



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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Baucus Continues Efforts to Lift Cuba Travel Ban, Embargo *Senator Testifies at Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing on Cuba*

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) U.S. Senator Max Baucus today testified at the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on U.S. policy toward Cuba. Last month the Senator traveled to Cuba and met with Cuban officials including Cuban President Castro, members of the business community, and Cuban dissidents in order to search for solutions that will bring democracy to the small island nation.

Earlier this year, Baucus introduced legislation that would seek to lift the trade embargo against Cuba, and remove travel restrictions between the U.S. and Cuba. Baucus has secured a commitment from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to hold a hearing on his travel legislation this year.

In addition, Baucus helped establish the "Senate Working Group on Cuba," a bipartisan group of Senators who are focused on examining U.S. policies toward Cuba and determining the steps Congress can take to increase trade and strengthen the relationship between the two countries.

Senator Baucus's Foreign Relation's Committee testimony:

"Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you this afternoon. Mr. Chairman, thank you for your continued leadership not only on this issue, but on the issue of sanctions generally. I also want to thank Senators Enzi, Dodd, Hagel, and others on this committee for your ongoing leadership on the issue of Cuba sanctions.

This hearing comes at an important time. Last spring, the Cuban government arrested and imprisoned 75 dissidents, whose only crime was speaking freely. I, along with members of this Committee, led efforts to condemn those actions. The crackdown in Cuba was unacceptable. And here in Congress, those on both sides of the embargo debate immediately denounced the arrests.

Yet, beyond these immediate denunciations, there was a second, more puzzling reaction in Washington. Somehow, people saw the arrests as a vindication of the embargo policy, rather than as an indictment of its failings. They fell back into the mistake of thinking U.S. policy ought to be built around a system of rewards and penalties for Castro. Some people, including

many of my good friends in Congress who believe in engagement, concluded that to ease the embargo now would only reward Castro for bad behavior.

I respectfully, but strongly, disagree. This is not about rewarding Castro. It is about changing Cuba. The embargo has been in place for more than four decades, and it has not worked. The arrests in March were not unique. They were merely the latest in a forty-four year record of oppression.

Moreover, many dissidents were reportedly arrested because the Cuban government was concerned about their meetings with Americans. In other words, the arrests indicate that the Cuban government fears increasing contacts between dissidents and Americans. If that is the case, we should not reward Castro by maintaining a failed embargo. That only shelters his regime from American influence. If the Cuban government fears contact between the American and Cuban people, the answer is to send more Americans, not fewer.

Alternatively, the so-called “carrot-and-stick” approach forces an odd logic. Under its rationale, one would have to believe that a continuation of the embargo would have some new and positive effect on the conditions in Cuba. This makes no sense. I support engagement, because I think it’s the best way to effect democratic change in Cuba. Castro is doing just fine under our embargo. If we want to maintain - for example - the travel ban in the name of supporting dissidents, then that’s fine with him. In fact, perhaps that’s exactly what he wants us to do. And if I am correct, then the arrests of 75 dissidents ought to create a greater sense of urgency in Congress to reform our failed and counter-productive embargo.

Three weeks ago, I traveled to Cuba. I met with officials from the Cuban government, and I met with Cuban dissidents - including Oswaldo Paya and the wives of three jailed dissidents. More than anything, I was struck by the devastation wrought on the Cuban people by the past four decades. Communist dictatorship has decimated the Cuban economy. Responsibility for the terrible poverty and oppression imposed on the Cuban people rests entirely with the current regime.

Nevertheless, the U.S. embargo, however well-intentioned, has done nothing to improve these conditions. If anything, the embargo appears to have exacerbated the isolation and powerlessness of the Cuban people. Democratic change in Cuba must begin with the Cuban people. And U.S. policy can have a profound effect on whether or not the Cuban people are adequately empowered to undertake such momentous change. But a “carrot-and-stick” approach is tantamount to giving Castro a veto over U.S. policy. If he wants a warming in our relationship, then he’ll do something nice. If he’s getting nervous, and thinks we’re too close, he’ll go and arrest more people. To hold off engagement simply as a “carrot” for him to release one or two dissidents, or to embrace the status quo because we think it will induce change, would be a mistake.

I know we all share the same goal – helping the Cuban people achieve independence. I know there are different opinions on this committee and I respect that. But 43 years of sanctions have accomplished nothing. We must move beyond the politics of this issue and press for change. I appreciate the chance to testify today. And I again thank the Chairman, both for

holding this important hearing, and for agreeing to mark up Senator Enzi's and my travel legislation later this year.

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