



TRIAL LAWYERS

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VIA EMAIL LARRY.TAWWATER@JUSTICE.ORG

Larry A. Tawwater, Esq., President
American Association for Justice
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14001 Quail Springs Pkwy
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RE: AAJ Sponsored CLE in Cuba

Dear Mr. Tawwater:

I have been a trial lawyer since my graduation from law school in 1976, and for many years a proud member of the American Association for Justice. I was also born in Cuba before coming to this country where I was given the opportunity to study, go to law school and become a lawyer.

Yesterday, I received an email from AAJ with a glossy brochure depicting the streets of old Havana and other beautiful scenes of my native land. Included among the pictures was one of young school children wearing the Communist "Pioneer" uniforms and another picture of a mural of Ernesto "Che" Guevara, a person who was personally responsible for hundreds of cold-blooded murders following the triumph of Fidel Castro and his revolution. The trip purports to be "an unparalleled combination of cultural and legal education". The "legal education" component is meant to fulfill the U.S. government's criteria to be able to travel to the island where I was born.

Reading the "tour highlights" of the brochure makes it obvious that this is nothing other than a tourist junket to the island of Cuba with very little, if any, "legal education". To market it as an educational tour on the part of AAJ is nothing other than shameful.

I will not bore you with details. Suffice it to say that I was born and spent the first decade of my life in Cuba, being forced to flee that island nation when my parents, both attorneys, could no longer independently practice their profession. The Havana bar association's office was promptly shuttered at the behest of the new

government and its members muzzled from speaking out about the atrocities of the new regime. It is a communist dictatorship that does not permit its citizens to engage the government in any meaningful dialogue, nor dissent. It is a country that went from having a remarkably progressive and democratic constitution that guaranteed fundamental rights, to being a one party, one ruler, island where dissent is simply not an option.

I have no fundamental problem with Americans wanting to travel to Cuba to see the island where I was born. I do have a problem with those Americans being bamboozled and being told that they are participating in some type of "people-to-people educational exchange" where they are going to have meaningful interactions with real, local people. To market this junket as such is deceiving.

I am saddened by the fact that an association that I hold dear, the AAJ, has chosen to put its sponsorship dollars above principle and has chosen to endorse this charade. There is no independent judiciary in Cuba; no rule of law as we know it; and certainly nothing that remotely resembles due process or other constitutional rights we hold dear. To have this done in the name of "legal education" is a farce. If this program wants to meet real people, let them meet with dissidents in Cuba, such as the "Ladies in White" that have, at great personal risk and sacrifice, tried to speak up against the abuses of this totalitarian and oppressive regime. Unfortunately, any such efforts would not meet with government approval and thus is completely left out of the tour's agenda.

If this were a group of monied American businessmen going over to find out how they can make a few bucks in Cuba, so be it. But for an esteemed association of trial lawyers with a commendable mission to sponsor such a charade is shameful.

Sincerely yours,



Tomas F. Gamba
TFG/am

cc: Linda Lipsen, CEO
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