



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

NEWS RELEASE

<http://finance.senate.gov>

For Immediate Release

Tuesday, September 14, 2004

Contact: John Gilliland

202-224-4515

Statement of U.S. Senator Max Baucus Press Conference Regarding the Cuba Travel Ban

“Ladies and gentlemen of the press, friends, thanks for being here today. This past weekend, the United States observed the third anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. When we reflect on that terrible day, we are reminded of those things most important to us, namely the safety and well-being of our homeland. We are also reminded that there are still violent, murderous organizations abroad in the world that mean to do us harm.

We have made many strides in the effort to meet the challenges of the War on Terrorism. The 9/11 Commission has offered us a roadmap and it is my hope that Congress will take these recommendations to heart. We are a resilient and resourceful people and we will meet these challenges.

However, as Congress enters into the appropriations season, we realize there are some self-imposed obstacles in the way. And we realize that politics – as often is the case – is at the heart of these obstacles. The people standing behind me are here with us today because they are fed up with politics. They are all Cuban-Americans and they are here in opposition to the Cuba travel ban. Earlier this summer, the Bush administration tightened – yet again – the rules that limit travel by Americans to Cuba. This time, the new rules were aimed at Cuban-Americans. These new rules make it harder for these people to visit their relatives in Cuba and to send hard-earned, financial support to their families who are still stuck in Castro’s Cuba.

You might be asking, what does this have to do with the War on Terrorism? The answer is simple: the Cuba travel ban is a drain on the same federal resources that we use to fight the War on Terrorism. As we all have learned in the past three years, Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations in the Middle East have a lot of money at their disposal. Without these funds, these terrorists would not have the means to organize and carry out their plots against U.S. interests, whether here at home or abroad. Thus, rooting out their sources of financial support and cutting them off is essential to winning the War on Terrorism.

Unfortunately, the agency charged with rooting out the international sources of terrorist financing – OFAC, or the Office of Foreign Assets Control – is also assigned to manage the Cuba travel ban. Incredibly, at the direction of the State Department, OFAC has decided to divert

more personnel resources to imposing the Cuba travel ban than to any other country or project-specific issue. According to their records, the equivalent of 21 full-time OFAC employees are allocated to the Cuba travel ban.

On the other hand, only 16 are allocated to the search for Al-Qaeda's financial sources of support. Less than 15 full-time employee resources are spent on the former Iraq regime and its insurgents, and less than 14 are spent on Iran. Less than ten are allocated to Syria, Sudan, and Libya combined. Afghanistan doesn't even merit one full-time employee – it receives the attention of roughly 2/3 of one full-time OFAC employee. North Korea only gets 1/3.

In other words, more OFAC personnel resources are spent on the effort to prevent Americans from vacationing in Cuba than are spent to track down and shut off the sources of funds used by Al-Qaeda to carry out terrorist activities. This is in spite of the fact that Cuba poses no credible threat to the United States. This is appalling and only illustrates how our misguided Cuba policy undermines our larger, more important foreign policy goals. The time has come to end this ridiculous travel ban.”

Excerpts from the U.S. Department of Treasury response to an April 28, 2004 letter sent from Senator Grassley and Baucus can be found on Senator Baucus' press release page of the Senate Finance Committee website at <http://finance.senate.gov>.

###