid to dissident groups, and Democrats did not allow any amendments easing travel restrictions from going to the floor for a vote.

According to a recent report by the U.S. International Trade Commission, an independent government agency that studies trade-related issues, lifting some U.S. restrictions would boost U.S. exports to the island by between \$176 million and \$350 million.