

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 8, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster
National Security Advisor to the President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington DC, 20050

Dear Secretary Tillerson and General McMaster,

It is our understanding that a review by the current administration of U.S.-Cuba policy is nearing completion. Press reports suggest that the recent easing of regulatory restrictions on travel, remittances, and investment on the island are at risk. It is clear that human rights abuses persist in Cuba and we all seek a solution to these troubling abuses. However, before we consider revoking reforms that have benefited U.S. citizens, everyday Cubans, and the U.S. economy, we write to offer the following points for consideration.

Increased Travel to Cuba by Americans is Positive

With the easing of restrictions and the expanded use of general licenses for travel permissible under statute, Americans are traveling to Cuba in increasingly greater numbers than ever before. According to the Government Accountability Office, there was a 77 percent increase in the number of U.S. visitors to Cuba from 2014 to 2015. According to the Congressional Research Service, Cuba saw more than a 100-fold increase in the number of non-Cuban Americans traveling to the island when comparing the first half of 2016 to the same period in 2015. The Cuban government recently indicated that more than 600,000 Americans traveled to Cuba last year, an increase of more than a third over the previous year.

We have long supported lifting the statutory ban on U.S. citizens traveling to Cuba outright. In the U.S. Senate, we are not alone. We recently introduced bipartisan legislation to do just that along with more than half of our colleagues. In November, voters saw fit to bestow upon Republicans the opportunity of unified government. Long the party of personal freedom and limited government, we have always found it difficult to rationalize why our side of the aisle would seek to curtail the ability of U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba or anywhere else in the world. Such restrictions would be tough to justify even if they somehow provided benefits. With fifty years of failure, they are indefensible.

Americans are Supporting Cuban Entrepreneurs

The easing of regulatory restrictions on travel and investment in the U.S. coincided with an expansion of the private sector in Cuba. Out of necessity, the Castro regime laid off thousands of government workers and expanded legal opportunities for Cuban entrepreneurs, giving way to a dramatic rise in the number of privately owned restaurants, bed and breakfasts, taxi services, barbershops, beauty salons, etc. Cuban entrepreneurs are benefiting from U.S. policy changes.

A recent survey of Americans traveling to Cuba found that more than half reported staying at a privately-run home offering lodging. Nearly everyone surveyed ate at a privately-run restaurant or paladar. More than three-quarters purchased items from independent artists and used private taxis during their trips. Since launching in April of 2015, Airbnb notes that Cuba is their fastest growing country with more than 20,000 listings, more than half a million guests, and \$40 million paid to individual Cubans who are sharing their homes with visitors. These economic interactions matter for human rights. The path to real change on the island lies with everyday Cubans having the opportunity to hold their government accountable. That opportunity begins when everyday Cubans begin to enjoy economic independence through a burgeoning private sector. That private sector expansion is being supported by both U.S.-based remittances and direct spending by U.S. travelers made possible by recent regulatory reforms.

U.S. Companies are Seeing Opportunity in the Cuban Economy

Since the easing of the regulatory burden and expansion of opportunities for U.S. companies to participate in the Cuban economy, interest in the island among U.S. businesses has skyrocketed. From the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to American agriculture, and from New York State to the City of Houston, trade mission after trade mission has sought to investigate business relations in Cuba. Corporate names familiar in many households across America are now engaged in the Cuban economy. Such interests include Google, Carnival, Verizon, Southwest Airlines, Airbnb, AT&T, Marriott, Sprint, and more.

Increasing economic ties to the island is beneficial to the Cuban people, who have the opportunity to engage with Americans both culturally as well as economically, and also to U.S. business and the U.S. economy. Just 90 miles off our shore and awash in economic needs, Cuba is a natural market for the U.S. In fact, a recent study just concluded that rolling back regulatory changes made to spur travel, remittance, and investment in Cuba would cost the U.S. economy more than \$6 billion and more than 12,000 jobs. To the extent that we keep American companies out, those from Europe, Russia, China, Brazil, Iran, and elsewhere will expand their presence – rebuilding infrastructure, modernizing communications, expanding tourist facilities, and developing oil, gas, and renewable energy.



The U.S. Is Seeing National Security Benefits

Engagement with Cuba supports U.S. national security interests, a point that was recently made in a letter from retired military personnel. In that letter, it was emphasized that Cuba is a strategic partner with respect to issues of concern for the U.S., including counter-terrorism activities, border control and migration, drug interdiction, environmental protections, and emergency preparedness and response. In fact, many of these areas have seen gains in meaningful cooperation through formal agreements being signed. In addition, U.S. influence in the western hemisphere and regionally has grown with steps having been taken to normalize relations with Cuba.

Taking steps that lead to little benefit while jeopardizing this comprehensive progress is counterproductive. It has been stipulated that Cuba currently poses no direct national security threat to the United States. However, given the downward spiral of its patron Venezuela, one can easily contemplate scenarios in which that does not remain the case: should the U.S. revert to its position of diplomatic, cultural, and economic isolation, Cuba could very well revert to becoming a client state of nations that view U.S. interests as counter to their own.

To conclude, there are those who suggest that any changes in U.S.-Cuba policy are concessions that must be met by some definitive action by the Cubans. Instead, we view recent reforms to U.S.-Cuba policy as providing critical strategic advances that have already benefited everyday Cubans and provided direct benefits to Americans by enhancing U.S. national security and boosting the U.S. economy. We strongly urge you to weigh carefully any rollback of policies that would endanger these benefits.

Sincerely,



JEFF FLAKE
United States Senator

MIKE ENZI
United States Senator



JOHN BOOZMAN
United States Senator