



LIFTING THE TRAVEL BAN WILL STRENGTHEN U.S. INTERESTS AND HELP THE CUBAN PEOPLE

For fifty years, U.S. policy toward Cuba – diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions – has failed to advance our goals for human and political rights on the island while also harming the U.S. national interest.


That is why retired U.S. military leaders, respected human rights advocates, former political prisoners and dissidents on the island, and growing majorities of Americans and Cuban-Americans want *all* U.S. citizens to have the right to travel to Cuba as part of a new policy based on engagement with the Cuban people.

1. Retired senior officers of the U.S. armed forces affirm that Cuba is not a security threat, that the current embargo in fact strengthens the Cuban government, and that allowing the freedom to travel to Cuba offers real benefits to the Cuban people.

- In a letter to President Obama, twelve high-ranking retired military officers said that “Cuba ceased to be a military threat decades ago... (but) the current embargo serves more to prop up the Castro regime.” Advocating for the freedom to travel, these esteemed military leaders said “By sending our best ambassadors – the American people – to engage their Cuban neighbors, we have a much better chance of influencing the eventual course of Cuban affairs” and promoting a more pluralistic and open society. – *Letter from retired military officers to President Obama, April 13, 2009.*
- General James T. Hill, a U.S. Army Retired Four Star General, and former Combatant Commander of U.S. Southern Command, has argued that engagement with Cuba would provide the island with an important alternative to Venezuelan and Russian influence. He has also written “Our national policy toward Cuba, to encourage democracy and the overthrow of Fidel’s communist government through sanctions, has failed miserably.” – “*9 Ways for US to talk to Cuba and for Cuba to talk to US,*” *The Center for Democracy in the Americas, 2009.*
- The strategy of starving the Cuban government by restricting U.S. travel is ineffective since Cuba is steadily building beneficial economic and diplomatic relationships with other countries throughout the world such as Venezuela, Brazil, China, Russia, among others.

2. Enforcement of the ban against travel to Cuba wastes U.S. tax dollars and diverts them from real threats, which compromises the security of all Americans.

- In a 2008 report, the GAO found that after 2001, OFAC opened more investigations and imposed more penalties for embargo violations, such as buying Cuban cigars, than for violations of other sanctions, such as those on Iran.

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- The GAO also found that the Treasury Department's disproportionate focus on enforcement of the rules against travel and trade with Cuba "have strained C.B.P.'s [Customs and Border Protection, Department of Homeland Security] capacity to carry out its primary mission of keeping terrorists, criminals and inadmissible aliens from entering the country."

3. Ending the travel ban would be good for the U.S. economy; it would expand demand for U.S. products, help the tourist travel and airline industries, and create much-needed American jobs.

- **U.S. economic output would increase by between \$1.18 billion and \$1.61 billion a year and create 16,888 to 23,020 new jobs** if current restrictions on travel to Cuba were lifted, according to an independent study conducted in 2002 by the Brattle Group, a respected economic forecasting firm.
- According to the Brattle Group report, increased demand for air travel alone would generate significant economic activity due to the corresponding increase in demand for inputs to airline service and the ripple effect on consumer spending. Applying a multiplier estimate of 2.6 to capture these "indirect" and "induced" spending effects, the total impact would range from \$650 million to \$1.08 billion a year in additional U.S. output and the creation of 9,285 to 15,417 new jobs.

4. A majority of Americans and Cuban Americans support unrestricted travel to Cuba for all.

- A recent Ipsos poll taken April 23-27 finds that **67% of all Americans want the right to travel to Cuba**, and 72% of respondents said it would have a positive impact on the island.
- According to a Bendixen and Associates poll taken April 14-16 this year, **two-thirds (67%) of Cuban and Cuban-American adults support the lifting of travel restrictions for all Americans** so that they can also travel to Cuba freely.


5. Prominent U.S. human rights organizations have called for an end to the travel ban concluding that it does nothing to improve the human rights situation on the island.

- "...this policy [the U.S. ban on travel to Cuba] has proved completely ineffective when it comes to pressuring the Cuban government to dismantle its repressive machinery. The Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act is a necessary first step in replacing an ineffective, unilateral policy toward Cuba with a more targeted, multilateral approach." - *José Miguel Vivanco, Americas Director, Human Rights Watch, 2009.*

- “It is well past time to reassess a policy that impedes the ability of American citizens to freely interact with Cubans on a large scale and thus expose them to unfettered information about the outside world. We call on the incoming administration of Barack Obama to reexamine the embargo and to immediately lift the restrictions on remittances and travel to and from the island.” – *Jennifer Windsor, Executive Director of Freedom House.*
- “Improving the lives of the Cuban people and encouraging democracy and human rights in Cuba will best be advanced through more, rather than less, contact between the Cuban and American people.” - *Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard, Bishop of Albany, Chairman Committee on International Justice and Peace, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, endorsing The Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act.*

6. Political dissidents in Cuba want engagement with the U.S. and the freedom to travel for American citizens. They prefer the U.S. approach toward the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the Cold War, supported by Presidents of both parties, to encourage unrestricted travel so that we could share our ideas, values and culture.

- Dissidents and former political prisoners in Cuba recognize this fact and have repeatedly urged the United States to lift restrictions on Americans’ travel to Cuba, and especially for an end to restrictions on family travel:
 - “We fully support lifting all restrictions on Americans to travel to Cuba. It would contribute to better knowing and understanding the realities in our countries. Even by a simple conversation, sharing everyday experiences, Americans would be demonstrating how your society is capable of constantly deepening and improving democracy, and could help our own efforts for democracy.” - *Miriam Leiva, Independent Journalist and Human Rights Activist; Oscar Espinosa Chepe, prisoner of conscience, sentenced to 20 years on March 2003, on conditional release due to serious health problems, April 2009.*
 - "I would love to think that this is the year that the embargo ends. The United States government has to reframe its policy towards Cuba, which has not worked for all these years. Trapped in the middle of the rivalry between governments are the Cuban people and I wish that we were the center of priorities for our government and for the United States." *Yoani Sánchez, a Cuban philologist and blogger who is under permanent surveillance by Cuban government officers, April 23, 2008*
 - "Lifting the embargo won't solve the problems of the Cuban people. Maintaining it is no solution, either." - *Oswaldo Payá, Cuban dissident and leader of the Christian Liberation Movement, Miami Herald, August 2000.*



7. Travel restrictions are inconsistent with U.S. policy on citizen travel to other countries.

- U.S. citizens, barred from traveling freely to Cuba, are allowed to travel to other communist nations, including North Korea, China, and Vietnam. With the recent end to the ban on travel to Libya, Cuba is the only country in the world to which U.S. citizens cannot travel without special government permission.

8. Allowing Americans to travel to Cuba will send an important signal to Latin America as a whole. Currently every nation in the hemisphere - except the U.S. - has full diplomatic relations with Havana. An end to the travel ban would signal a shift in the U.S. approach to Cuba and demonstrate to our democratic allies in the region that we are respecting their concerns while continuing to adhere to our goals for opening political space in Cuba.

- Most other governments have normal diplomatic relations with Cuba, engage with Cuba in other multi-lateral bodies, address concerns about human rights in the context of ongoing dialogue, and place no limitations on the right of their citizens to travel to Cuba.
- At a December 2008 summit in Rio De Janeiro, **the leaders of every Latin American country called on the U.S. to end the embargo against Cuba.** An end to the ban on travel would be a modest step that would respond to the calls of our friends in the hemisphere.
- In an historic agreement at the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) in San Pedro Sula, Honduras on June 2, 2009, foreign ministers agreed by consensus to end Cuba's suspension from the body, imposed in 1962 at the height of the Cold War. After rounds of tough negotiations, the U.S. agreed to the language, showing flexibility and a willingness to listen to regional partners. The final statement set no preconditions, but rather ended the suspension on Cuba and proposed a mechanism for discussion with Cuba if it requests re-admission.

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