



November 19, 2009

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED BY GENERAL BARRY R. McCAFFREY (USA, Ret.)**

**SUBMITTED TO: U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

SUBJECT: *Restrictions on travel by American Citizens to Cuba: Time to Lift the Ban*

Chairman Berman, Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen, it is an honor to submit this statement for the consideration of the Foreign Affairs Committee for the hearing on the U.S. Government's restrictions on travel to Cuba by American citizens.

Restrictions by the U.S. Government on travel by American citizens to Cuba have been part of the long-term U.S. policy to force political change in Cuba via restrictions on commerce, communications, travel, and other forms of transactions that are routine between nation states. The bottom line is that this embargo policy has failed to precipitate regime change in Cuba, will not do so in the future, and harms long-term U.S. interests by limiting the ability to develop mutually beneficial relationships that will transcend the inevitable political transition that will occur in Cuba.

The U.S. commercial, economic, and financial embargo has waxed and waned over the almost fifty years it has been in existence, reflecting periods of heightened tensions between our two nations, ideological tendencies of different U.S. administrations, and changing perceptions of the U.S. self interest. Legislation passed by Congress in 2000 to allow the export to Cuba of U.S. agricultural products, for example, was principally championed by agricultural concerns, which were interested in capitalizing on a nearby market. Over the past decade, the United States has become Cuba's most important food and agricultural product supplier, accounting for more than one-fourth of the country's total food and agricultural imports.¹

Restrictions by the U.S. Government on travel to Cuba by its citizens have also been modified over the years. Between 1977 and 1982, there were no restrictions on travel. The Administration of President George W.

¹ Cuba's Food & Agriculture Situation Report, Office of Global Analysis, FAS, USDA, March 2008, <http://www.fas.usda.gov/itp/cuba/CubaSituation0308.pdf>

Bush placed additional restrictions on travel to Cuba by Americans to visit family members or participate in educational exchanges or religious activities. The Obama Administration recently loosened restrictions on family travel.

These restrictions on travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens have nothing to do with the totalitarian nature of the Cuban regime or its reprehensive repression of political freedom. There are no corresponding restrictions by the U.S. Government on travel by Americans to the few remaining communist countries in the world (e.g. People's Republic of China, North Korea, Vietnam), countries with dictatorial regimes (e.g. Burma) , or countries with which we have problematic bilateral relations (e.g. Iran). The restrictions on travel to Cuba and the enduring embargo are the legacy of the antagonism that has characterized the U.S. – Cuban relationship for the past half century.

CONCLUSION

It does the United States no good to unilaterally maintain these counter-productive policies. The Castro regime has lost legitimacy domestically and internationally. The U.S. embargo is used by the Castro regime to foment Anti-American sentiment. Lifting the embargo will be a catalyst for inevitable political change. The greater people-to-people contacts that will be the result of eliminating restrictions on travel will reduce the political isolation of the Cuban people and increase domestic pressure on the Cuban regime.

Restrictions on travel and the embargo are anachronistic policies that do not serve the U.S. national interest and unnecessarily limit the freedom of Americans to travel where they choose. There is no justifiable reason for the United States Government to decide that Cuba is the only country in the world where it will restrict travel by U.S. citizens. Congress should not wait for the Administration to change this absurd policy. It should enact legislation that eliminates all restrictions on travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens.

General McCaffrey currently serves as an adjunct professor of international affairs at West Point. He previously served as U.S. drug czar from 1996 to 2001 and prior to that as Commander, United States Southern Command from 1994 to 1996. He served four combat tours and was wounded in action three times.