



# Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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Contact: Laura Hayes  
202-224-4515

## Statement of U.S. Senator Max Baucus Forum on U.S. - Cuba Travel Policy

Thank you very much. And thank you to our four hosts - the Center for International Policy, USA Engage, the Lexington Institute, and A-TRIP - for organizing this important and very informative conference.

Senator Enzi and Representative Flake have already provided an overview for today's conference. Our first panel this morning will address the policy implications of the restrictions on travel to Cuba. They will provide us a broad understanding of how the travel restrictions affect everything from our larger foreign policy goals to the most basic liberties enjoyed by ordinary U.S. citizens.

Yet, beneath each of the panel discussions this morning stirs an even more basic question - a question that drives the debate over Cuba policy. That is: how do we bring peace and prosperity to the Cuban people? This is really what this debate is about. And the way we settle this question has deep policy implications for the way we view our role as a free and open society in a world where political and social repression are not uncommon.

Virtually everyone **B** on both sides of the debate **B** shares the same desire to bring peace and prosperity to Cuba. The question is how. Answers to that question are diverse and varied. It's a complex issue, and there are as many different opinions as there are people in this room.

But one thing is clear. The current policy is a total failure.

The regime in Cuba has been amazingly resilient. It survived thirty years of the Cold War. It survived the end of the Cold War and the fall of its primary benefactor, the Soviet Union. And it has survived another twelve years completely on its own.

But while the rest of the world enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the global economy enters a new era of interdependence, the Cuban island remains isolated. It's as if the country is in a time warp, with the politics of the country the same as they were when Castro took control.

Despite the U.S. embargo and travel ban, the Castro regime appears as entrenched as ever. The despicable crackdown on dissidents this spring exposed the truths of the regime to everyone. There is no debate about the evils of the Cuban government - but there never really was.

I don't think a single panelist or Member of Congress here today has ever supported engagement with Cuba because they agree with Cuba's oppressive government. To the contrary, those of us who

support engagement do so because we believe it is the most effective and peaceful way to bring about democratic change for the Cuban people.

After more than four decades of futility, it is time to question very seriously whether the embargo has any chance of achieving our goals of peace and opportunity for the Cuban people.

Yet, surprisingly, the crackdown struck many people as an occasion to rally behind the embargo, rather than to reconsider it. The Administration's response has been to strengthen the embargo and to reduce opportunities for contact between the Cuban and the American people.

This is exactly the wrong response. If anything, the crackdown proved to me that the gulf between the Cuban people and democracy is as wide as it has ever been - despite the existence of a forty-three year old embargo. And now, not coincidentally, the gulf that separates and prevents contact between the Cuban and American people is as wide as it has ever been.

If we truly want to bring democratic change to Cuba - if we truly want peace and prosperity for the Cuban people - then we have to rise above the politics of this issue and pursue a policy that gives them that opportunity.

In September, I will travel to Cuba - to see firsthand how the people and the economy are faring. I plan to take a group of Montana farmers and businessmen with me to promote the sale of Montana food and medicine products.

Trips such as these are vital to maintaining a line of communication between our citizens. Unfortunately, due to decisions within the Administration to decline licenses for travel, fewer and fewer trips are now possible. Now, more than ever, all of us need to take a close look at the travel restrictions. I also urge you to contact every Senator and Representative and ask for their support of the travel bills now pending in each chamber. In the Senate, we have introduced S.950 - the AFreedom to Travel to Cuba Act of 2003.@ We have 24 co-sponsors so far, and want even more.

Thanks again for being here this morning. This is an important debate. It is gratifying to see so much interest in the issue. We all owe our appreciation to our hosts for putting the conference together. Each of the panels will add to our understanding.

The first panel this morning will discuss the effect of the travel restrictions on the opportunities for democratic change in Cuba.

The two moderators are two of the strongest champions in Congress for engagement. As members of the House Appropriations Committee, and also of the Subcommittee on Agriculture Appropriations, Rep. George Nethercutt, of Washington, and Rep. Jo Ann Emerson, of Missouri, have been in the trenches on Cuba legislation for several years. They are staunch fighters for a responsible Cuba policy, and I am proud to stand with them in this fight.

So, with that, I turn the floor over to them.

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