

**HEARING OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS,
HUMAN RIGHTS, AND OVERSIGHT OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN AFFAIRS; SUBJECT: FAMILIES TORN APART: HUMAN RIGHTS
AND U.S. RESTRICTIONS ON CUBAN-AMERICAN TRAVEL; CHAIRED BY:
REPRESENTATIVE BILL DELAHUNT (D-MA) WITNESSES PANEL I:
REPRESENTATIVE JO ANN EMERSON (R-MO); REPRESENTATIVE RAY
LAHOOD (R-IL); REPRESENTATIVE THADDEUS G. MCCOTTER (R-MI);
PANEL II: MARLENE ARZOLA, CUBAN-AMERICAN WITH FAMILY IN CUBA;
LUISA MONTERO-DIAZ, CUBAN-AMERICAN WITH FAMILY IN CUBA;
HECTOR PALACIOS, CUBAN PRO-DEMOCRACY ACTIVIST AND FORMER
POLITICAL PRISONER; BLANCA GONZALEZ, MOTHER OF POLITICAL
PRISONER, CUBAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST; PANEL III: PHILIP PETERS,
VICE PRESIDENT, LEXINGTON INSTITUTE; FRANCISCO J. HERNANDEZ,
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EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER, CUBA STUDY GROUP; NINOSKA PEREZ
CASTELLON, BOARD MEMBER, CUBAN LIBERTY COUNCIL; SYLVIA
IRIONDO, PRESIDENT, MOTHERS AGAINST REPRESSION (M.A.R. POR
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Body

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REP. DELAHUNT: This hearing will come to order. I want to apologize particularly to my colleagues for my tardiness. It's my intention this morning to make my statement and then go to my friend from California for his statement, and then go to the panel. And obviously, understanding that other members of the committee will be coming in and out depending on their schedules, and allow them to make their remarks as they come. And then we will go to the second panel.

Last year Mr. LaHood, Ms. Emerson, our full committee Chair, Howard Berman, Mr. Flake, Mr. Meeks, and Dr. Ron Paul joined me in introducing the Cuban-American Family Rights Restoration Act, House Resolution 757. This bill would allow American citizens and permanent residents with relatives in Cuba, to travel whenever they want, without having to get permission from our own government.

It would allow them to carry any remittances in any amount to give to their families. And it would prohibit the president from imposing any restrictions on family travel. We introduced this bill to eliminate restrictions imposed by the Bush administration in 2004. Until then, Cuban-Americans could effectively travel to Cuba whenever they wanted, if the purpose was to visit family.

These family visits were critical for Cubans on the islands; their relatives brought money, medicine, clothes, and humanitarian supplies. But they were just as important for Cuban-Americans, because these visits allowed them to fulfill the most basic of human impulses, being with family. These trips were a very clear and unequivocal statement by Cuban-Americans that they did not want politics to trump family.

But in 2004, new restrictions were imposed on Cuban-Americans. The word "family" was redefined to exclude aunts and uncles and cousins. And now, Cuban-Americans can only travel to Cuba if they get permission from our government; even worse, they can only go once every three years.

And there are no humanitarian exemptions, not even to care for a terminally ill parent or child, not even for a death in the family. Let me repeat that -- no humanitarian exemptions whatsoever. I would hope that we all could agree that that's particularly cruel, and from my perspective, morally repugnant.

But this isn't really just about Cuba policy, a policy that I would submit has been an abysmal failure, a policy that has reduced American influence on the island to almost nothing, even as changes are occurring. It's as if there's a new embargo, an embargo on American influence in Cuba, for these particular restrictions that specifically target families make it something much more than just policy, for it's about truly family values, American values, if you will.

It's about who we are and what we stand for. It's not about Fidel or Raul Castro, we know who they are and we know what they stand for. The callous nature of these restrictions was bluntly stated by one of the policy's authors in response to a question by Congresswoman Emerson, who had concerns about these new restrictions. Here's what he had to say to her -- and I was present, along, I think, with Representative Flake.

"An individual can decide when they want to travel once every three years, and the decision is up to them. So if they have a dying relative, they have to figure out when they want to travel." Those are his words. I would ask all of us to reflect on that statement for a moment. Do you want to visit your terminally ill mother on her deathbed or attend her funeral?

Pick one, because you can't do both. And God help you if your mother and father die within three years of each other. Just imagine having to decide which funeral you're going to attend. I would suggest that these restrictions are stunning in their lack of humanity. I believe they are anti-family and un-American. And they only magnify the pain and the anguish and the heartache that families torn apart by political ideology must endure and suffer.

The fact is that Cuban-Americans are the victims of a pernicious political discrimination. No other community in the United States is punished like this because of hostility between governments. Not Iranian Americans, not Korean Americans, not Americans with families in Burma, Uzbekistan, or Zimbabwe, just Cuban-Americans.

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According to a recent report in the Miami Herald, one of our witnesses here today, Ms. Ninoska Perez Castellon -- I hope I'm pronouncing that correctly -- say Cuban-Americans who are worried about their relatives should consider the greater good. "There are 11 million people under the same conditions.

What we should be looking for are ways to benefit the 11 million people" -- I agree, I agree, -- "and not think of what we can do for our own relatives," she went on. I can't disagree more. I cannot disagree more. If we take care of our families, everyone benefits. The community at large will benefit.

And as the "El Nuevo Herald" editorialized this week, "free men do not make policy with other people's pain."

The tragedy of these restrictions exclusively targeted at Cuban- Americans is underscored and amplified by the devastation wrought by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. The Red Cross' early estimate of total damage is in the neighborhood of \$4 billion. Some 2.5 million Cubans had to be evacuated.

Another of today's witnesses, Mr. Ignacio Sosa, opine that the damage to Cuba's economy from Gustav alone will exceed that which the U.S. suffered after Katrina and Rita combined. What we have is a disaster of epic proportions.

And yet, these Bush administration restrictions complicate the natural generosity of Americans, particularly, Cuban-Americans who are well-known for their compassion, and at a time when their families are desperate for both material and emotional support, the opportunity to see and talk and embrace each other.

These restrictions are prohibiting American citizens from helping their families in Cuba. And that's why I'm filing new legislation later on today -- or maybe even early tomorrow morning, depending what time we finish -- with Mr. Flake, Ms. DeLauro, Mr. McGovern, (Mr. Emerson ?), Mr. LaHood, and Dr. Paul and others, that would lift for six months the limits on family travel, remittances, and care packages.

I want to be very clear I still believe that these restrictions should be eliminated entirely. But I'm willing to compromise in an effort to avoid any humanitarian disaster. For if we fail to act, we're not simply going to be accused of double standards.

Remember just yesterday, this committee approved a down payment for a billion dollars to a repressive regime in Georgia for humanitarian relief, a billion dollars. But more importantly from my perspective, and I know it's shared by some, really betray those American ideals that make us unique among the family of nations.

Now let me turn to my good friend and Ranking Member Dana Rohrabacher for any comments he wishes to make. Dana.

REP. DANA ROHRABACHER (R-CA): Yes. Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, without objection, I would like to ask the record be kept open for a week to allow for statements from additional witnesses to be submitted for the record.

REP. DELAHUNT: Without objection.

REP. ROHRABACHER: And specifically, Mr. Chairman, I would like to note that one of our minority witnesses, Armando Valladares, who served 22 years in Castro's jails as a political prisoner and an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience, was delayed in Ecuador where he is seeking the release of a prisoner of conscience there, and has just established a branch of his Human Rights Foundation.

And he is unable to join us today. I ask that his statement be made part of the record. And as you know, Mr. Valladares' memoir of his time in the Cuban gulag "Against All Hope" was an international best seller. And I am proud to say that my former boss, President Reagan, appointed him as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, where he represented our nation and the interests of freedom-loving people everywhere.

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And I am honored that Blanca Gonzalez has agreed to appear at such a short notice to offer testimony when Mr. Valladares was not able to. Now with that said, just a little bit about the subject matter today. And I'm looking forward to the testimony and to some frank discussion about the nature of our relationship with Cuba and the nature of the Cuban government.

I disagree with you, Mr. Chairman, in just about everything you just said. And this has nothing to do with the families, and has everything to do with the nature of the Cuban government. We don't have this problem with people who want to go to Brazil or other countries in Latin America. Why is that?

Well, that's because we're not against families, we're against a communist dictatorship that hates the United States so much that it has agreed to do anything it could to hurt us. Years ago, of course, Fidel Castro hated our country so much that he agreed to put nuclear-armed missiles in his country. And then when the Soviet Union put those missiles in the country, Fidel Castro argued that they used them, which then precipitated a mass slaughter of Americans.

Now we have a regime headed by Castro, and now he's handed it off to his brother. That shows you what a wonderful, you know, dictatorship of proletariat it's all about. I mean, it's just like feudalism. And father to son, and we have problems here in our country too. I don't necessarily support that either -- (laughs.)

But the fact is that Fidel Castro from -- and I'm anxious to hear the details about some of the things that we may not be aware of, for example, the vast wealth of Fidel Castro. Where did that vast wealth come from? I mean we talk about here, my goodness, the families can't come and help their families when they are in trouble. Well, that is not because of anything, except Fidel Castro.

Number one, he is -- the totalitarian anti-American regime that he has, if he didn't long for that power and keep that power in his hands, that problem would be dissolved. But not only that, but why is there such need for families in Cuba to need help from their families that have left for United States? Because Fidel Castro has raped that country.

Fidel Castro is a man of vast wealth, and where did he get it? It came right out of the hide of his people. If we're going to make things better, we have to be realistic. We want things to be better. Fidel Castro and his regime not only keeps political prisoners, but every time anybody decides to cite something and express some displeasure over the corruption and repression in Cuba, they are targeted by gangs of thugs who go to their home and beat them up and beat their families up.

This is right out of Nazi Germany. And that still happens to this day. And to this day, Fidel Castro still has what they call a "block spy system." You know what a block spy system is. That's where every block has a spy who makes sure that they report on anything you do if it's out of the ordinary.

Now, Cuba's problems are not caused by United States policy. Cuba's problems are caused by Fidel Castro's dictatorship, and we should do everything to eliminate those problems by eliminating that dictatorship and helping the people of Cuba have a democratic government.

I remember during the days when Saddam Hussein was still in power. I remember when there was this great outcry among my friends -- and who I have to disagree with; they are still my friends and colleagues -- blaming the United States for the fact that the little children of Iraq didn't have medicine even though we fully understood that we had a recent agreement with Saddam Hussein to make sure he had enough revenue to provide for all the needs of his children.

But what was he doing? We know now he was squandering all of that money on weapons. So who is to blame, the United States of America or Saddam Hussein? Now, what we want to do is make this a better world by making sure that regimes like the old Soviet Union collapse, which they have.

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And we do not make it a better world by treating a communist dictatorship with all of the evil that that represents, as if it was a government like in Belgium or in Brazil or another democratic government. Now, we should treat that government differently, and we should seek to try to help those people who want to bring democracy.

Changing our rules to try to treat them the same way we do any other country is not going to bring about more freedom or change in the condition of the Cuban people. So with that said, I'm looking forward to the testimony today. And thank you for calling this hearing.

REP. DELAHUNT: I thank my friend from California.

Now, let me introduce our first panel. I know they have schedules that are frenetic, and they have other commitments. But they are three outstanding members of the House of Representatives.

Representative Jo Ann Emerson has represented the 8th congressional district in Congress since 1996 under the principle of putting people before politics. In Washington, DC, she's a high profile leader on agriculture, energy, health care, and other issues that disproportionately affect Americans in rural parts of the country. From her position on the House Appropriations Committee, she conducts oversight on the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Department of Energy, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Department of the Interior. I'm going to cut short, because I know she's anxious to give her testimony. Let me just simply say she is an outstanding member of Congress and a dear friend.

And let me now go to -- well, let me go to Ray LaHood and introduce him. Ray is serving his seventh term representing the 18th district in Illinois. Over the years, Congressman LaHood has been lauded by many for his leadership at the local, state, and national levels. And I can say this with candor and honesty, he is widely viewed as someone who has a deep respect for the institution of Congress, and who works across party lines on issues that are of a priority to the American people. He is a leader in terms of efforts to establish a higher level of civility, decorum, and bipartisanship in the House.

And let me just say this; he's retiring voluntarily at the end of this term. He was elected with around 70 percent of the vote in his last election. He is an individual who has made a superb contribution to this institution, to this country.

And I know I speak for all of the Democrats, Ray. You are going to be sorely missed.

Now last, but not least, we have Representative Thaddeus McCotter, who was first elected in Congress to -- 2002 to represent the citizens of Western Oakland and Western Wayne -- counties -- Counties, I'm sorry for that. He too is a superb member, well respected in the Republican conference, and serves as chairman of the House Republican Policy Committee. And I think that's a position that was once held by Vice President Cheney.

Is that true, Representative?

REP. MCCOTTER: (Off mike.)

REP. DELAHUNT: I know the gentleman. He's also a member of the House Financial Services Committee where he serves on the Capital Markets, Insurance, and Government Sponsored Enterprises and the Housing and Community Opportunity Committees.

Welcome, Thad.

I think we'll begin with Congresswoman Emerson. We will then go to Congressman McCotter, and we will wrap it up with our friend from Illinois, Mr. LaHood.

Jo Ann.

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REP. EMERSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also want to thank Ranking Member Rohrabacher for allowing me to speak before the committee today to discuss an issue of great importance to so very many Cuban-Americans, and that is the ability to travel and visit their families in Cuba. However, before I begin my formal remarks, I want to make a response if I could, to Ranking Member Rohrabacher's comments about the fact that this is really not about travel, but rather about the Government of Cuba. I am sorry, sir, that is not correct.

The fact is that those people who oppose the policy of allowing Cuban-Americans more frequent travel to their home country, always make it an argument about the Castro brothers and never understand the human value of this.

And when Chairman Delahunt mentioned in the discussion with the State Department folks and the Treasury folks that we had, and my question about going to visit one's family, you know, and having to decide between going to see them on their deathbed or going to their funeral, the statement was that the intent of Congress makes this policy that we are now changing, correct.

Well, the intent of Congress, since I happen to be one of the authors of the TESRA (ph) bill that changed the law to allow us to have a little bit more contact and a little bit of trade, that was not the intent of Congress. And I just have to point that out, because I just want you to reflect upon the fact that yes, that this happened in North Korea, yes, that this happened in Iran. Guess what, Americans could go visit their families. You just can't do it in Cuba. And it's unconscionable.

And I feel very, very strongly about that, and I want to really share a story if I could, about a friend of mine. His name is Carlos Lazo, and he's a Cuban-American who came to the United States in 1991 on a raft. And I met him in the spring of 2005 after he had completed a tour of duty in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

At that time, Carlos had two sons living in Cuba. And he was also a sergeant in the Washington State National Guard. He visited his sons back in 2004 before he was going to be deployed. And I can tell you that as a mother of two soldiers who have served in Iraq, and one will be going back again, I really can certainly sympathize with the strong desire of any family member to be able to spend time with their sons and daughters, spouses, grandparents, aunts or uncles, prior to deployment.

There's nothing more important. And let me say too, that during his R&R, in 2004 June, Carlos actually sought to visit his family and traveled from the Middle East to Miami with the intention of flying on to Havana, as he had always done. And I can empathize. But you know, I was fortunate to be able to spend time with my children before they left for Iraq.

Unfortunately, when Carlos got back and wanted to go visit his sons, he was informed by our government at the Miami Airport that our government had imposed new restrictions which not only redefined who family was, but also prevented him from being able to visit his sons, to prevent a father from being able to visit his sons.

So after being denied the right to visit, Carlos then returned to the battlefield where once again he served our country with so much honor, received the Bronze Star for his valor at the Battle of Fallujah. He continues to serve in the Washington State National Guard, and has an unshakeable love for the country he risked so much to get to, and then again he risked his life to defend it.

While Carlos' story is in many ways unique, ultimately, it really is all too common. Every day a significant event occurs in the life of a Cuban or a Cuban-American family -- a birth, an illness, a wedding, or a death, and the restrictions now prevent those families from sharing the moments when they most need to be together.

Mr. Rohrabacher, I ask what would happen -- how would you feel if you couldn't see your triplets? How would you feel if you weren't able to see them?

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REP. ROHRABACHER: Should I answer the question, I would say that if I didn't see my triplets and it meant freedom in my country and -- so that other people in the future would be free and young people would be free, that would be more important, yes.

REP. EMERSON: I guess I'm a mom, and I feel differently about it. And I think that 40 years of the same policy and nothing changing, doesn't matter. You got to see -- and some people live and die for children. Anyway, during all of these times, I think it's irresponsible, reprehensible that Cuban-Americans wouldn't be able to share in these joys.

You know, family is really one of life's unique blessings. And I'd like to quote Desmond Tutu who said, "You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them." And unfortunately, the Code of Federal Regulations has chosen who can be a Cuban-American's family, and rations out that gift in three-year intervals.

Congress is not without the ability to change these policies. At present, there is language included in the Fiscal Year 2009 Financial Services Appropriations Bill which would extend the definition of a member of a person's immediate family to include an aunt, an uncle, a niece, a nephew, or first cousin. And it would also decrease the amount of time between travel.

I'm very pleased as Chairman Delahunt mentioned that he has again introduced stand-alone legislation which would restore the rights of Cuban-American citizens to travel to Cuba, a more ideal situation would not require annual action. As I mentioned, and having spoken to so many Cuban-American families both within and without and outside of Cuba, there are a lot of joys and a lot of hardships that they are not able to properly respond to.

Obviously, the ongoing trauma that Hurricanes Gustav and Ike inflicted on the Cuban people can now be added to the long list of life-changing events. When a hurricane strikes in the United States, the outpouring of assistance to relief organizations is overwhelming. Our nations, our communities, our people, and our families, they come together and respond to this scale of tragedy.

Americans will risk their health, safety, and property to look these loved ones in the eye, hug them, and help start the healing process. I have been told, we all have been told that more than 500,000 houses have been damaged in Cuba, 90,000 homes completely destroyed. And as Mr. Delahunt said, the damage is in the billions of dollars.

Those of us blessed with family members would surely agree with Archbishop Tutu that they are gifts of God, and the governments should not separate them --- not during a time of joy, a time of hardship, certainly not during a time of crisis.

With that I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I'm ready to take any questions.

REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you, Representative Emerson.

And now we go to Representative McCotter.

REP. MCCOTTER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for allowing me to testify. In the interests of your time, I will associate myself with the introductory remarks of Mr. Rohrabacher regarding the intrinsically evil nature of the communist Cuban government. I will also stipulate to the noble intentions of everyone in this room, everyone in this committee, everyone on this panel. Your compassion is historic, and it is duly noted.

Unfortunately, your compassion is what the butchers bet on. History abounds with such cynically cruel incidents that people like the Castro regime using every effort by people of goodwill, for whatever reason, to turn them into weapons to be used for the oppression of the Cuban people. What we must recognize is how in the hands of this evil Castro regime every concession becomes a weapon.

Thus we should recognize one elementary fact -- Castro could lift any embargo in a heartbeat. He could allow his people to be free. And then the trade and the reciprocity and the family reunions could occur. With this law it is

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difficult even under such difficult circumstances as the Cuban people find themselves. We must not reward communist intransigence, because this isn't how we feel about us. It is about freedom for Cubans.

Of course, this issue can be about us. For no matter how noble our intentions, if we betray the oppressed Cuban people and compel Castro's political prisoners to peer through their bars to behold our beacon of liberty vanish across scant miles of sea, it will be about us and about our abject failure to champion human freedom. Thank you.

REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you, Thad.

And now last on this panel, our friend, Congressman Ray LaHood. Ray.

REP. LAHOOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding this hearing. And thank you for your kind comments about our service in the House. I appreciate that very much, and I appreciate the time that you and I have spent working on other legislation that ultimately became law. It took us five years to accomplish that.

And I know that you all will be working for extended period of time beyond this to accomplish our goal to allow family members and others to visit Cuba. I want to illustrate something that I've been involved with during the time that I came to Congress in 1995. Our government had a travel ban on Lebanon. My grandparents came to this country -- actually came to Peoria in 1895 what was then Syria, now is Lebanon.

And so I decided to take a great deal of interest in the country of Lebanon. And the reason that I mention this is that there was a travel ban in 1995 by our country on Lebanese Americans traveling to visit family members and others. And so I decided to go to Lebanon myself. And as the case with Cuba, members of Congress can go to Cuba, but family members can't.

Members of Congress could go to Lebanon -- which I did, and I've been there now 13 times out of the 14 years I've been in Congress -- and while the travel restriction was on, members of Congress could travel to Lebanon. And when I got there, what I found was a very peace-loving country, even though Syria had influence, even though Hezbollah had influence in the south of Beirut, in the southern part of the country. What I found was that even though there were influences of terrorists and terrorist governments from outside the country, it was a pretty safe place to be. And I found no threat to myself or to others that were visiting there.

And over a period of time working with President Clinton's team, secretary, then Secretary of State, Christopher, and then Secretary Albright over a period of time, we were able to make the case that there -- we were not going to have any great influence on Lebanon's ability to be a good upstanding country and the people there, by prohibiting family members from traveling there.

And over time, we were able to persuade the Clinton administration, ultimately Secretary Albright and President Clinton to lift the travel ban. And my point in using that illustration is how do we hurt Castro by inhibiting family members traveling there to visit their loved ones? How does that hurt him?

And by the way, folks, Fidel Castro is no longer in charge of the country. And my point is we are not hurting him, but we are hurting the ability of family members to travel there. I had a young woman in my office recently about a year ago whose family was from Iraq. And she was a visiting student. And she was going to take leave from my office and live in Iraq for a summer. And she did that.

And my point is even though we have great difficulty with -- and this was the time during which Saddam was the leader -- and my point is she was able to go there. She was safe. She was able to visit family members. What good does it do for us to have a policy that in no way inhibits Castro or his family or other leaders in the country from doing whatever they want to do by the inability of family members to go there and visit?

It's an antiquated policy. It's an outdated policy. Our job as legislators is to look at problems and to look at policies that simply do not make sense in the real world. We are in the 21st century. And we live in a very small world. And you know what this is all about. This is about presidential politics, and it's about politics in Southern Florida.

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And my hope is that whoever gets elected president, whether it's Senator McCain or Senator Obama, they will do the same thing that President Nixon did when he made a trip to China. Maybe one of them will make a trip to Cuba and reach out. If we're not talking to people, we are never going to have the ability to work out our differences or work out, what we believe, are the opportunities to engage these people.

You look what's happened all around the world where we've engaged governments that we didn't like, we didn't agree with their policies. And the idea that restricting family members is somehow going to hurt Castro is nonsense. And everybody in this room knows that. It doesn't affect him one bit, or his regime.

What it does do is send a pretty loud message that we are very insensitive to the people, very insensitive to the people who really want to visit family members, really want to have opportunity to go back and visit their homeland. This is an outdated, antiquated law, and it should be changed.

And I'm happy to be one of the original co-sponsors of your bill, Mr. Chairman, that will begin to open the door and open a pathway like we did in Lebanon.

And it took us a long time to do it. So keep up the fight, and eventually this policy will be changed, and the loved ones of those who want to visit will be able to do that. And lots of other opportunities will begin to happen. Thank you for allowing me to testify today.

REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you, Ray.

And I'm going to ask the panel if they have any questions of the remaining two members.

I call on Congressman Ron Paul.

REP. RON PAUL (R-TX): Mr. Chairman, I don't exactly have a question. I'd like to make a comment and then ask them if they want to respond, if I could.

REP. DELAHUNT: Of course.

REP. PAUL: But first off, I want to thank you for holding these hearings. I think they are very important, and I know you've made an effort to be fair and balanced. And you had both sides expressed here before the committee --

REP. DELAHUNT: Well, if the gentleman would yield for a moment, I want to really underscore that the three members of Congress that are testifying here today are all Republican. So I don't want it reported somewhere that this is a partisan issue. This is not a partisan issue.

Please proceed.

REP. PAUL: But -- I would like to contribute more to this effort to be fair and balanced and tell you that I agree with every single thing you said in your opening statement. But I would like to just make a comment, you know, about this whole issue. So I was delighted to hear the testimony.

But you know, the ranking member made some very strong points. And I -- of course, I'm on the other side of that issue, but I would agree with his good intentions. But I would like to remind him also that when one is set on a road of good intentions on just where that usually leads us, and the good intentions won't work.

And it is so clearly evident that sanctions don't work. And the unintended consequences are so important. I think people who are frightened about reaching out, I think they are insecure with their own beliefs, and I think that there is a lack of confidence that trade and freedom works.

And I think the Chinese example is perfect because they were ruthless, but now they're more capitalistic than we are. Sure they are way imperfect, but they're our banker. And what are we doing? We're socializing our industries. So --

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REP. DELAHUNT: Would the gentleman yield for a moment? Now, what we're doing is we are borrowing from the Chinese. That's what we are doing and --

REP. PAUL: Yeah, we're borrowing. They have become our banker. But think of what the efforts were made when we were going to take on the communists of Vietnam, fighting and dying with the French for 20 years. And all of a sudden, we give up on that approach. Then we trade with them. Their president comes here. We talk to them.

The Founders were right about this issue. They emphasized this, we should trade with people, be friends with people. You'll never find another perfect nation. If we see imperfection in the world, our obligation is within our own selves and within our own country. But this reaching out, to me, is so, so important that we do this.

And this whole idea that punishing the people of Cuba -- this is what we're doing. And the chairman was right about the humanitarian approach. Most of the time people think about extending humanitarian aid. All right, we feel sorry for people. Let's appropriate a billion dollars or \$10 billion on and on.

At the same time, here's something. We remove government restrictions that emphasizes a humanitarian approach. So this, to me, is so crucial. If you believe in liberty, if you believe in freedom, if you have confidence, you shouldn't be intimidating and say no, what we want to do is confront and intimidate.

Castro -- Castro is past tense. He is gone. I mean he is gone from the scene. And you know, we should be worrying about what we do on the eastern side of the island, Guantanamo, that's what we ought to be worried about rather than the serious problems that Castro causes.

So I want to thank the chairman for these hearings, and I appreciate very much this opportunity. And I would see if anybody wants to make a comment.

REP. EMERSON: I'd like to comment, please, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much, Mr. Paul.

First of all, let me say this. None of us -- and I believe I can speak for Ray as well -- none of us are saying that the Castro brothers are good people. I mean there are definite human rights abuses. There are definite problems and a lack of freedom in many cases for the people in Cuba.

And there's no question about that. But all we're doing, number one, is giving now Raul Castro, formerly Fidel Castro, an excuse to beat up on America, an excuse to make us look bad in the eyes of every Cuban person and who is on the island. And I think all of us know, as Ray pointed out, as you all mentioned, that face-to-face contact, visits, educational visits and the like, that's the very best ambassador for democracy that I can think of.

It certainly has worked with other regimes, and I still -- I do want to point out once again that in my opinion, there is no difference between the human rights violations imposed by Fidel Castro or even perhaps Raul Castro, and those by Kim Jong-il in North Korea, and in Iran by Ahmadinejad and others. There's no difference.

And so we can't have a double standard. Well, we can, we obviously do have the double standards -- makes us look like hypocrites.

REP. PAUL: Mr. Chairman?

REP. DELAHUNT: Dr. Paul?

REP. PAUL: Can I ask for 30 seconds more, please?

REP. DELAHUNT: Sure.

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REP. PAUL: Okay. I'd like to make one point. During the presidential election campaign, we had a debate in Florida, and I brought up our position that we should be more open. And the crowd was made up of mostly people 50 and older. And I was booed and hissed. But later on, I had a luncheon with young Cuban-Americans, and they loudly cheered. That is the future. The past is this old approach that has staled for 40 years. So that was a real experience for me.

REP. EMERSON: Let me just point out that having a meeting just earlier in the week with a person who lives in Miami, who has worked very hard with the community at large, tells me that because of -- in the aftermath of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, that the entire Cuban-American community regarded the most conservative, the most liberal toward other kinds of relations with Cuba, have all come together because they realize the desperate need of the Cuban people in the aftermath of these two terrible tragedies.

REP. DELAHUNT: Congressman Flake.

REP. JEFF FLAKE (R-AZ): I just want to thank the witnesses. I know that as long as I've been in Congress, both of them have worked on this issue, and worked very, very hard on this issue. Particularly with Congressman LaHood retiring, I think we all owe him a lot for standing up and taking a principled position and a difficult position sometimes in our party, and also for Jo Ann Emerson for working so hard on many of these issues.

And let me just say I think that people can make the arguments effectively and persuasively sometimes on whether travel will or will not help a brutal regime like we see in Cuba. I think there are arguments that can be made on both sides. I happen to believe that the arguments on the side of allowing freedom are far more persuasive to me.

But as long as the arguments can be made on either side, then it seems to me to be a terrible thing to tell someone else, somebody who does have family there, that I am going to impose my feelings about whether or not this will produce regime change or how effective the policy can be on you.

Now, somebody may take the position and can take the position always under a free system that if I have triplets living on the island or if I have family members on the island or anything, I will not visit them until freedom comes to that island. That is a position that anyone, any Cuban-American in Florida or New Jersey or in Arizona or anywhere should be able to take.

But by the same token, I, as a member of Congress or in an official position, should not be able to tell another Cuban-American family you are going to make that choice too. You have to make the choice of whether to visit your mother on her deathbed or whether to go to her funeral because you can't go to both. That is simply wrong.

And when we talk about it as mentioned that we have to champion human freedom, how in the world do we champion human freedom when we tell a family I'm going to impose my views on you because I think that the regime will change faster if you stay away? You can make that choice yourself, but I'm going to impose that choice on you anyway.

And that just seems to me at the core of this argument. The default should always be freedom, should always be freedom unless there is a compelling national security reason otherwise, which is absent in this case, particularly when we've gone on 49 years with this regime with some form of travel restrictions going on and we still have this regime.

It's tough to make a compelling, I would think, national security reason. You can make some other arguments. But like I say, as long as there is an argument, as long as it is not clear-cut and settled, to tell a family that you cannot visit your family in need -- and right now, look at the situation right now. A massive hurricane, devastation on the island, some death, a lot of suffering, and families can't even go and give aid and comfort. And that, to me, is simply, simply wrong.

So I thank the witnesses for all the work over the years that you've done. And I agree with what you've said. I yield back.

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REP. DELAHUNT: If I can, Congressman Flake, your observations prompts me to read into the record, quote, that I think reflects the sentiments that you just expressed. It's from a blog on the Internet. It was brought to my attention yesterday by staff because I'm not really conversant with the blogosphere. But the blog is called "Kill Castro."

So I guess we can presume that its authors are not fans of Fidel or Raul, but they support ending restrictions on travel and remittances. And here's what they have to say, "Why do we want to go against the grain of normal human feelings which are, according to our culture, to help people in need? Why do we want people to forget about their families and ignore their pleas?

"Is it going to destroy the tyranny, or is it going to send a message to Cuba that is totally negative? Do we think that the people of Cuba are really going to ignore the fact that some of us are for their punishment? Who gave us the moral authority to tell free people, Cuban exiles, what to do, and who gave us moral authority to impose only one view on them?

"Our position is that there should be total freedom to do what you want, go to Cuba or not, send money or not, and that's going to be your own personal decision and responsibility. It's not our position to dictate what anybody should do."

You are not part of this blog, I take it, Congressman Flake?

(No audible response.)

REP. DELAHUNT: Okay. But I think it's important to read that in the record as well. And unless any other member has any questions of --

REP. ROHRABACHER: Mr. Chairman -- Mr. Chairman?

REP. DELAHUNT: Dana.

REP. ROHRABACHER: I feel like I'm a little outnumbered here today. But that's okay. Let me note that the restrictions that were put on travel on Lebanon, I understand, were put there after American citizens and others who traveled to Lebanon were kidnapped, and precipitated a major crisis that led to very -- you know, death of American Marines, et cetera, as we got involved in Lebanon.

And certainly the restrictions that you talked about, Mr. LaHood, were basically put in place specifically to prevent the Americans from being kidnapped over there. Was that not the case?

REP. LAHOOD: They were put in place because of what people believed were terrorist groups coming in from Syria and also living in the country as members of Hezbollah.

REP. ROHRABACHER: Right.

REP. LAHOOD: And my point is that the restrictions were lifted, notwithstanding the fact that -- you know, they never really --

REP. ROHRABACHER: That is correct. That's correct. We did not reach -- we did not do that. That's right --

REP. DELAHUNT: -- to finish --

REP. ROHRABACHER: Well -- okay. Go right ahead. Finish your thought and then I'll --

REP. LAHOOD: Well, my thought is this. We've had these restrictions in Cuba, and they've had no impact on Castro. They haven't hurt him one bit. They've had no impact. And that was the point we were making with the

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restrictions. A number of people travel to Lebanon and were not injured, were not killed, and ultimately we made that point to the State Department, and they lifted them.

REP. ROHRABACHER: Right. And we -- at the same time, when we were realizing that a lot of problems in Lebanon were created by Syria, we just sort of backed --

REP. LAHOOD: Syria and Hezbollah, which existed in the country.

REP. ROHRABACHER: Right. And we backed down from that. And some people believe that perhaps that message was not the right kind of message to send to Syria, or to eventually the others in that region like Iran, which was not a good message to send, that we were moving back from those restrictions.

REP. LAHOOD: Let me -- can I ask you a question?

REP. ROHRABACHER: Well, first of all, I got a little limited time here and let me --

REP. LAHOOD: Well, I --

REP. DELAHUNT: My friend, you can take as much time as you want. So do not feel that we will impose any limitation.

(Cross talk.)

REP. LAHOOD: When you finish, I just have one question for you.

REP. ROHRABACHER: Go right ahead.

REP. LAHOOD: No, go ahead, you finish.

REP. ROHRABACHER: Okay. About the example of China that was used, let me just say that China, at a certain point, was actually liberalizing dramatically.

And it ended up in Tiananmen Square, where there was a turning point, tipping point. And we decided just to do visits as usual with the Chinese after they slaughtered the democracy movement.

And I believe that China is perhaps one of America's worst adversaries right now, and potential enemies that could do great harm in the future. I think this nonchalant -- well, we treat Chinese just like we do everybody else.

Look how much trade they have, while ignoring the thousands of people who are being arrested for their religious convictions, ignoring the Falun Gong being thrown into jail and their body parts being sold to Westerners who -- oh, religious free enterprise, you know. I would hope that we would not have the policy with other dictatorships that we have had with China and build up their economy while they've had zero liberalization in terms of setting their people politically free. That will lead to big problems.

And I think that the threat of China is far worse now than what it was even though Castro -- even though Mao is gone. And yes, Mao is gone, but his regime is in place. And it is being empowered by the economic strength that we give them by treating them as if they were no different than a democratic country, which goes right back to Cuba.

You do not treat a country that is run by a gang of dictators, and that's what they are. Castro's regime is still in place. That has not changed, and we don't treat them as if they are the Government of Brazil, or you will expect to have something that will hurt you in the long run.

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We had -- I mean, this is -- and one last note that's been made, and then we'll -- any question you have for me will be fine. Let's just see what the Cuban people -- I mean we have American congressmen here, and we have others here speaking for the outrage among the Cuban community.

Let's just note that Cuban-American members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans, don't seem to agree with you. The Cuban-Americans who have been elected to Congress, who have to respond directly to Cuban-American voters, are in the opposite side of this. Now, they understand and they are -- you know, their families -- they are separated from their families as well.

But they understand as do the people who vote for them, that yes, sometimes it is important to sacrifice that moment of love and compassion, because in the long run it will bring repression and brutality and misery for large numbers of people. And yeah, you don't always go and hug your children when you have to go off and fight a war sometimes.

And in this case, we don't have to go off and fight a war, but at least we have to have policies that will make sure that in the end Cuba does not have a government that is expanding power as we see in China that's hostile to the United States, but simply that we now -- our billionaires can go and make money by doing business in Cuba as if it was -- as if it was not a dictatorship.

One last note. We have -- when we talk about humanitarian things, who is causing the problem? I still suggest it's the nature of the Castro regime, the regime that's still in place that is causing these hardships that we're talking about.

Let us note the United States has offered \$5 million in relief for hurricane assistance and relief that has been rejected by the Castro regime, which is typical of what you can expect from that regime. I don't want to do anything that will give the wrong message to anybody to say that we are pulling back from the, you know, from the tough stand that we have taken on that regime and siding with the freedom-loving people of Cuba. Thank you very much.

REP. DELAHUNT: I thank the gentleman. And before I recognize Congressman LaHood's -- his response, let me just note I'm somewhat confused about the gentleman's observations about China. Now, if he is suggesting that we should ban family travel for Chinese-Americans back to their homeland then let him file a bill, and we will have a debate on that. I think what Congressman LaHood and Congresswoman Emerson are talking to is the hypocrisy that exists to just simply target this particular ethnic group in this country, Cuban-Americans.

I found it fascinating that there was an elusion to Saddam Hussein, who by the way we supported in the 1980s, whom we provided the technologies for the development of weapons of mass destruction, whom the former secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, shook hands with, and opened up an embassy in Baghdad in 1986 to talk about hypocrisy. And yet as has been testified to an Iraqi-American could travel to visit their family even when Saddam Hussein ruled there with an iron fist.

So I guess it's just simply beyond the Cuban-American community in terms of a policy. It affects our whole world image to the rest of the world. The gentleman is passionate and eloquent in his criticism of China, and yet not only can Chinese-Americans travel and there is a number of Chinese that come here as tourists. And tragically and unfortunately, we've managed over the course of the past eight years, my friend, to borrow a trillion dollars from China, but, no, no, no, we can't let Cuban-Americans -- we can't let a Cuban-American travel to visit a sick mother, or father, or child. Only once for 14 days. How humane?

I don't see how we can call that policy anything but immoral and repugnant. And now, let me also note that you spoke about the Cuban-American community. I've over the course of the past 10 years have met and hopefully developed friendships with many in the Cuban-American community. And there is a great diversity of views within that particular community. But let's note for the record, my friend, that a 2000 -- this is the CRS.

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This isn't, you know, a poll taken by a candidate, or by a member of Congress. This is a report by the Congressional Research Service that a 2007 Florida International University poll examining attitudes of the Cuban-American community in South Florida showed that 64 percent of respondents would like to return to the less restrictive policies on travel and remittances that were in place in 2003.

Moreover, I find this fascinating. 55.2 percent of those that were polled support allowing unrestricted travel overall, not just family travel. So I'm glad that you gave me the opportunity to read that into the record. And with that let me recognize the gentleman from Illinois for response.

REP. LAHOOD: No -- I just -- the only question I have is, tell me what value there has been with this policy in terms of the effect that it's had on the Castro regime. I mean, how has it -- what has it done to them? Zero. But what is your -- I mean, why have a policy like this that has no impact on the regime? What has it done to him?

REP. ROHRABACHER: This policy, as recognized by the Cuban-American people themselves -- that's why when you claim that politics is getting in the way, politics just means that majority of the people will be upset with the position that you're taking and vote in a different way. So the only reason this policy is ablaze because of politics is because a large number of voters, Cuban-Americans, disagree with you on that. I would --

REP. LAHOOD: What has it done to impact on Castro? That's my question.

REP. ROHRABACHER: I'm getting -- I want to get to that.

REP. LAHOOD: Oh, yeah, go --

REP. ROHRABACHER: And that is, what we have to say is, what will the impact be. What will the impact be -- we're seeing to be weakening our position in terms of what positions we've taken about the Castro regime that looks like we are softening our positions. It will not lead to a better chance for freedom on that island.

REP. LAHOOD: The answer -- my answer is correct. It has zero -- it's had zero impact on him, and his regime.

REP. ROHRABACHER: No, I don't think we can say what it would have been like otherwise. I don't think you can say changing that factor would have made certain things happen. But what we can say is that in Syria, when we dealt with Syria, we did certain things in Lebanon that looked like it was weakening our position, our demands, and Syria took that as weakness on our part even though those policies in and of themselves looked very rational. Well, no. If a dictatorship, if a regime, if the gangs down there says, aha, American is weakening its positioning, that will embolden them in the same way in Lebanon it emboldened the Syrians.

REP. DELAHUNT: Congressman Don Payne from New Jersey.

REP. DONALD M. PAYNE (D-NJ): Thank you. I'll be brief. I know the members have to leave. But I would like to also express my appreciation for the work that Congressman LaHood has done during his time in Congress. I've mentioned to him personally, and publicly, that I think that he has been a true -- a good example of what a good congressman ought to be like. And so we're going to miss you a great deal. Ms. Emerson is sticking around, so I don't have to say anything about her. (Laughs.)

REP. ROHRABACHER: Mr. Chairman, perhaps we can be moving on to a panel so we do have some Cuban-Americans here who will be expressing what their views --

REP. PAYNE: I would take my time back. I didn't yield to you. I just have few things that I want to say. As matter of fact, I will be brief, but I -- I just listened to all the pride you take in those speeches you wrote for President Reagan, and you talk about how bad a regime is, and how terrible it is to their people, and people in prison, and the gulags and all that.

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When you were writing those papers I don't know what you were thinking about Jonas Savimbi. And you need a -- Savimbi who imprisoned his people, murdered them, stole the money, but was thoroughly supported by you and your colleagues. And when you talk about Mobutu who used to come to Christmas parties at the White House, and he had everybody under the sun in prison. I mean, he had villas in France of money that the U.S. government gave him. And he similarly murdered people, threw them in prison. So if you're going to be an equal opportunity, you know, basher.

I mean, if Castro is so bad why were these other people actually entertained in the Reagan White House? Mobutu was, and so -- and of course the worst regime in the world apartheid, where people even if their brothers and sisters -- if the brother was lighter skinned than the other black brother or sister, they had to be separated physically from that family and live in the colored section away from his family.

They used to have a comb test where they put a comb through your head, and if the comb didn't go through easily - these were the policies that were supported proudly by you and your great late President Reagan. And so if we're going to be so harsh, and apartheid is the worst regime in the world, and what did you say, no, we should just have a constructive engagement. You know, Charles Crocker and those folks. So the inconsistency is just unbelievable. And I stand with the gentleman, Dr. Paul, and Congressman Flake, and of course our two panelists that are left here. And Mr. Chairman I wholeheartedly support this legislation.

REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you, Mr. Payne. And again let me thank our colleagues, and we'll excuse them, and we'll see you on the floor, presumably shortly. Thank you.

And now let's have our second panel come forward. I hope staff has indicated who is on the second panel. I'm going to introduce them while they're assembling. Our first witness is Hector Palacios, the leader of the Pro-Democracy Movement in Cuba, and a man whom I have met. I consider him a personal friend and an individual of great courage. He is the director of the Center for Social Studies, and secretary of Todos Unidos. In the Black Spring of 2003 when 75 democracy activists were arrested, he was sentenced to a 25-year sentence. He was released in December of 2006 because of poor health.

Hector was formerly an official in the Cuban Communist party. He left in 1980 as a response to what he perceived to be the Cuban government's harsh repression of Cubans wanting to emigrate from the island. Since 1980, Hector Palacios is advocate for reform in Cuban government, and has been active in opposition politics. He has also been an active organizer for the Varela Project, and is an independent librarian.

Our next witness is Marlene Arzola. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology from Florida International University. For almost five years she has worked as a therapist for foster children with Charlene Holmes for children in Miami. Since 2004, she works as director of therapeutic activities for the Hebrew Home for the Aged in South Beach. Marlene left Cuba in 1989 leaving behind her 77-year old father, her 59-year-old mother, two sisters, a nephew, and a very extensive family.

She left Cuba seeking freedom and opportunities. As all good sons and daughters whether they are Cubans, Americans, or any other nationality they feel compelled out of love and duty to help their parents who are in need. However, Marlene is not allowed to travel freely and help her family due to the existing restrictions on family travel to Cuba. She lives in Miami Beach with her eight-year-old son, Liam.

MS. ARZOLA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think -- I'm sorry.

REP. DELAHUNT: Un momento. I got to get organized here. The staff is great, but I fumble statements all the time. Who do we have? Okay. Next, we're joined by Blanca Gonzalez, the mother of Normando Hernandez Gonzalez, a political prisoner suffering under the regime of Fidel and Raul Castro. Ms. Gonzalez was a guest of Ms. Bush at the 2000 State of the Union address. In 2002, Ms. Gonzalez fled Cuba and applied for political asylum in the United States. She now resides in Miami, Florida, with her husband.

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While in Cuba, she was a human rights activist, and was harassed by the Cuban government. Her son Normando Hernandez Gonzalez is a writer, an independent journalist, and was arrested on March 18, 2003. He was sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment for reporting on the conditions of state-run services in Cuba, and to criticizing government's management of issues such as tourism, agriculture, fishing, and cultural affairs.

Last, but not least, we have Luisa Montero-Diaz who has over 25 years of experience working on a variety of local, national, and international programs. She is currently the managing director of the Maryland Multicultural Youth Centers, a division of the Latin American Youth Center, a non-profit organization serving minority and immigrant youths by providing comprehensive, culturally sensitive programs in education, employment, and social services. She oversees three sites in Prince George's and Montgomery counties, which serves over a 1,000 young people annually.

She is an appointed commissioner on the Governor's Commission on Hispanic Affairs, and the Governor's Workforce Investment Board. She is also affiliated with the Insight Meditation Community of Washington as a teacher. And she began her professional career as a speech therapist for the county public schools. She is a graduate of the University of Maryland and resides in Tacoma Park with her son.

Before we start this -- the testimony from this panel I have one technical note here. Hector Palacios is currently in Mexico preparing to return to Cuba to continue his efforts there. Since he cannot physically be here we have recorded a video of his testimony which we'll play in a moment. Now, when that is done, we will get him on the phone and go directly into questions and answer with him if members have questions. Then when we are finished with his Q&A we will hang up and then go to the testimony of the other witnesses. So let us proceed.

(NOTE: Mr. Palacios' remarks are through interpreter.)

MR. PALACIOS: Chairman Delahunt, distinguished members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to discuss the current situation in Cuba and to suggest measures that the United States could take unilaterally to help facilitate this process of change currently underway in Cuba. Almost 50 years ago, the rulers in Havana imposed an ironclad blockade on the people of Cuba, doing away with their economic, civil, and political rights. Later, the government of the United States declared an economic embargo against the rulers of Cuba, which has been maintained for many years.

In 1999, when the ninth Ibero-American Summit meetings were held in Havana, democratic-minded Cuba, despite intense repression by the state, founded the largest political umbrella of the opposition, bringing together the internal dissidents, that were called "Todos Unidos," All United. In that document we proclaimed whoever wishes to act with a moral coherence should call for the sanctions imposed by both governments be struck down.

As the Cuban government has not answered our request we cannot ask the U.S. government to do so. That would be an undeserving political triumph on the part of the Cuban government.

Nonetheless, within Cuba real factors have come about in recent years which could contribute to furthering the changes that are needed in Cuba with a view to bringing about genuine rule of law and a democratic country without political prisoners and with multi-party balance.

The factors for change are, first, the gradual disappearance of the founder of that totalitarian state, which is significantly weakening the authority of the new government that has been designated. This situation will become even more acute in coming months. Second, the Cuban population is removing the mask of terror that had been imposed on them and is beginning to assume conscious participation to decide their own future. Third, democratic-minded Cubans are coming together in four or five political groupings which bring together thousands of activists, and which has been increasingly recognized internationally. Moreover, we are seeking total unity with the Cuban diaspora, because Cuba belongs to all Cubans. And fourth, the platform of the authoritarian left in Latin America and the Caribbean is less and less effective, and Cuba is playing an ever less important role in that bloc, yet it is still a threat that we should not underestimate.

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In the face of these unquestionable realities it would be prudent for the government of the United States to adopt measures for the Cuban people to be able to immediately receive the assistance they need, and so that Cubans can be the leading protagonists in their own history. This is the time when change can begin in Cuba. At this moment it would be beneficial, first of all, to do away with travel restrictions to Cuba for Cubans residing in the United States. They would be the best bearers of hope, moral assistance, and liaison which are essential.

Second, lift current restrictions that limit remittances to Cuba, and which criminalize assistance to family members. And third, it should be allowed for those Cubans who wish to cooperate economically with the internal dissidents to do so without that being a criminal offense. Such resources are essential for the work of democratic-minded Cubans in Cuba.

Eliminating the restrictive measures, as we just laid out, cannot resolve the economic situation of the regime; nonetheless, it would immediately facilitate contacts and resources for carrying out our patriotic work. The rulers of Cuba are not interested at all in economic advantages, but just in political advantages. And such actions would consolidate Cuban society and weaken its rulers.

REP. DELAHUNT: I hope -- I believe we have Hector on the phone. Hector? We're making the call now. This was a high-tech operation up here in the U.S. Congress. Hector, can you hear me? You can hear me well, I understand. I hope that you are well, and I convey to you my warmest personal regards, and please also convey those same good wishes to Gisela. It was good meeting with you recently here in Washington, DC. I want you to know that we have just watched and heard your testimony on a video, and we appreciate your words.

I have no questions, because you and I have communicated frequently on this very issue. But I -- why don't we have the interpreter interpret. Hector, I'm going to now recognize another friend of yours the member of Congress from Arizona, Congressman Jeff Flake, for any questions that he might have for you.

REP. FLAKE: Hector, I appreciate your testimony. It is said by some here that lifting the restrictions on family travel will somehow rescue the regime or aid the regime. You had mentioned in your testimony that you don't believe that is the case, do you want to elaborate on that?

MR. PALACIOS: I can barely hear you. I didn't understand the question.

REP. DELAHUNT: Jeff, if you can make another effort.

REP. FLAKE: Well, the question, there are some here who believe that lifting the restrictions on family travel will aid the Cuban regime, will aid Raul Castro. What -- how do you feel about that?

REP. DELAHUNT: Hector, we need a opportunity --

MR. PALACIOS: Well, I wanted to tell you that we believe that not all restrictions are good. It's very interesting what is going on in Cuba today, and for the Cuban-Americans to come and see their relatives would be a source of great inspiration and the economic situation is quite alarming.

THE INTERPRETER: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, but there is so much distortion, it's very hard to make out the words --

REP. DELAHUNT: Okay.

THE INTERPRETER: -- adjust the microphone on that end.

REP. DELAHUNT: I don't know if we can. I'm going to request that you when you're having difficulty and you're unable to understand what he is saying on your own just simply ask him to repeat what he said and to speak more quietly.

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THE INTERPRETER: Thank you. He is saying that he also has great difficulty in hearing me. I sound very, very far away.

MR. PALACIOS: And Cubans have a responsibility to help Cubans. And this will keep Cubans from helping their fellow Cubans. We are giving the Cuban government a reason to accuse the American people of being subversive. In addition, the Cuban government is not so much interested in economic problems as in political problems. And we should not give them an opportunity to turn this into a political advantage.

The policy of restrictions favors the government in Havana. The biggest embargo has been of the Cuban government on the Cuban people, and that does have to be listed. And then we'll discuss with the government of United States a possible change in its policy. When we talk about change we need to talk about some measures that can help the Cuban people.

REP. DELAHUNT: You know, I just enquired of my friend, the ranking member, Mr. Rohrabacher. He has no questions. And I know that neither Mr. Payne nor -- or rather Mr. Meeks -- welcome, Mr. Meeks, to this hearing, the gentleman from New York -- nor Mr. Carnahan have any questions. And I presume Mr. Flake that you have finished. So let me thank Hector Palacios for his testimony and warm regards, my friend. And we'll now terminate the --

MR. PALACIOS: I thank the U.S. Congress for listening to me on behalf of the Cuban people.

REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you. And we'll now terminate the telephone call and proceed to the testimony of this panel. Why don't we begin with Ms. Arzola and then with Ms. Gonzalez, and we'll conclude with Ms. Montero-Diaz? I should also inform the panel that votes are expected and anticipated in 10 to 15 minutes. I understand that you have all submitted written statements that obviously the committee will review and make part of the record of this committee. So if you could keep your remarks somewhat limited we could excuse you, or if we can't, we would hope that after -- that you could stay during votes and we will all return.

Ms. Arzola.

MS. ARZOLA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all of you for the invitation for me to come here in the name of my son, eight-year- old son, Liam. I'm a single mother and I left Cuba in 1989 and came to the U.S., seeking freedom and opportunities. My son Liam was born in here in the United States. A few months after I left Cuba, my middle sister, Zoila, died in a car accident. At that time, her son Leonardo, my nephew, was two years old.

My mother is now 78 years old and in bad health. If she dies, I will no longer be able to visit Leonardo. Why? Because the 2004 U.S. Travel Policy towards Cuba says that you can visit your family in Cuba only every three years. Moreover, the travel policy defines who your family is, and who isn't. So according to this policy my nephew not considered part of my family, and I could no longer visit him.

In 2004, Liam, my son, and I went to Cuba to bury my father. He was suffering from Alzheimer's. Since the travel restrictions had just come into effect in 2004, we had to wait until 2007 to go again. For three years, my sick mom had to take care for my disabled sister, my older sister, without my support, or without the joy that my visit could have brought to her. For three years, my mother and my son were not allowed the pleasure of being with each other, to play, to cuddle, or to hear family stories, to share home-made desserts, or to enjoy that very special relationship between children and their grandparents.

My son, Liam, was born here, as I said before, and he is not allowed to visit his grandmother, his only grandparent, only every three years. For Cubans, as well as well as for Americans or for any other culture, maintaining family ties is very important. In 2007, after three years of separation from his grandmother -- we are talking about a child -- the bond that he had with his grandmother was almost gone. When we arrived in Cuba, he was encountering a stranger.

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Liam has to wait now for another three years, until August 2010, to see his grandmother. By then she will be 80 years of age and he will be 10 years old. His childhood will be almost over, and the memories that he should have of his grandmother will be missing. There will be a gap in his identity. It's like déjà vu, like a Peter Pan in reverse.

And I put emphasis on the damaging effects of separation between Liam and his grandmother because Liam is a child. As his mother, I have that duty to voice his rights. Let me please quote from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16.3, quote, "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State."

Thus, the United States government is violating the fundamental rights of its citizens by failing to protect the family structure. This is why I'm here today, in the name of the many Liams, Leonardos, Marias, Thomases, and all the Cuban children who are caught in the middle of politics that override their interest. I'm raising my voice in the name of their lost memories.

If my mother, who is 78 years old, could get worse and end up in the hospital, I'm not allowed to travel to Cuba to be by her side due to these travel restrictions and it breaks my heart. Does it make sense that I cannot see my mother, if God forbid ends up -- she ends up in the hospital just because of these travel restrictions?

The children who are caught in the middle of these restrictions and who have parents in Cuba, or who have grandmothers, or aunts, or nieces, they are not thinking they are not going to be allowed to see their loved ones in Cuba, except every three years. And they don't know that they -- able to go back if the only family left consists of nieces, nephews, aunts and uncles, or cousins.

Not in this country, it is unbelievable that this is happening in this compassionate country, the United States of America. This issue is not about being a Democrat or being a Republican, or being in favor of or against the Cuban government. This issue is about protecting the family structure, and especially our children.

Hurricane Ike caused significant devastation throughout Cuba. When I spoke to my mother on the phone after the hurricane, she was in despair. It was still raining heavily and the roof of her house was leaking in many places. Haitians in the United States can travel freely to Haiti to help their family and friends. Americans who have family in Galveston can offer them support. Cubans in the United States want to enjoy the same rights. If I could, I would be in Guantanamo helping my 78-year-old mother fix her roof. What in the world is wrong with that?

Cubans in the United States are not the only ones who have suffered in exile. Those in Cuba have suffered family separation, dictatorship, poverty, and lack of human rights. It is time to wake up to the cry of our immediate neighbors, to the pain and suffering of the Cuban people. It's time to put aside politics, by lifting all travel restrictions to Cuba, and let the Cuban families from both sides of the Straits come together as one.

REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you, Ms. Arzola. And we've been called to vote. It's a 15-minute vote. So hopefully we'll be able to at least hear the testimony of Ms. Gonzalez, and then we will take a recess for approximately 30 minutes and we will ask you, Ms. Montero-Diaz, if you'd indulge us, and wait, and then we can come back and have a conversation. But would you please proceed, Ms. Gonzalez. And I noted that Ms. Arzola, you went one minute over the five-minute rule. So we're going to make sure that Ms. Gonzalez gets at least six minutes.

MS. ARZOLA: I apologize.

REP. DELAHUNT: Please, Ms. Gonzalez.

MS. GONZALEZ: (Speaks in Spanish.)

REP. DELAHUNT: Ms. Gonzalez, I don't mean -- let me apologize. I don't mean to interrupt. But what would your preference be, that you read your statement in Spanish or -- and we could have it interpreted later, or would you prefer to have the interpreter, as you pause, testify in English.

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THE INTERPRETER: Okay, she prefers for me to read the first paragraph that she's read already.

(NOTE: Ms. Gonzalez's remarks are through interpreter.)

MS. GONZALEZ: Mr. President and -- excuse me, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the subcommittee, it's an honor for me to be able to address you. My name is Blanca Gonzalez and I'm the mother of prisoner of conscience, Normando Hernandez. My son was arrested in March of 2003, in what is known as the "Black Spring" that led to 75 men and women being imprisoned because of their peaceful opposition in Cuba.

My son Normando Hernandez was condemned to 25 years of prison simply for exercising his profession of independent journalist. His trial came from -- out of the Stalinist era, and there was no chance for him to defend himself, because even before the trial began he and the rest had already been condemned. My son is in the prison at Kilometer 7 in Camaguey, in inhuman conditions. His many ailments have not been attended to. He suffers from high blood pressure and gastro intestinal problems that are getting ever worse, because of the lack of medical attention.

In order to be briefer, I'm just going to read in English. During the five years that he's been in prison, his cells have been limited to very small spaces where he has had very little ventilation and where humidity has gone into his bones, and rodents remind us of the inhumanity of the system that keeps him in prison. His wife, Yarai, and his daughter, Daniela, who is six years old, are only allowed to visit him every 45 days for two hours at a time. On their last visit, they found him in a precarious state of health because of the rigorous conditions of the jail that he is in, with the aggravating factor of having lost a great deal of weight.

I wanted to come here today because while you are debating whether or not restrictions should be lifted that have been imposed as a form of sanction to the regime in Havana, because of the arbitrary imprisonment of peaceful opposition the Cuban people is a victim of -- has since then become victim of the horrible plague of the hurricanes Ike and Gustav. How can anyone believe that, faced with the magnitude of the tragedy that is faced by 11 million Cubans, how can anybody believe that the visit of a few Cubans to the islands will solve any problems?

Mr. Chairman, the high cost of airfare to Cuba is around \$800, and if you add to that the cost of the passport, its 400 additional dollars. Then you have to add to the 44 pounds allowed for each traveler, which cost another \$10. How can this be a solution to take such a reduced amount of aid to families in Cuba? There are many families that have recently arrived in this country from Cuba whose economic situation would not even allow them this kind of option.

Why are voices raised here today, and why aren't these voices raised in the international community? And then why doesn't that community then demand that Fidel Castro's regime should accept the massive humanitarian aid that has been offered by the United States. Many people here today forget that the sanctions that were debated here were imposed because of the arrests that took place during the Black Spring of 2003. I remind you, that out of the 75 people taken prisoners, 59 are still in jail, in Castro's jail, and they are victims of ill-treatment and repression.

What has changed? What would justify that we lift sanctions against a despotic regime which has total disregard for justice, and which absolutely refuses to give a single sign of willingness to change? Mr. Chairman, and distinguished members of the Congress of the United States, we Cubans have always looked to this country as a forum for freedom and democracy. And we don't want you to be the first to turn your backs on people who have been victims of one of the longest dictatorships in the world, nor to prize somebody who continues to enslave our people.

As the mother of a Cuban political prisoner who has family in Cuba, I respectfully ask that you don't contribute to lift even one sanction against Cuba. Thank you very much.

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REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you Ms. Gonzalez, and we are going to make an effort to go, and we've only got about a little under seven minutes. So if you can restrict your comments to five minutes, Ms. Montero-Diaz, it might allow us to excuse you, or if you still wish to stay and respond to questions. But please proceed.

MS. MONTERO-DIAZ: Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Delahunt and other members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. My name is Luisa Montero-Diaz. I was born in Cuba in 1955, and left the island with my immediate family on December 18, 1961. I grew up in a small town in North Carolina, went to college there, and moved to the D.C. area to attend graduate school. I currently live in Maryland with my family.

My family was the first on both my father's s and my mother's s side of the family to leave Cuba and come to the United States. Through the years, many family members followed us, many did not. Despite never knowing my maternal grandmother, she died before I was born, I have this sense that my life has been much influenced by her. This influence has come to me through my mother and her two sisters.

The connection with my two aunts, just as with my grandmother, has not been a physical one. Both my aunts remained in Cuba. Since leaving Cuba, when I was six years old, I can count on two hands the number of days I have been physically present with my aunts. Two visits to Cuba, one in the early '80s and the second in the mid '90s allowed me, in essence, to meet my aunts as an adult. These trips were exciting, sad, too short, and far between, and life altering for me.

Even though there has been a geographical divide between our families, through my mother I grew up feeling an amazingly strong bond with these aunts, a bond that my mother passed down to me, my sister, and my brother. A bond so strong that I consider these three women --- my mother and her two sisters -- the most important influences in my life, the way I live it, my values, and the choices I have made.

My mother is now 88 years old. Her older sister passed away in Cuba four years ago. The younger sister, Yara, died less than 2 years ago. The year leading up to my Aunt Yara's s death was a rough one on my family. Two nephews living in Cuba died within two months of each other. They were the ones who had looked after and cared for my aunt since she had not -- did not have children.

With these nephews gone, during her last months, while ailing and physically fragile, but mentally alert, my aunt Yara was taken care of by in-laws and a great niece. My mother longed to see her sister, to check on her, to see for herself that she was being taken care of, her needs being met, to touch her once more. Certainly, my aunt, in her condition could not travel, but neither was my mother able to travel.

As a daughter, and as a niece, my desire was to be able to make that trip for them, to go there as my mother would, if she could, taking messages of support, and love, and concern. And yet this option was and still is not available to me or other members of my family.

My mother is old enough and wise enough to bring some resolution to this situation through prayer and her faith that my aunt was well taken care of. This faith is what she has relied on through all of life's s difficulties. Up until Yara's s death, she continued, as she had for 45 years, without missing a week, to write my aunt a weekly letter. Yet, I know that there were many nights of lost sleep. There were nights when my mother wondered, did Yara have dinner tonight? What did she eat? Is she sleeping well? Did they give her the medicine? Is she cold?

One trip would not have answered all these questions, nor made the loss any less difficult, nor would it have alleviated the pain of years of separation. But one trip would have given consolation. It would have allowed my mother to know the true reality rather than living with the imagined one. And most of all, through me it would have reinforced familial relationships and obligations, those bonds and influences that are passed on and become a part of what forms us from generation to generation.

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The current travel restrictions are unfair and inhumane. They fly in the face of family, of love, bonds, and family obligations. The sanctions have not even served their original intention. This is not only a failed policy, it is a counterproductive, harmful, and cruel one. Thank you very much.

REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you very much. And let me express my gratitude to the three witnesses. Your stories are very poignant, and they are very powerful. And I know, in the course of our deliberations, we will review your testimony and express to you our support for all of you in your families in Cuba.

And with that we -- with the concurrence of the ranking member we will excuse you from further testimony, and when we return we'll ask our final panel to convene. Thank you. And we're in recess for 30 minutes.

(Sounds gavel.)

(Recess.)

We will come to order once more for our final panel. Welcome to everyone. I also want to submit various documents for the record, and then I will go to introduce you, and hopefully, my ranking member, Mr. Rohrabacher, will be joining us. First, I'd like to put into the record a letter from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to President Bush asking him to suspend, even temporarily, restrictions on travel and remittances. I would note that the Catholic Church is the only independent institution in Cuba. So presumably, the American Church is communicating with the Cuban Church and is reflective of their views.

The second letter is from two of Cuba's high-profile opponents to the Cuban government, Marta Beatriz Roque and Vladimiro Roca. Both have fought to liberty for Cuba for years, and both have been incarcerated in Cuban jails for their efforts. They wrote to President Bush, asking him to lift the restrictions on family travel, remittances, and gift packages just as the legislation I'm filing today would accomplish. They're on the island. They know what they need, and we should listen to them. So without objection both of those letters will be submitted for the record.

Now, let me introduce our third panel. I'll go first from my left to right. If I can find Mr. Sosa's -- I can't find it, but I know that you're from Boston, you're a member of Red Sox Nation, and that is a very strong bond between you and myself, although I think it's clear we disagree on many issues, but welcome. I know that you are a board member of the group that is called "The Cuba Study Group."

Next let me go to -- if we didn't have staff here we couldn't turn the lights on. Sylvia, you're going to have to help me with the pronunciation -- Iriondo. I acknowledge you are right here, and I -- we have something in common. She was born in Havana on January 26. Her family along with thousands of Cubans fled their homeland, seeking freedom in South Florida, and was admitted as a political refugee in 1960. She has worked as a real estate agent, and also at a number of community services, including the International Rescue Committee, the State Department of Welfare, Cuban Refugee Emergency Center, the United Way, and Little Havana Activities and Nutrition Centers.

In 1994, together with a group of Cuban-American women she founded M.A.R. Por Cuba, Mothers and Women Against Repression, a non-profit dedicated to the advocacy of human rights, to the promotion of democratic values, and its mission to help restore fundamentally liberties and rights of the Cuban people. Welcome.

And next -- I found you. Yes, I could say that, but welcome. Ms. Ninoska Perez Castellon is a journalist and host of a top-rated South Florida radio talk show "Ninoska en Mambi." She is also the host of a primetime political debate show called "Ultima Palabra" at GenTV. She is also a columnist for "Diario Las Americas," her articles have appeared in Latin America, and Spain, and in other prestigious publications in the United States.

She is a frequent guest on national and international television having appeared on such shows as the "O'Reilly Factor" and "Hannity & Colmes." She is frequently quoted and interviewed by the national and international media on Cuba-related issues.

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She has lectured extensively in colleges and universities, participated in national televised debates, and has testified before the United States Congress on several occasions on Cuba issues. Welcome.

And next is Dr. Francisco Hernandez, who is the president of the Cuban American National Foundation. He was born and raised in Cuba. He studied engineering at the University of Havana until 1960. And he went into political exile, joining the Brigade 2506, and participated in the Bay of Pigs Invasion in April 1961. As a result he served two years as a political prisoner until 1963 when he was freed and returned to exile in the United States as part of an agreement between the U.S. and Cuba.

That year he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps, and later served in the Marine Active Reserve until 1972 when he retired with the rank of captain. He's been active in the cause of freedom and democracies over 40 years, and is a founding member of the board of directors of the Cuban American National Foundation.

Last but not least, Philip Peters is the vice president under the Lexington Institute, a non-profit non-partisan public policy research organization based in Arlington, Virginia. He has been conducting research in Cuba, and publishing studies on Cuba's economy since 1996, covering small enterprise, agriculture, information technology, tourism, historic preservation, and other topics. He is also an advisor on U.S. policy towards Cuba through the Cuba Working Group and the House of Representatives. He covers Cuba issues in his blog, the Cuban Triangle, and has testified before congressional committees, and the U.S. International Trade Commission. He also writes on trade and immigration policy.

Prior to joining to Lexington, Philip Peters served as a State Department appointee of Presidents Reagan and Bush, and as a senior aide in the House of Representatives in the office of Representative Jim Courter and the House Armed Services Committee. He holds degrees from Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, and its graduate school. Welcome all. And let's proceed with Mr. Sosa.

MR. SOSA: Thank you very much. Chairman Delahunt and distinguished members of the committee, I am very grateful to have this opportunity to discuss U.S. restrictions on Cuban-American travel.

I'm an American who is grateful for the many opportunities this country has provided, since I arrived on its shores 48 years ago on a lonely flight from Havana. I'm also the son, brother, nephew, and cousin of men who spent years in Fidel Castro's prisons. I admire President George W. Bush's principled advocacy for freedom in every corner of the world. I am also a lifelong Republican and an admirer of both Presidents Bush. As a Republican, I'm deeply concerned that my party's positions on Cuba will lead it to lose the votes of the only reliably republican Hispanic group in the country, Cuban-Americans.

REP. DELAHUNT: If I can interrupt you just for one minute, I want to reiterate what I had said earlier, because all of our -- the panel -- the first panel all were republicans, you're a republican. I know that Philip Peters is a -- worked in Reagan and Bush administrations. And I'm pointing this out -- I won't ask anyone else unless they want to volunteer -- that this is -- and you too are republican. Are you listening to this, Mr. Meeks? And you also are republican -- and a republican. This is a partisan undertaking, and I just wanted to note that. But in any event please proceed.

MR. SOSA: Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, maintaining restrictions on Cuban-American travel and family remittances risk more than just the republicans losing the key electoral state of Florida. We as Americans are in danger of losing the moral high ground in our relations with Cuba. Increasing numbers of Cuban-Americans are calling for an end to restrictions on travel and family remittances to Cuba.

Indeed, the data from the 2007 FIU Poll that Chairman Delahunt mentioned show that in excess of 60 percent of Cuban-Americans in South Florida support returning to the pre-2004 rules governing Cuban-American travel and remittances. Even more importantly, almost all leading dissidents in Cuba, and I stress this, almost all leading dissidents in Cuba, even those who have been the most supportive of U.S. policy in the past have asked the U.S.

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government to lift travel and remittance restrictions applied to Cuban-Americans. The most recent was (Maria ?) Beatriz Roque in a conference call to President Bush on May 5th of this year.

The U.S. government does not restrict travel to any other country in the world, even those on the State Department's list of State Sponsors of Terrorism. Only in the case of Cuba does the U.S. government regulate the rights of persons to visit their families. This makes no sense. I am one of those Cuban-Americans who believe we should end all American restrictions on travel and remittances to Cuba by Cuban-Americans.

Such limits are counterproductive because they increase the Cuban people's dependency on the Cuban government as the only source of employment and information. Limits on family travel and remittances work to destroy family values and represent the opposite of all that is great about the United States. I have traveled to Cuba several times on humanitarian missions. I've met with Cubans throughout the island; students, pensioners, clergymen, factory workers, farmers, engineers, the homeless, and several very brave dissidents.

I was greeted always with warmth and generosity as well as a barrage of questions on how the world works outside of Cuba. I did my best to extol the virtue of a free society where the rule of law underpins the ability of each citizen to choose the life they want to lead. I never met one Cuban who was in favor of restrictions on Cuban-American travel and remittances, not a single one. Cuban-Americans who're traveling -- Cuban-Americans traveling to Cuba are especially powerful agents for change. Their success in the U.S. serves as a compelling advertisement for what Cubans can do if they are free to pursue their dreams and ambitions.

There are those who say that unfettered travel to Cuba by Europeans and Canadians has done little to advance change. I think that this is disingenuous. Cuban-Americans traveling to Cuba have a much deeper and more important impact than a German, for example, on vacation in Varadero. I also argue as a small government republican that it should not be up to bureaucrats in Washington to determine what kind of travel by Cuban-Americans is acceptable. Cuban-Americans are citizens of a free country and they should decide for themselves where they wish to travel.

The damage wrought on Cuba by Hurricanes Ike and Gustav has brought to the forefront the damage caused by American restrictions on travel and family remittances. Cuban-Americans are angry that those who espouse family values wish to prevent families in the United States from helping relatives in Cuba. I know from personal experience how incredibly difficult it is to send money and aid to family members.

Meanwhile, Russia and Venezuela have stepped in with massive amounts of aid. When the United States announced a \$1 billion aid package to Georgia, which was mentioned earlier, it sent a strong signal that America will fight Russian expansionism and stand with the population of a tiny country fighting for its life. Meanwhile, 90 miles away from our shores, Russia has sent four cargo planes of humanitarian aid to Cuba and is seeking to dramatically expand its presence on the island. Venezuela has also been generous in its aid to Cuba. And if we want to contain Russian expansionism, I would argue that \$100 million in public and especially private sector aid to Cuba, and the lifting of travel and family remittances restrictions will get us a bigger bang for our buck than \$1 billion in aid to Georgia.

The damage caused by the hurricanes should cause us to re-examine all of our policies to Cuba. A policy such as the ban on Cuban-American travel and remittances so flagrantly contradicts American values of openness and compassion that the policy needs to be scrapped. Thank you, and may God bless America and grant Cuba the freedom it deserves.

REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you, Mr. Sosa.

Ms. Iriondo?

MS. IRIONDO: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. I'm most grateful for this opportunity to speak on such an important issue for me. Today, Cuba is facing two monumental disasters, the

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natural disasters caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, and the man-made disaster brought about by nearly 50 years of totalitarian rule and neglect under a brutal dictatorship intent on remaining in power at all costs and responsible for the thousands of Cuban families torn apart.

The devastation caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike stretches across the island, from east to west, and north to south. The damage inflicted by the force of these powerful hurricanes requires nothing short of massive disaster relief assistance. The United States government has generously offered to provide massive humanitarian assistance to the victims. But the Cuban regime incapable of addressing the needs of the Cuban people has repeatedly rejected United States' offers. Instead, they are demanding the suspension, at least temporarily, of the trade embargo so that they may buy from U.S. companies on credit. The only one that stands to gain from easing restrictions is the Cuban regime.

The tragedy that the Cuban people face in the aftermath of Gustav and Ike should not be utilized as yet another argument to promote the partial, total, or temporary lifting of restrictions. Nor should it be used to advance a political agenda in the upcoming U.S. elections. The situation in Cuba is such that even if the travel restrictions were lifted little would be accomplished in terms of providing the massive assistance the Cuban people need. Of the Cubans residing in the United States not many would be able to travel immediately given the required documentation and the high fee that are charged.

Families are torn apart and will remain so, but not by the United States sanctions, but by the actions of the Cuban regime. The lifting of travel restrictions would result in a selective process, feasible only for those who have financial possibility and beneficial only for those Cubans with relatives in the United States. Should the restrictions be lifted, the Cuban regime would generate a considerable amount of additional resources which, as time and history have proven, would be used to increase repression against the civic resistance movement and to solidify the regime's stay in power denying the freedom. The Cuban people have struggled so hard for so long during almost half a century under the yoke of oppression.

Lost in the din of the debate are the reasons for which these sanctions were rightly instituted and why they must remain in place. The 2004 sanctions were imposed following the March 2003 violent wave of repression that resulted in the arbitrary arrests, summary trials, prison sentences of up to 28 years for more than 75 human rights and pro-democracy activists, and the execution by firing squad of three young men who attempted to flee Cuba. Today, over 50 of this group of prisoners still remain in prison under inhumane conditions.

Restrictions facilitate a process of internal democratization to aid Cuba's opposition movement, channel the aspirations for change of an overwhelming majority of the Cuban people. Proponents of the lifting of sanctions insist that the restrictions serve to keep Cuban families torn apart, not so. Families torn apart are the parents of those United States citizens who were shot down by Cuban Air Force MiGs on February 24, 1996, while conducting a humanitarian search and rescue flight in international airspace in the Florida Straits to save Cubans fleeing the island in fragile rafts. I know because I was there. I was onboard the only plane that made it back home that day.

Families torn apart are the relatives and children of political prisoners who cannot have their loved ones at home. Families torn apart are the victims of crimes continually perpetrated by this regime, such as the massacre of the 13th of March Tugboat on July 13, 1994. Those are families torn apart by a ruthless regime that aims to control every aspect of its citizens' lives and tramples upon inalienable God-given rights.

Regrettably, Cuba's regime continues to refuse humanitarian assistance from the United States. It is not the time to unilaterally lift these sanctions, but the time to exert international pressure on the regime to allow humanitarian assistance to reach all Cuban people, 11 million of them and to stand with a people of Cuba in their unwavering determination to be free. Freedom has a price. Many Cubans including some here have been willing to pay that price with their life and their best years in prison. Mr. Chairman, and members of the subcommittee, it is not U.S. law that needs to be changed, it's the Cuban regime. Thank you.

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REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you.

Ms. Perez Castellon?

MS. CASTELLON: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to submit my statement in response to some of the things that have been said here today.

REP. DELAHUNT: Without objection.

MS. CASTELLON: You talk about legislation, and I wonder if this will include illegal immigrants who come to the United States and cannot travel one or two or three years because they simply cannot leave the United States, or many of the Cubans who came here and claimed they were politically persecuted and then within a years time taking the Cuban Adjustment Act into account, they go back as if nothing happened after having lied to the U.S. government.

So I don't understand, because, for example, two years ago when you went to Cuba in 2006 and Raul Castro had just been named successor without election, and I wonder if we would have accepted Pinochet's brother to take over. You said that it was a new era. Well, Raul Castro had just been named successor, the new era is the same dictatorship with a new face, one another Castro at the helm, and they are still enslaving the Cuban people.

So I don't understand, yesterday you were questioning aids to Georgia, because you said it's not a democratic regime. Don't those families count? And I've heard here that sanctions don't work. What put an end to South Africa's racist regime? I remember blacklist when Cuba -- when America artists couldn't even go back. Or we could do what Congressman LaHood said, let's to do business with China, let's get cheap goods and let's get cheap labor, but let's, you know, squash some skulls and trample upon human right.

You said that it's some -- some things you said were un-American. You know, what is un-American? To serve as apologist for dictators. And I don't understand -- Congressman Ron Paul said that people over 50 at the debate. Well, you know what, it was at the University of Miami, and half of the tickets were given out to students. I don't recall those students being over 50, and if that were to apply, then perhaps all of you should retire and your staffers should take over.

And you ask about moral authority. Who gave the United States the moral authority to wage war against Hitler when Jews were being massacred in Cuba? And you constantly talk about both -- I'm sorry --

REP. DELAHUNT: I appreciate your passion. But let me interrupt for one moment and point out to you that what we are talking about here is restrictions on family problem.

MS. CASTELLON: Well, restrictions on family --

REP. DELAHUNT: And I would like to make a point right now. Are you aware that there are no restrictions on Germans, German-Americans to go back to Nazi Germany until the war broke out.

MS. CASTELLON: No, there were apologists who permitted Hitler to massacre 600 Jews.

REP. DELAHUNT: Actually, it's fine --

MS. CASTELLON: -- fine. Well, let's talk about --

REP. DELAHUNT: I'm going to give you additional time. But let's understand, let's make this factual --

MS. CASTELLON: Factual.

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REP. DELAHUNT: Okay. Let's stick to the facts, and the fact is you made a reference to Nazi German, and the governments at the time, okay, the United States government at the time did not impose restrictions on family travel so that German-Americans could return to take care of their families and maybe assist them in leaving.

MS. CASTELLON: Right.

What I referred to were people who apologize for Hitler and allow the 6 million Jews to die.

REP. DELAHUNT: Who is apologizing for Hitler?

MS. CASTELLON: Some people apologized, and it lasted --

REP. DELAHUNT: Could you name them? Who was apologizing for Hitler?

MS. CASTELLON: Let's go back to travel restriction, what did -- when people -- when Cubans could travel before 2003, what did that solve? I don't know that it solved anything. Cuba depends on tourism. And it was clear when Castro said they did not want any aid. And that tourism is handled by the armed forces. And I don't understand when I see those sanctions were imposed when 75 men and women were arrested.

I saw Hector Palacios speak here today. Well Hector Palacios was able to leave Cuba. He was able to return. But do you know what, her son is still in prison and 59 of those men for whom those travel restrictions were in place are still in prison. Why are we not asking the Cuban regime to release those political prisoners before we lift those sanctions?

I would like to remind this panel that this is the same regime that harbors fugitives of U.S. justice, that has imprisoned thousands of men and women, that has killed American citizen in international airspace, that has sunk tugboats in the Bay of Havana with children onboard, and the survivors have testified of that horrible crime before this committee. And in May 2001, before an audience of American haters at the University of Teheran, Fidel Castro, to the chant of war, from the fanatics in the audience, threatened that the governments of Cuba and Iran could bring the United States to its knees. Four months later Americans awoke to the horrors of September 11. And today, Fidel Castro's brainchild Hugo Chavez continues subverting the continent.

I don't understand how travel restrictions are being used, not now, by the same people that have requested the lifting of the embargo and the lifting of sanctions. Cuba needs to change. It's not the U.S. policy. It's the Cuban government. The Cuban government has to release political prisoners. The Cuban government has to hold free and democratic elections. And the Cuban government has to respect human rights. And then perhaps sanctions could be lifted. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you, Ms. Perez Castellon.

I would also note that other individuals who were incarcerated as a result of what's described as the Black Spring, people like Oscar Espinosa Chepe, who happens to be a friend of mine, whom I visit every time that I go to Cuba, and his wife Miriam Leiva, who was one of the founders of the -- I'm trying to say this in Spanish -- La Damas Blanco.

MS. CASTELLON: Damas de Blanco.

REP. DELAHUNT: Okay. Also had communicated with me that family travel is extremely important not to aid and assist the Cuban government, but to encourage those on the island who are in opposition. And they have paid the price. It's easy for you and for me to be here in Washington or to be here in Miami. They have served their time, as Mr. Hernandez has --

MS. CASTELLON: -- others are still in prison of those 75 --

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REP. DELAHUNT: Let's be very, very clear, there is nobody on this panel that will not make an effort to advocate for their release as well.

MS. CASTELLON: Well --

REP. DELAHUNT: I can assure you of that. And another individual who has spent time in a Cuban prison is Dr. Hernandez. Doctor, would you please make your statement?

MR. HERNANDEZ: Thank you very much.

REP. DELAHUNT: Could you hit the button, you got to hit that button.

MR. HERNANDEZ: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee. I'd like to submit also my complete testimony for the record if you please --

REP. DELAHUNT: Without objection.

MR. HERNANDEZ: Thank you. And my name, as I said, is Francisco Hernandez. And I am the President of the Cuban American National Foundation. And you have mentioned part of my record. And in order to perhaps be more explicit on it, let me say that I left Cuba after working for about a year in the underground. And early in 1959 my father was not only arrested, was tried, sentenced, and executed in 24 hours by the courts of -- the kangaroo courts in Cuba.

So I've also visited this room many times. And I remember in looking at those two great men, their portraits hanging on the walls that they helped us tremendously. And many of the fights were won against the Castro regime over the years because of the work of Dante Fascell and Henry Hyde. So as you can see, Mr. Chairman, I am not a Castro sympathizer. Thereby, my dismay at having to defend, not in Cuba, not against the Castro regime, but in the halls of the Congress of the United States, the right of Cuban-American families to consort, support, and protect each other, especially in times of peril.

Mr. Chairman, this is not about sanctions. This is not about Fidel Castro or Raul Castro. The right of human families to support each other pre-dates the establishment of human societies and human governments. Their rights are inalienable, and as such should be protected, not interfered with, by governments, whether they are the U.S. government, or the Castro regime. For that reason, the Cuban American National Foundation firmly opposed the restrictions imposed by the present administration in the year 2004.

These restrictions were not on the Cuban government. These restrictions were directly on the Cuban people. Mr. Chairman, these restrictions are not only inhumane, but they are also counterproductive to our desire to uplift the Cuban people in their struggle for democracy and clearly reveal the utter hypocrisy of a policy that prohibits families from helping one another, yet facilitates trade and travel to American businessmen looking to make a profit.

I haven't seen, yet, anybody talk about the fact that the Bush administration has authorized \$2.6 billion in trade with Cuba, and Cuban families cannot send more than \$100 a week to their families in Cuba. Mr. Chairman, Cuban-Americans now more than ever must become agents of change inside the island, and feel the gap the Castro government has created by not responding to the present crisis.

I had the opportunity to talk to an activist, the human right activist in Las Tunas province just after the pass of the Ike Hurricane. And he said to me, for this first time in my life for about four days I haven't seen one Cuban officer around here, whether a member of a communist party or member of a municipality, whatever, or a military man. This is the vacuum that the Cuban government has left. That vacuum must be filled. And there is nobody else that can fill that vacuum at the present time than the families, and the brothers and sisters of the Cubans that are suffering in the present time.

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In the coming weeks, with a Cuban government unable and unwilling to confront these crisis, disease and malnutrition may spread, and the desperation of a people who feel helpless and forgotten will reach the point where, as it has occurred in the past, thousands will see no other alternative than to attempt the desperate journey to American shores placing their lives and our national security at risk.

As this crisis unfolds, Mr. Chairman, we will be holding back, because of these absurd restrictions, the efforts and resources of over 400,000 Cubans who have arrived in the United States in the last 10 years and who have immediate relatives on island. What would any of us do in their situation? What would you do Mr. Chairman, if your mother had lost their house, or if your children didn't have anything to eat? What would, any of us would do? Surely, the insanity of these restrictions will drive many of those 400,000 Cubans in South Florida and throughout the United States to resort to all kinds of illegal and risky schemes in order to help their families, and who could blame them?

There is no question that the primary responsibility of responding to this growing crisis belongs to the Cuban regime. Yet they have dismally failed at providing emergency aid to their own people.

They do not feel compelled to act, because their primary concern is not the well being of their people, but their ability to remain in power. We have born witness to this over the course of 50 years as they placed innocent men and women before the firing squads, and forced one-fifth of Cuba's population into exile.

Make no mistake, Mr. Chairman, this was true during Fidel Castro's reign, and it'll continue to be true under Raul Castro. And they are not going to reply to the offer, the very generous offer of the United States, because what they want is to continue to control the Cuban people. They don't want the interference of United States. But we have to find ways in which we can break that total control of the government over the Cuban people. And the only way we can break that control is opening and making Cuban-Americans agents of change within the island of the present time.

This is our opportunity actually, and is the opportunity of the Cuban people. We cannot continue to maintain our families and the families of those who are in Cuba completely separated and unable to help theirs, because nobody else is going to help them, nobody else is going to do what has to be done. In the face of dealing with a regime that completely disregards the well-being of its own people and has turned down, as I said before, the aid from the United States Government, the Cuban-American community stands anxious to assist our brethren on the Island.

In an attempt to get direct aid to hurricane victims, the Cuban American National Foundation requested, and was granted a license by the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the Department of Treasury. In less than two days, the response was so overwhelming that we met the ceiling of our 250,000 license and were forced to put the program on hold while we await approval of an additional license. In a matter of hours, over 1,200 --

REP. DELAHUNT: Wrap it up, Mr. Hernandez.

MR. HERNANDEZ: Yes.

REP. DELAHUNT: I bet you I'm going to have to give some extra time when we do Q and A's to our other witnesses.

MR. HERNANDEZ: You're right. So to end, this is the opportunity that we have to help Cuba under Cuban people. First, get sufficient independence from the government in order to do things by themselves, to help the opposition inside Cuba, which cannot be helped at the present time by anybody in the United States because they are not direct families or immediate families of that opposition.

And the 59 members do not have -- that do not have families here in the United States, are imprisoned at the present time of the "black spring" in Havana cannot be helped, you cannot send them a \$1,000. So I ask of you and the members of the Congress of the United States to please help the Cuban people by lifting these restrictions.

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REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you, Dr. Hernandez.

Mr. Peters.

MR. PETERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, it's good to be with you. And I'm particularly honored to be on this panel with these fine people here.

We are talking about Cuba today in a context that's unlike, you know, the context that we've known for all these years. It's the context of tremendous devastation because of the hurricanes that went through and the great suffering that's taking place and economic destruction which we've documented in our statements. And I think that the tests for governments in a circumstance like this is to put politics aside, and do all we can to help the people who are victims of these disasters.

I have faith in the Bush administration. I think that President Bush and his people have done that. I think they have -- that they could more, but certainly these offers that they've made and the fact that the president and his representatives have pulled back on conditions that we originally set, I think those were signs of good faith. And I think I'm glad that our government is making these offers. I think it's deeply regrettable that the Cuban government has not found a way to accept those offers, and I think it's -- if I may venture to say this -- it's probably incumbent on people like us who has had conversations and have conversations with Cuban government officials to encourage them to accept these good-faith offers that are coming out of the Bush administration.

I hope for the future that the door remains open and I don't want to be too definitive of why I say it because I want to be optimistic that maybe the diplomats on both sides can work something out or that the United States can contribute to the kind of multilateral effort that's going to be needed.

This hearing started out on a very high plane, with Mr. Rohrabacher and Mr. McCotter invoking all these moral considerations and all of that, and I wanted to touch on that briefly if I could. It was nice that Congressman McCotter stipulated to everybody's good intentions in the room, I'd like to stipulate to the fact that everybody has the same views of the nature of the government of Cuba, all of us in the room do. I don't think there is any disagreement about that. I think foreign policy would be a very simple proposition if all it only consisted of was making a moral judgment about the nature of a foreign government, it would be really simple. We would be breaking relations, we would be cutting off contacts not just with Cuba, but with dozens of countries all around the world.

But of course that's not what it's about. There are practical and prudential judgments that are involved too. And Mr. Rohrabacher invoked President Reagan; we can invoke President Nixon's action with regard to China, President Ford's action with regard to Eastern Europe, President Reagan's actions with regard to the Eastern Europe and exchanges and all kinds of contact with the Soviet Union. Those are entirely contrary to judgments that some -- I underscore "some" here -- Republican colleagues voiced today, and I don't think President Nixon and Ford or Reagan were morally blind, they were asserting our interests. And they saw that contact was an element of American strength and openness is a strength of ours, it's not a liability that we need to regulate.

Getting back to the family sanctions issue. Again, in the context of doing all we can to help the people, I think that it's clear that multilateral aid is necessary, it's clear that very large scale efforts are necessary. But just because those relief efforts are going to proceed why should we hold back family members from helping their loved ones? There is nothing that could be more direct and more effective than a family member coming to help out, or sending money to help out.

We were treated yesterday to a truly absurd statement, I would even call it pathetic, by our secretary of commerce who's Cuban-American and who sort of invokes some kind of authority as a Cuban-American, but he said that he hears some people in Cuba that they don't need money because they've nothing to spend it on. What an astounding statement. And one almost doesn't know where to begin. There are stores in Cuba where people can buy things, people can buy things to repair their houses, they can buy appliances, there is a black market which is a

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fact of life in Cuba. And obviously it's not a perfect system, but the idea that somebody in need and especially somebody in the kind of need that they're in now, would not want the purchasing power to be increased by having a relative send them money, is just absolutely absurd.

You know, how could people help? If you -- one aspect of our sanction goes all the way to the contents of packages that people can send. And it is illegal now for Cuban-Americans to take a box and put some clothing in it and some seeds in it and personal hygiene items for somebody whose house has been completely wiped out, and whose garden has been blown to smithereens. You can't do that. If somebody's -- if their house is okay, but their refrigerator was flooded -- a Cuban-American can't send money to go buy a new refrigerator.

Some guys in Miami who would want to go repair their aunt's roof, they can't do that, because their aunt is too distant a relative and they're not allowed to go visit her. Or someone in Miami or let's say Bergenline Avenue in New Jersey who wants to go find his mom because he can't locate her and her phone is out, if he went last year, he would have to wait till 2010. Why in the world would the United States stand in the way of things like that?

There are many points to bring up on that score, but I'll just finish on the issue of the dissidence in Cuba. Just like we Republicans who show capacity to show different point of view, sure, the dissidents disagree on different things.

But in my estimation, there are three major networks of them. There's the one led by Marta Beatriz Roque and she for some time now has been against all of these family sanctions. She was, back in May, on a video conference with President Bush and with Secretary Gutierrez for that matter. And she called for these family sanctions to be gotten rid of so Cuban-Americans could send packages, could send remittances, cash aid, and visit their family more often.

And she has called on President Bush specifically in the context of this natural disaster. Oswaldo Paya, who challenged the government with a petition drive, the same thing. Hector Palacios's wife who was the leader, until she left Cuba, of the library movement, she did the same thing.

REP. DELAHUNT: Mr. Peters, you better begin to wrap up.

MR. PETERS: We should -- I submit that we should not just invoke the cause of those people or appropriate millions of dollars to support their cause, we should also listen to them and heed their word. Thank you.

REP. DELAHUNT: Well, thank you all for your testimony. Again the buzzer has run. We have a series of four votes which would most likely implicate 45 minutes to an hour, but I'm going to ask all of you to stay because we'd like to pose questions to you.

Let me begin with a question and you can all reflect on it, and I want to read it into the record, because it is a "El Nuevo Herald" endorsement of an amendment that's being proposed by Senator Dodd who I'm sure is familiar to most of you. And I'm reading this.

"The proposal of Democratic Senator Christopher Dodd to lift in six months the principal restrictions on remittances and travel to Cuba among others has the virtue of wisdom and the force of compassion. Seconded by a Republican colleague Richard Lugar, it gives a glimmer of hope.

"The Cuban authorities have been insisting on linking the unilateral and total lifting of the entire embargo to any willingness to receive aid. In this way they make all the people suffer as a tool of urgent political blackmail. Nevertheless, the circumstances allow Washington to look at things from another level and work with an ample margin to maneuver.

"In normal times the restrictions imposed by the administration of George W Bush were extremely unpopular on the island and for exiles. Now, they ascend intelligence in sensitivity. That absurd strategy does not benefit North American interests nor does it speed up the return of freedom to Cuba.

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"The Cubans of the island are hoping for the help of the United States. If the cost of saving lives and alleviating suffering consists of lifting the embargo for six months, well, it's worth the pain and we'll pay the price. That is the ethical fiber that differentiates us from the Castro brothers' dictatorship. Three men do not make policy with other people's pain."

So when we return I'm sure that your response will be illuminating, interesting. I yield to my friend.

REP. ROHRABACHER: Chairman, we still have a few more minutes. It's about seven minutes before, which means we got about three or four minutes left just to put into the discussions. So when we return, I have yet to hear people advocating that we just temporarily lift the restrictions on humanitarian aid in order to deal with the current crisis. What we're really talking about here is a major change of policy and not a humanitarian "let's just lift the restrictions now because of the hurricane and a natural disaster." That might actually be a little bit more, you know, attractive to us ---

REP. : I would support that ---

REP. ROHRABACHER: --- because we would be then -- yeah, well, but unfortunately that's not what's being advocated today.

REP. DELAHUNT: Well, would my ---

REP. ROHRABACHER: What we're advocating is a major change in policy and what we're doing is letting a crisis define what long-term policy should be, which is not the way we're supposed to be getting to ---

REP. DELAHUNT: Would my friend yield for just a moment ---

REP. ROHRABACHER: Sure, sure.

REP. DELAHUNT: --- because I take his point and he knows my position, as I think everyone on the panel does. I indicated in my opening remarks and I thought you were paying attention to me, but what I suggested and it's my intention to file, a six-month suspension. And my proposal would not go as far as the amendment put forth by Senator Dodd, but would simply, for six months, go back to the pre-2004 regime, if you will, that would allow Cuban-Americans to travel and to bring remittances along with maybe toothpaste and some bedding home to their loved ones.

And I'd be more than welcome to have you as the lead Republican sponsor on that humanitarian initiative, but maybe you should have a discussion on the floor of the House as we go to vote, with some others, otherwise you might be the target of some criticism.

REP. ROHRABACHER: The other fundamental that we might need to get out --- and asking for something that is temporary is far different than changing policy, fundamental policy --- the other aspect is, we of course have seen nobody suggesting that, yes, let's make an offer -- we will do this, we will change this policy if we can eliminate certain political restrictions that Castro has on his own people. Let's take a look at specific policies that are in Cuba, that are repressive and repugnant to us and say, good, let's cut a deal here. Let us lift this, if you do this. Instead, I think what we've got is unilateral concessions that doesn't lead to any type of respect by a dictatorial regime like that in Cuba. And maybe we can discuss all of this when we get back.

REP. DELAHUNT: I look forward to the discussion. It's a dialogue.

(Recess.)

We're back. I appreciate your patience. And my good friend from California has other obligations, so he will proceed first.

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REP. ROHRABACHER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and let me note this is our last hearing probably. Probably our last hearing, maybe not, but who knows.

REP. DELAHUNT: We've got some surprises.

REP. ROHRABACHER: He's got some surprises up his sleeve, but if this is indeed the last hearing of the year, we've had a --- you know, the "Bill and Dana" show has been quite an experience for us both, and we've had a lot of fun, but we'd also --- we've really broken a lot of new ground intellectually because we've been open-minded to having extensive and thorough involvement in questions and answers and exchanges of ideas, which is different than many of the other subcommittees that I've been on. So I've learned a lot this year and --

REP. DELAHUNT: If I can interrupt, as I always do -- (laughs) --- I want to thank you, Dana. This is the 50th hearing of this particular subcommittee. I believe we've had more hearings than all of the other subcommittees combined. And it has been informative, it's been fun, and it's been an intellectual challenge. And it would not have been that way but for the fact you are the ranking member of the subcommittee. I hope that as the next Congress assembles, that you still are the ranking member and I'm the chairman. But I'm grateful for your courtesies, your ability to work well with your Democratic colleagues.

I hope I am not giving you a heavy load by praising you, but it's not hyperbole. It's from the heart, you're my friend. We disagree on a lot, but we do it with respect, we do it with civility, and on occasion we agree.

And when we do, watch out.

REP. ROHRABACHER: (Laughs) --- well, with that said, I think that we actually agree on more than we thought we did at the beginning of the year. And I have been very pleased with those areas which, for example, with Ramos and Compean where you agreed to look into that issue, which was important to me, and several other issues that you've backed me up in terms of my investigative endeavors into the Oklahoma City bombing, and things such as that. So I appreciate that very much.

Mr. Chairman, I finally want a couple of words in this, and then, I'm sorry, I have to run upstairs. I've got a --- actually it's an interview on the Uyghurs which is something we agree on. But we didn't know we agreed till we had those hearings.

So let me just say that we have had a number of hearings on Cuba. We had eight hearings on Cuba so far this year. Unfortunately, seven of them were about Guantanamo, and one was this hearing about this particular issue. I think that it would have served us well if we were to have had --- and if next year we decide to move forward and you resubmit your legislation, we should begin with hearings on human rights in Cuba, and how that relates to basic fundamental policy. And there is a relation to fundamental policies and where you to draw the line between a humanitarian, very humanitarian instinct that we all have in caring for people as individuals and also the responsibility of developing a policy that will make all the people better in the long run is a tough question --- (laughs) --- tough job to know where to draw that line.

So today, I would just simply say that while we -- while I sympathize with the people who've talked about their relatives not being able to see each other, I blame Castro and I blame the dictatorship for that. I think that when people came here they understood that I'm going to be separated from my family, and they were willing to do that to get away from this monstrous regime. And then after a few years of feeling the heart's pain --- then they expect the United States to change, it's not necessarily the right way to go. What we should be looking for is regime change in Havana, and hopefully there will be, now that Castro is on his way out.

I would also recommend that we get fully behind the humanitarian effort for hurricane assistance and I understand the NGOs now are capable of collecting money, any amounts of money, and going into Cuba to help. If there's any restriction on that, we should be behind that effort.

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And finally, with Cuba suffering as it is, I think that we need to call upon Fidel Castro to give up some of the hundreds of millions of dollars he's ripped off from his own people and amassed in foreign banks as has happened for the last 50 years. Maybe he can give some of that money to help his suffering people at this moment and I would challenge him to do so.

With that said, Mr. Chairman, I've got to go up and do this interview. Thank you all very much, God bless you.

REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you, Dana.

And let me go first to the other Republican. I feel like I'm at a Republican convention.

REP. FLAKE: (Laughs) --- we'd let you know if you were --

REP. DELAHUNT: I know, and I have no doubt about it.

Jeff?

REP. FLAKE: Thank you. I appreciate the testimony, and I really appreciate the indulgence while we traipse back and forth through the floor, I know you've waited a long time and I just want you to know how much we appreciate it, all of you.

Let me just say I've enjoyed all the testimony. I just had a question. Ms.-- Iriondo, is that how it's pronounced, and Ms. Perez Castellon, or however you pronounce that, if you could -- I think I heard you loud and clear that you believe that travel -- that you would not want to travel to Cuba, because that would somehow aid the regime or send the wrong message. And I understand that and I appreciate that. And I would be that last in the world, I don't think anybody should force you to do so.

By the same token, do you think that it should be your right or our right as members of Congress to tell Dr. Hernandez or Witness Arzola or somebody else who has family there, who has a sick mother there that it is not their right to travel?

MS. IRIONDO: Can I ---

REP. FLAKE: Please do.

MS. IRIONDO: If I may, for example, Blanca Gonzalez who's the mother of a current political prisoner sentenced to 25 years, is not permitted by the Castro regime to visit her son, her grand daughter, or her daughter-in-law, because whoever gets into Cuba is a selective process. And all those that dissent from the regime are not allowed to go into Cuba.

Now, I've heard some things and if I may, I'm going to use your question, and if you allow me I would like to clarify some things I've heard in a testimony given here that I think that needs clarification for the record.

For a long time now, in addition to what's available now in response to the devastating hurricanes that have impacted the island of Cuba, there have been non-governmental organizations, fully licensed by the Department of the Treasury to send remittances to independent civil society in Cuba, for the promotion of independent civil society, and also to all the families and political prisoners in Cuba.

That we know of there are 300 or approximately 300 political prisoners and I say that "we know of" because the figures are given by Castro's regime. And we know for a fact that without any other entity to dispute the official numbers given by the regime, it's very difficult to assess the real number of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience within Cuba.

But one of those organizations -- and I have the privilege of working with it --- is an organization that's called Plantados hasta la Libertad y la Democracia, "planted until freedom and democracy." And this is an organization

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and NGO integrated by former political prisoners who never wavered in front of the regime, who spent more than 20 years, each of them, in prison, and who would rather be naked than wear the prisoner, common prisoner uniform in Castro's prisons. And every month we send \$50 to every family of every political prisoner within the island.

At the same time I had also a licensed organization and we didn't renew it because I don't have employees, they were all volunteers. So I worked through Plantados until liberty and freedom and I send our remittances through that organization. But members of the opposition inside Cuba also and members of the independent civil society, groups of independent civil societies -- there are many exile organizations and NGOs that are not exile organizations, that are taking care also of sending this resources for the independent civil society within Cuba. This is nothing new. It has been going for a long time.

And the last thing I wanted to ask, because I heard also -- and with all due respect, Congressman Delahunt and Congressman Flake, in all your visits with the government authorities in Cuba, with the regime, how many times have you been able to visit a political prisoner inside a prison, or to publicly ask for the liberation of those political prisoners who at this moment need to be a very --- a very serious concern for all freedom-loving people.

REP. FLAKE: Thank you for your statement. Let me just say, every time that I've traveled to Cuba and every meeting that we've had, we've presented a list of political prisoners and asked for their release, as well as many letters having been sent from here as well, so we have made that --- but that is all beside the point, as was the response.

Let me ask again, and maybe Ms. Perez Castellon will answer, I know how you feel and I feel that it is your right, certainly, if you don't want to travel to Cuba to visit relatives or to give aid and comfort to those who are hurting or whatever; you should be able to stay where you are and not travel.

And then I understand that not everyone can see their relatives, they -- the gentlelady with a son in prison, my heart goes out to you --- but does that mean that nobody should be able to visit their family? Should you have the right, should we have the right as members of the Congress to say to Ms. Arzola, to say you cannot therefore visit your sick mother?

MS. CASTELLON: Well, first of all, the Cuban government has said they will not allow me to return to my own country, so that takes care of that. My husband was in prison for 28 years. None of his family was allowed to go visit. But when we're here to talk about the sanctions that were imposed in 2003 to 75 political prisoners, I did not hear Oscar Espinosa Chepe, say or a Hector Palacios when they were in prison, "Lift those sanctions," because they knew that those sanctions meant something.

And I would also like to say that -- what I have heard here is, lift sanctions, lift sanctions; I have not once heard anyone say let the Cuban government take the first step, whether it be the release of prisoners, whether it be anything. And with all due respect, what I think you're doing is (emboldening ?) the victimizers, and you have no regard for the victims.

And I have not heard Oscar Espinosa Chepe condemn Cuba's totalitarian regime. Yet, when I read his columns in the Herald, one was, let's give Raul Castro a chance. Well, you know what, it's been two years. The ladies in white have been dragged through the street, the prisons are still full. And the other column I heard was, "Vote for Obama." So you know what, I don't think this makes him a member of the opposition, but rather someone who is being used by the regime to obtain their goals, which is basically the lifting of sanctions.

REP. FLAKE: Let me back -- when you stipulate that you've to --- or that it is your right to tell another family that they cannot visit ---

MS. CASTELLON: No, no, I believe that sanctions were imposed for a purpose.

REP. FLAKE: Okay.

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MS. CASTELLON: The arbitrary arrest --

REP. FLAKE: Should be --- all right.

MS. CASTELLON: -- comprise men and women. Yes, I think it was okay for the racist South -- government of South Africa to, you know, have an embargo. And I think that's what made South Africa change.

But for some reason, in the case of Cuba, and it's not now because of the hurricane, it's the same people that year after year, and year after year I came here with Dr. Hernandez, precisely asking for those sanctions to remain. And now, all of a sudden, we feel that those sanctions have to be lifted without one single step from the Cuban government.

REP. FLAKE: Let me ask Dr. Hernandez and Mr. Peters quickly, today the statement was made that if we allow travel or allow packages, that it wouldn't benefit any Cuban families. But then, in the next paragraph of the testimony there was a statement made that this action would benefit the Cuban regime. Is it possible to send, you know, if we were able to send, a hygiene kit or a fishing line or seeds to a family, that the family wouldn't benefit but the regime somehow would?

Now, I'm the first to admit there's no way you can keep all that you send to families. You can stipulate that none of it will go to the regime, or whatever. But it seems a little simplistic --- Mr. Sosa may want to address this as well, to say -- and unrealistic to say that you can't benefit your family members by visiting, or doing anything else, but that same visit or that same shipment or that same aid, will benefit the regime. Dr. Hernandez?

MR. HERNANDEZ: First of all, I'm very glad to see --

REP. DELAHUNT: Give him the microphone, and before you have an opportunity, let me introduce this rather famous individual by the name of Dan Burton, who, I happen to --- have to admit, is a friend of mine as well.

REP. DAN BURTON (R-IN): (Laughs) --- I like to be a friend of the Cuban people.

REP. DELAHUNT: Well, you are a friend of the Cuban people.

MR. HERNANDEZ: And I have a very, very great honor to be here, and with whom I consider a very personal friend also, Dan Burton.

Look, we have been here for at least three, or four hours going back-and-forth on this matter. And I tried to explain from our -- where we come from, from our position. I mean -- and Mr. Burton knows this very well because both, the Torricelli bill, and the Helms-Burton bill, you know, we fought at least as much as anybody else to try to pass it with our community, and certainly, here in Congress. But this is not about that. This is not about sanctions at this moment, and I said it in my testimony, this is about helping the Cuban people at the, probably, the worst time that they have confronted in a long, very, very long time.

After 50 years of having the worst government that we could, anybody could, ever expect, we are having two hurricanes that have destroyed completely, the island. I am -- I have to say this, but I'm afraid, and I am extremely concerned that we may be looking at the disintegration of the Cuban family and the Cuban nation as we know it. If we cannot hold, at this time, the Cuban people to their land, we are going to have to find a way for them here in the United States, because nobody is going to stay in Cuba under the present conditions, and yes, yes, I will do anything in my hands to get rid of Castro and Raul Castro. I would do anything, and they don't deserve anything, whatsoever.

But, right now, we have to save the Cuban people, and it's not going to be saved by simply crossing our hands and waiting for Raul Castro to give us what we are asking of him. They are not going to accept what we have offered. They are not going to do anything to help the Cuban people. We have to help them. And then, it's not a question of coming here and discussing whether this is right or this is wrong or we shouldn't, and there are people

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there that don't want to be helped. This is a question that we have to now break the rules, if they can be broken, and help the Cuban people.

What we are asking is not to lift the embargo or anything like that, not to legitimize the Cuban government, I would never do that. But what we are saying is that the Cuban people is suffering tremendously. And what worked before should not work now. We have to help, and the way we can help is unleashing just the tremendous resources of our own people here that are prepared to do it.

I also have a license to help the Cuban opposition, and we are also sending money to the Cuban opposition, but what I refer to is that if you got -- any of you wants to send monies to those 75 or 59 that remain, or their families, you cannot do it. Because you have to have a license, and that is not fair. And it is not fair that the -- I can have the license to send money to those people, and anybody here in the United States or their families, cannot go there. There are people that can visit Cuba everyday, and they have a license to go there and take humanitarian relief. But their families cannot. The families of those people cannot. But then, if you're given -- if the government gives a license to somebody, then they can go there. What I am saying is that let everybody do it, because this is a time of crisis.

MS. CASTELLON: Sir, sorry --

REP. FLAKE: Yeah, can I --

MS. CASTELLON: Excuse me, sir, we have a plane to catch, and we're going to have to leave. But we do appreciate your having invited us there today. And again, I don't see how family travel can make up for not pressuring the government to accept --

REP. DELAHUNT: I appreciate what you're saying, and I'm going to go to my friend, Mr. Burton, who wants to make a few --

REP. DAN BURTON (R-IN): I know you have to catch a plane and I --

REP. DELAHUNT: -- but before he goes on, I think that it's important, because you made a statement about Oscar and Hector, while they were in prison.

Their wives, Miriam Leiva and Gisela, spoke out on this issue with great courage, and continued to advocate for the removal of restrictions on Cuban family travel. So I don't want anyone to leave here, that might be watching this today, to think that, at great risk to themselves, at great risk to their husbands who were incarcerated as you all know, that they have altered. They are people of great principle. They deserve our respect, our admiration, and I think that's important.

And with that, let me go to the gentleman from Indiana.

MS. CASTELLON: I know that, you know, they were an inspiration ---

REP. BURTON: I know you have to catch a plane, and I won't ask any questions, I'll just make a couple of observations. First of all, I think as long as President Bush is in the White House, which is not for very much longer, you're not going to see any movement to lift the sanctions. If Obama wins, there probably will be a movement. I haven't talked to John McCain about it. I presume he would take the same position as President Bush.

But they're still driving 1950-something Chevrolets down there if they can find the parts for them. The people that work in the hotels down there, they can't be there except while they work, and if they make \$400 a month, it goes to the government. The government pays them back, and pay is so-so. They get about an equivalent of, \$10 -- \$5, \$10 a month. None of that is changing. And for us to show a weakness, in my opinion, and reward that, won't change that government's structure, whatsoever. I had problems with the embargo that we had on South Africa,

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but it did work. And I think that Cuba, eventually, will be free, eventually it'll have democracy, and I hope to be around to see that. But I don't believe it's the right time.

I talked to some of the people who really wanted to change what's going on in Cuba. I said, the minute they start allowing local democratic elections, they start allowing people to be able to have a voice in their government, then I'll start talking about changing the Helms-Burton Law. And I'll be one of the people to lead that, because that's what we want to see. We want to see a movement to democracy and freedom. And until that happens, I will continue to be a stalwart to help you guys out, and try to make sure that we keep the pressure on Fidel and Raul. And I hope Fidel lives long enough to see democracy come to Cuba. I'd hate to see him go before it happens. Thank you very much.

MS. CASTELLON: Thank you, Congressman.

REP. DELAHUNT: I have to -- before you two leave, my colleague from New York wishes to either pose a question, or make a statement.

This is Congressman Gregory Meeks.

REP. GREGORY W. MEEKS (D-NY): I have to jump in because of some of the comments that were made. Number one, I think that the part that my dear friend and colleague, Mr. Burton made that nothing has changed, is exactly right. Nothing has changed. And as long as we keep doing the same thing, nothing will change. And so if, in fact, we've been doing something for 48 years, and we have not changed anything, and nothing has, you know, made it better for the Cuban people, then common sense would tell me that we need to change, we need to do something differently, number one.

Number two, there's been reference made a number of times about South Africa, and I hear that a number of times. But there are some very real differences, I think, in Cuba and South Africa. One, let me point out first of all, that in South Africa, it wasn't unilateral sanctions, it was multilateral sanctions. And you had the whole, rest of the world that was a part of it, and that's what helped make the kind of change that was necessary, that happened there. That's not the case that's taking place in Cuba, because every, you know -- others are there.

Number two, on this specific issue that we're talking about, even during the sanction period in South Africa, families were allowed to go visit families. Families were allowed to take care of families, families was allowed to bring and give money to help out their people. Even during the sanctions in South Africa, there was not that kind of travel ban. And what happened was people had a choice to make whether or not they wanted to go visit South Africa. For example, many African-Americans choose not to go visit South Africa because they thought that to sit in a segregated park would not be right. But it was their choice. But others were not denied, and family members were not denied the right to go visit, as is happening here. So that's a different scenario.

And secondly, I too, want freedom and democracy for the people of Cuba. And no one knows more about that than I think that I do, and actually people who happen to be of African descent in the United States of America. Because we too know how it is to be deprived of a democracy, in a quote "democracy," unquote. And so it was for a long period of time, in the South, where African-Americans did not have the right to vote, did not have the right to -- they were limited in the same -- to me, in a very real way, as some of the Cubans are, in Cuba. But how did it change? It changed when people went down and was able to open it up, to expose what was going on, to show what was going on, to talk about what was going on. It gave a real presence, and forced people who wanted to keep everybody else out.

If you look at the governments in the South doing segregation in America, what they wanted to do was restrict people from coming into them, telling them what to do. They wanted to leave them out. And we was fighting to get people in, so that it could expose, so that we could have change. Otherwise, if that not had happened, we could be now, some 45 years after the Voting Rights Act in 1965, in the same condition that we were then, just as Cuba,

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some 48 years later, is in the same condition that it was in because we stubbornly move with the same policy, and refused to change so that we can benefit the majority of the Cuban people.

REP. DELAHUNT: You know, I want to give -- you can stay you're staying, and I know you two have a plane, so I'm going to conclude the two of you with Ms. Iriondo.

MS. IRIONDO: I would like to thank you for your consideration. And before I go, I would like to say, and reiterate, that we are as concerned for the people of Cuba in this moment, as the greatest concern of anybody can be. Because we want the best for our people, or we want the best for 11 million Cubans, not for those only that have family members. And that's what we're striving for.

If the case can be argued by some of the people that have expressed a different position to that we have expressed, then too, the case can be argued that it is a unique opportunity to exert the kind of international pressure. Starting with all of us here, to ask and demand from the Cuban government, and from the regime, to make and take the steps, at least one step, liberate the political prisoners, do something, the case can be argued. And I believe, if that case is argued with the confluence of all of us, in the strength of our unity, I believe we're going to see real change. And that's the change I want to see.

REP. DELAHUNT: I want to assure you that every time that I go to Cuba, I argue and advocate for exactly what you want. In 1988, I went personally to Combinado del Este and interviewed (Los Guantados ?) and came back, and filed a report, and urged the Cuban government to release them. And as you know, because in 1989 that they were released, I'm not taking any credit for that, but I can assure you, and those that have been incarcerated in Cuba, have our support. And we have advocated for them publicly, and with the Cuban government officials. Be assured of that. And I'm not in anyway questioning the sincerity of what you're saying. And I think if we had more time and could have a conversation in an informal setting, I think you would be surprised by the level of agreement. Bon voyage.

MS. IRIONDO: Thank you very much.

REP. DELAHUNT: Mr. Peters.

MR. PETERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin by saying that I was very heartened to hear what Mr. Rohrabacher said, that after having a number of hearings on Guantanamo, and then this one, that he would like to continue. And I hope that this subcommittee will plow ahead.

I think that the strategy that the United States has employed towards Cuba is under-examined, and deserves to be examined because we -- well, let me put it this way, I don't think it's a matter of strength or weakness. If I'm playing chess with Mr. Hernandez here and after, say, 48 years, I realize I'm not winning the game, and I decide to change my strategy, that's not a concession to him, that's my effort to do something slightly smarter.

And I think that if we look at what we've done over the years, we have imagined, in our own mind, that our sanctions are really tough because they're extreme in our own context, and we imagine in our own minds that this regime is going to fall. But it's actually -- the communists are a lot smarter there than we imagine them to be. The regime, whether we like it or not, is more solid than we imagine it to be, our sanctions are ineffectual. And so I encourage you to plow ahead, and examine the strategy itself.

Congressman Flake asked if aid can get to the people, and I think there's no doubt that it can. The Cuban-Americans would not send remittances over the years if they were just going into the east, or they get to their people. And I -- the Congressman's point is extremely well taken. It's a communist country after all. The state is the dominant factor in their economy. So as the money moves through the economy, yeah, some get into the hands of the state. But you can send remittances.

And in this context, let me just stop for a second and --- this hearing is not about grand strategy. This hearing is about what we do specifically now, in a time of humanitarian emergency, and whether we're going to hold all these

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sanctions as if they're Holy Writ and can't be touched, or whether we might adjust in some ways. What in the world would be wrong with just allowing somebody to send remittances, so that their aunt can buy a refrigerator that's been destroyed by a flood, or a mattress, for that matter. Why do we have to hold, as if it's Holy Writ to these sanctions that say that if I've got my mom in Cuba, I can't send her new clothes in a gift package? I can't send seeds. These are absurd in today's context.

MR. : Yes, yes you can.

MR. PETERS: No, you certainly cannot.

MR. : No, you cannot.

MR. PETERS: Or for that matter, if somebody's roof has sustained damage, and one wants to go and bring \$500 to repair it, you can't do that because that's too much money. So you look at these sanctions in the light of the needs that are there now, and they're absurd. And if you suspend them, that does not prejudice at all your ability to take a bigger look at the policy on a permanent basis, but it will help a lot of people who --

REP. DELAHUNT: Let me, before you conclude your remarks, and I'm going to get to Mr. Sosa. We're here for the duration. So, you know, we'll make sure that we keep, you know, Dan Burton here, until it gets painful for him. But, would you expand, Mr. Peters, on -- in terms of what can be sent by family members from this country, in terms of humanitarian aid? Can I send toothpaste, or toilet paper as it were, to Cuba?

MR. PETERS: No.

REP. DELAHUNT: No?

MR. PETERS: No.

REP. DELAHUNT: I want that to go on the record. What we're talking about --

REP. BURTON: What constitutes humanitarian aid? Let's hear your definition of it.

MR. SOSA: While he's waiting to speak, I don't think it's his definition that matters, it's the Bush administration's definition, and that's -- he's about to read it from the federal regs. And we've tried actually over the years to expand it and are unsuccessful.

MR. PETERS: When I refer to the family sanction there, Mr. Chairman, what I'm referring to is on the issue of visits, a limitation of once every three years without any provision for exception. When it comes to sending money to your family, \$100 per household per month is the limit. And when it comes to gift parcels, since 2004, what's permitted is for someone to send to their family, food, medicine, medical supplies and equipments, receive-only radios, batteries for radios, and then last year, cell phones were allowed to be sold.

In 2004, President Bush deleted the following items from what was allowed to be sold, so that it's not legal to send clothing, personal hygiene items as you mentioned Mr. Chairman, seeds, fishing equipment, soap-making equipment, veterinary medicine and supplies. And then finally, in the case of all of those things, since 2004, the administration restricted -- or rather constricted --- the definition of "family," so that visits, packages, and cash assistance can only be sent to the immediate family and not the cousins or aunts and uncles, or nephews. That's what we're --

REP. FLAKE: Can I interject here, just a -- when you were talking about Holy Writ, that really rings a bell here, because in 2003, and few people recognize this, the Bush administration actually liberalized, you know, who is "family," and moved it from one degree of relationship to -- or from two, to three. So for all those who say that we're somehow conceding, and that that would send the wrong signal we've done it, back-and-forth, it isn't a Holy Writ, so we liberalized it in 2003 and then restricted it further in 2004.

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REP. DELAHUNT: Mr. Sosa?

MR. SOSA: Thank you very much, Chairman Delahunt. A couple of things come to mind. One is, for example, Dan Fisk, who is the national security advisor in the Western Hemisphere for the Bush administration, in the year 2000, wrote an article that I have here, on the Washington Quarterly, calling for the lifting of travel restrictions for Cuba-American remittances. So why was it okay then and not okay now?

Secondly, one thing that is incredible to me, and you know, having grown up in the United States, I have a good sense of common sense and what works and doesn't work, and here we are, having a discussion that we could have had, every one of the past 47 years. And the arguments that I hear, always on the other side, of keeping every --- the status quo, is, just hold on, because inevitably it will change. And I suppose a clock is right -- a broken clock is right, twice a day. In this case, the clock has been broken for 47 years. How much longer is this going to last?

In the meantime, we are not only isolating Cuban families, we're isolating the United States. The United States has created a vacuum in Cuba that is only very evidently, now, being filled by the Russian Federation, and the Bolivarian Republic of Hugo Chavez. Venezuela sends \$3 billion a year in annual subsidies. And so here we are, sending \$1 billion in aid to Georgia to stop the Russians, and 90 miles from Key West, the Russians are here. And we do nothing. So we have created this vacuum that is not only bad for the Cuban people, it's bad for the United States of America.

So, you know, I think it's great that we're all discussing, you know, the effects on the people of Cuba, but what about the effects on the United States, and our foreign policy. And what's going to happen if we have a state, as we very evidently do now, 90 miles from our shores that could eventually turn into a failed state, as a result of these hurricanes. And it's just, you know -- I mean, at some point, you've just got to stop knocking your head against the wall, and say, okay, this doesn't work, let's try something new. What we're saying here, not only myself from the Cuba Study Group, but also the Cuban American National Foundation, and others who in the past have been much more, shall I say, hard-line. It is time to forget about the politics of the situation, inject the moral imperative into the equation. The hurricane has provided us with a fantastic opening to help the Cuban people help themselves, and to further the interests of the United States by not creating on, so close to our shores, a failed state which is in debt to Venezuela, and potentially Russia.

REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you, and I'm going to -- yes, I'm going to go to Dr. Hernandez -- and I know that -- I want to say something publicly, you and I don't agree on practically anything. And I know --

MR. HERNANDEZ: That was you who's --- not "we" don't agree.

REP. DELAHUNT: -- and so I don't want to give you a curse of having to -- of having Delahunt saying good things about you. But having said that, I know that it was difficult for you to take the stance that you have. I consider it an act of courage because it's difficult to break out of the old thinking and look forward and envision a new strategy, or the beginning of a new strategy that will lead to something that, I think, we all can agree on. And I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that and let you know that despite the agreements and despite the criticism that you have occasionally added about myself, I have great respect for this act of courage that you have demonstrated.

MR. HERNANDEZ: Thank you, and, Mr. Chairman, and you can be sure that I also have a great respect, and all that criticism has been done with a respect that I have for your, position and also for your person, because I believe that -- you believe in your principles when you are saying that.

But let me -- you mentioned that, you know, it takes courage, but --- to change and I don't think that I have changed at all in my principles and my view of what the Cuban regime is all about. I continue to believe that this is one of the worst regimes that --- or systems I have ever -- being suffered by any country in this hemisphere.

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But and I am going to use the opportunity that Mr. Burton is here with us, to tell you why, I personally have changed also in my opinion a little bit, and --- somewhat, and it is that first we believe that we were going here in the United States -- we, the Cuban --- the U.S. Government and also the exiled community, what's going to be their driving force to exact change from the Cuban government in the island. And our position here, and the things that we did, and the things that we -- the activities that we carried here in the United States were going to have a tremendous effect on the Cuban people.

When Congressman Burton and Senator Helms were working on the Helms-Burton Bill. We saw a great opportunity to present, as we did also back in the Torricelli Bill, a sort of "sticks and carrots" approach to this situation. And people that criticized tremendously the Helms-Burton Bill has never talked about the fact that chapter 1 and chapter 2 of the Helms-Burton Bill say clearly what the United States is prepared to do if there is a reply, if there are conditions in Cuba that merit a change like Mr. Burton has said now.

Well, there has never been anything that the Cuban government has done in order to propitiate that change. And I can say here, now, that we can wait until hell freezes over and neither Raul nor Fidel Castro or any of the people around them are going to do anything to move from where they are. So what do we do here? We stay calm, cross our hands, and wait for things to happen, or like the Bush administration is saying, well, these are the three conditions, if you do these three conditions we are going to move.

Well, I can tell you right now that they are not going to release the prisoners, they are not going to call for free elections, and they are not going to do anything to respect human rights in Cuba because that is their nature, and if they change any of these things they are going to lose control. So what do we do in that condition? In addition to that, we gave, --- the Congress gave, in the Helms-Burton Bill, the president, the opportunity to really exercise some pressure over the Cuban government. In chapter 3 and the Congress gave a waiver on chapter 3 of the Helms-Burton Bill.

Well, the president, this president, my president, because I am a Republican, which he agreed and promised us before he was elected that he was going to apply chapter 3 of the Helms-Burton Bill, he has signed the waiver for all the times that he has been here. So we don't have any pressure of what so ever on the Cuban people -- on the Cuban government. Moreover, chapter 4 actually says that if somebody in Cuba, and a foreign corporation is dealing with the assets, a confiscated assets, in Cuba, their executives will not be given visas to come to the United States.

Well, it has been exercised I believe, in one or two occasions. But that has not been complied with. What has happened? The work, the tremendous work, that you did, Mr. Burton, on the Helms-Burton Bill, it has been lost because no pressure whatsoever has been applied on the Cuban government. And what I say now is that this pressure is not going to work with these people because they know that their lives go on it. So they cannot and they will not change.

What will change is that if we are capable of empowering the Cuban people to get independence from the Cuban government, to be able to work and act by themselves, to get confidence in themselves, to get confidence that they are going to be helped here in the United States, that there are people here that we are their friends, the friends of the Cuban people, not the friends of the Cuban government. And this is why we need to lift these restrictions at the present time because they go directly to the Cuban people and those in there now are going to say they want to help us, they don't want to help the Cuban government.

This is why it is so important at the present time that we lift at least for six months. But we lift that so that the Cuban people knows that in their very worst moment we were there to help them, and we did not wait for the Cuban government to act, because they know --- down in Cuba they know that the Cuban government is not going to help us, so we need to tell them we are going to help you directly because the Cuban government is not going to help you.

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REP. DELAHUNT: Mr. Sosa, for the benefit of Mr. Burton, can you describe your own family's history, and then if you could care to comment on what Dr. Hernandez just said?

MR. SOSA: Yes, thank you very much, Chairman Delahunt. I was born in Cuba, left when I was four. I had a father, brother, three cousins, an uncle in prison in Fidel Castor's jail. You know, I've been to Cuba three times on humanitarian missions. I think I may be the only one here who is a Cuban-American who has actually been to Cuba, talked to Cubans, and heard what they have to say as opposed to think what they are saying.

I'm a Republican; I'm a supporter of President Bush, also a voter, like Dr. Hernandez. So I'm not here as some wild-eyed Liberal despite living in Boston, Massachusetts -- (laughs) --- But I agree with what Dr. Hernandez says. I think, the thing that's troubling here is the United States never seems to take the initiative. It always seems to react. You know, something happens on the island we react to it whether it's the imprisoning of 75 dissidents or the hurricane or --- you can name a bunch of different things.

We never seem to be able to put the Castro regime on the defensive. It's time, we have an opportunity right now. The first thing we need to do as Dr. Hernandez said is we need to lift these restrictions on travel and remittances for a minimum of 60 days or 6 months, just a minimum of time to allow people to help themselves. This isn't a question of how much money can the U.S. taxpayer fork over to Cuba, it's a question of one family helping the other. That's the first thing we need to do, that we need to put the government of Cuba on the defensive. And, yes, that's going to involve some unilateral steps that we will need to take but so what --

MR. BURTON: Can I ask you a question -- may I ask you a question? When people work at the hotels down there and they get money, the money is paid to the government, the government pays them back in pesos. What guarantee is there that if we had a six-month lifting of that so they're able to travel, and we allow those monies to go down there in whatever amounts necessary, what guarantee is there that same thing won't happen and that money will be converted to pesos, which is worth virtually nothing down there, people working for a \$5 or \$10 a month? And we send the money down there, they save thousands of -- let's say a family goes down there, take \$5,000 or \$1,000 down there, and they're forced to give that to the government in exchange for pesos, what you're doing is you're helping fund the Castro government by giving them hard currency and they're turning it around and giving it back to people in pesos.

MR. SOSA: Okay --

MR. BURTON: I mean, that's one of concerns we talk about.

MR. SOSA: Sure. No, and I understand that concern. A couple of things. One is the absence of Cuban-Americans visiting Cuba in the last four years and that vacuum in money has been filled very nicely by Venezuela.

So there is always somebody there to come in and fill that vacuum, number one. Number two, I think, that if we were to lift family travel and remittances right now, I really doubt that there's going to be very many Cuban-Americans who are going there right now to stay at a hotel in Varadero. They're going to go stay with their relatives to help them build the roofs and put cement and all these other stuff.

There is no question that a dollar floating around from a Cuban-American on the Island of Cuba is a dollar that benefits the Cuban economy. I mean, there's just no doubt about it, there's nothing in life that is a 100 percent good. There's always some trade-offs. What we're saying here is that the trade-off --- first of all, that what we've been doing hasn't worked at all. We're still here discussing the same regime that's been in power for almost 50 years, number one. Number two, what we're saying is let's try something new, let's have Cuban-Americans be on the frontline. It's going to --- yes, I understand there maybe a few extra dollars floating around in Cuba's treasury, but at the end of the day, to have Cuban-Americans running around the island helping their families, with the obvious success in the United States on upfront to the Cuban government's socialist policies. It's so obvious, you know, that it's worth paying that price. And that's what we're saying, I think, here and what we're also saying is this is the right moment for change.

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MR. BURTON: May I respond to that, Mr. Chairman?

REP. DELAHUNT: Let me just make one more comment, then I'll leave the floor, I'm going to -- I probably have to leave in a minute anyhow, we were -- we have been and continue to be the top supplier of food to Cuba. And that we're also the top -- one of the top suppliers of medical equipment as well, and during this hurricane, it's s tragic it took place, we have offered humanitarian aid and other assistance and they flatly rejected it. So when it comes to really wanting to help the Cuban people during a crisis like this hurricane, America's s there. America's s there all over the world in places we don't like, and if they reject it there's s not much we can do.

But to lift the -- I still have to be convinced, and I have not yet been convinced, that we ought to start making positive changes or negative changes in the Helms-Burton law until we see some kind of positive reaction or action on the island. One small move toward democracy, one movement for releasing political prisoners would change enough lot of attitudes in this place but there's s been nothing. And I don't know if you guys had read Armando Valladares' book --

MR. SOSA: I've read the book.

MR. BURTON: Armando has been a friend of mine, I haven't seen him for a while, but, you know, I don't think Armando's s for lifting those --- any kind of sanctions, and he's s a guy that spent 20-some years in that hellhole over there.

MR. SOSA: Right. Well, I would say first of all that a very large group of Cuban dissidents disagree with that --- with the view you have just expressed, people who are actually now in the island, either imprisoned or whatever. So that's s the first thing I would say. Secondly, we're not here to discuss American government aid towards Cuba. I think that that is a subject for perhaps another committee meeting. We're here to talk about Cuban families helping themselves. That to me is the most basic American right there is. It's s the right to choose where you want to travel and to whom you want to give aid to. And to have a Congress or government deny one solitary island on the face of the earth the ability to have families see each other and receive aid, to me makes no sense.

You know, why can I send money to North Korea or why can I visit North Korea? But somehow Cuba seems to be different. This doesn't make any sense, I'm sorry, it doesn't. And if you go outside of the Cuban-American community and you go all around this country and you try to explain American policy towards Cuba, to people who are not -- have vested interest in Cuba, they look at you like this was the craziest thing I ever heard. How did we get to this point?

And so, you know, this is the moment of change, the moment, you know --- the hurricane has provided us with an opening. We need to take the initiative. And it would behoove us not to do that.

MR. HERNANDEZ: If I'm allowed just to clarify something, Mr. Burton, we are not trying to change the Helms-Burton Bill here. Thus it doesn't have anything to do with the Helms-Burton Bill. What we are trying to lift is the restrictions imposed by the Bush administration on 2004 that actually restricted the, first, the travel of Cuban families to once every three years and also that change, the classification of families that can send monies to Cuba restricting only to parents and husbands and our wives and children. And this is what we believe that should be lifted at this time.

MR. PETERS: Mr. Burton, I agree with you and think that having been here out there and listening to the testimony I think everyone agrees with you that -- that the administration has made a good -faith offer of aid to Cuba, the Cuban government has rejected and that is very regrettable. I believe that --- I don't want to be pessimistic so I hope that what we've seen so far is not the end of the story and I hope our administration stays at it and finds a way to get the Cuban government to accept the aid that we're offering in good faith. And I think it's s also important to put on the record that some of the conditions that the United States put on the initial offer of aid have been dropped. So the administration is showing flexibility, it's s terrible that the Cubans haven't accepted it.

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With regard to the other point you made about the money, one of the problems that the Cubans perceive about their own economy is that everybody wants to work in tourism. It's true what you said about the dollar, about the hard currency and peso but if that was the whole story, Cubans wouldn't want to work in tourism because they'd make the same money there that they would make anywhere else. So why bother?

The fact is there's so much money that sloshes around the tourism sector, whether it's tips or whether it's the foreign company that gives them extra money on the side after that Rube Goldberg transaction that you described takes place, that's why they want to work there. That's why they want to work in foreign corporations, with the joint ventures and all that, because after that transaction you described takes place there's money paid on the side to these workers.

But that whole issue has nothing to do with the issue of people going to help their family. If somebody goes to help their family and, they, let's say Mr. Hernandez would go and bring \$500 to his sister down there, let's you convert the \$500 dollars --- in the Cuban economy there's the peso that you referred to and there's also a hard currency peso. It's a strange economy where two currencies circulate side-by-side --- you convert the money, the Cuban government takes its cut, expectedly, I would say, but then that purchasing power goes to the sister and it's used. So there's no doubt in my mind --

MR. HERNANDEZ: It's --- never heard of the story

REP. DELAHUNT: If the gentlemen would yield?

MR. PETERS: Yeah.

REP. DELAHUNT: Just in terms of common sense, I'd pose this to my friend from Indiana, if the Cuban-Americans here send remittances to their families on the island, if it didn't benefit the families, it just makes no sense. It just doesn't make any sense at all. Now, you can rant and rave and pound on your chest and say it's going to help Fidel Castro; no one in their right mind would be sending remittances back to the island unless it benefited their family. It just is common sense.

MR. SOSA: (Off mike) --- I agree. It's not the --- one thing we haven't talked about is the accountability of the Cuban government. They will have to pay a price for turning down this aid. And, you know, we --- again I really have to insist on this point; we need to put them on the defensive. We need to say here's what we're willing to do; you want to make changes, you don't want to make changes, you are the one that will be held responsible when you do not rise to the occasion. But the United States must rise in this occasion. And you know, it's -- we can't just always be responding to every crazy notion or opinion that Fidel Castro prints in Granma. I really think it's important again to take the initiative. Thank you.

REP. DELAHUNT: Thank you, again. I guess this leaves me. And I want to thank you, all of you really for your patience, and --- as well as your endurance. I think it's been very informative and enlightening and illuminating for members on both side, to hear this exchange, and the diversity of opinion, by the way, that exists within the Cuban-American community that's so important to this country.

I, for one, have had an interest in this issue as you know -- (inaudible) --- and you, Mr. Sosa, know that. I've great affection. I don't think our objectives are that different, we just have different ways to achieve them. And I believe that if we would be a different place today.

I -- there's an anecdote that I have related in the past. I told Fidel Castro that if --- that there will another invasions, but this time there would be millions of Americans coming to visit the island and that this time we would win. We had a very special group that we would send down and that group was the kids on spring break and he raised his hands and he's willing to surrender.

I agree with both of you. I think, there is an opportunity here, beyond just doing the moral thing, the right thing and respecting families, but maybe just creating --- opening a window just a little to get people thinking in a different

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way. And it's all contributed during the course of this hearing today and you have the gratitude of the committee. And thank you, we'll now adjourn.

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