

“U.S.-CUBAN RELATIONS: THE WAY FORWARD”

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on U.S.-Cuba policy. I know many of you have a deep interest in U.S. policy towards Cuba and have closely followed our implementation of the President’s new approach to Cuba since December 17. I appreciate the Committee’s engagement on Western Hemisphere issues and your strong commitment to democratic values, human rights, and expanding social and economic opportunity in the Americas.

Before I move to my remarks on Cuba, I wanted to underscore the unique moment that the United States is facing in the Americas. As someone who has spent her career working with this region, it is remarkable to see how U.S. relations with the countries of the hemisphere are increasingly characterized by mature partnerships and shared values and interests. Without at all minimizing the difficulties that we have with some countries, and the challenges that remain with regard to the subject of the hearing today, the depth and breadth of our partnerships with Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Mexico, and so many others is extraordinary and continues to grow. I am especially proud of our renewed commitment to working with the Northern Triangle countries of Central America, including our \$1 billion FY 2016 request that will strengthen regional security through increased investments in security, prosperity, and good governance. We have launched the Caribbean Energy Security Initiative to help countries to achieve a more sustainable and cost effective energy matrix. And of course, the President’s new direction on Cuba has generated enormous goodwill among all these partners and underscores our desire to turn the page on the 20th century and to build a more forward-looking relationship with the region.

Since I last appeared before this committee in February, we have begun to see the Administration’s new approach to Cuba providing space for other nations in the hemisphere and around the world to focus on promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Cuba and elsewhere in the region. This was illustrated at the Summit of the Americas in Panama last April. Engagement by the

President and the Secretary at the Summit re-invigorated our momentum on a variety of issues. Our new approach has drawn greater attention to the potential for greater political and economic freedom for the Cuban people and the gap between Cuba and other countries in the Hemisphere. More Americans are travelling to Cuba, getting past the rhetoric, meeting Cubans, and building shared understanding between our people. We have seen practical cooperation in our official dialogues with Cuba on issues in our national interest like maritime and aviation safety, telecommunications, and environmental cooperation. Our future discussions on law enforcement cooperation, coupled with the ongoing migration talks, will expand the avenues available to seek the return of American fugitives from justice as well as the return of Cubans residing illegally in the United States. We are also planning future talks on human rights and settling American claims for expropriated properties. Most importantly, the President's new approach makes clear that the United States can no longer be blamed as an obstacle to progress on things such as access to information and connecting Cubans to the world.

Now while I like to think of myself as an optimist, fundamentally I am a realist – and as anyone who has ever dealt with Cuba knows, a realistic perspective is a very useful one to have. Indeed, as the President made clear prior to his historic meeting with Raul Castro at the Summit of the Americas, significant differences remain between our two governments. We continue to raise our concerns regarding democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression. And we will seek to engage with all Cubans to gain their perspectives on the best way forward for the country.

While the President's new direction on Cuba has been welcomed by many Cubans and Americans, I know that there are divergent views in the U.S. Congress on the policy of engaging the Cuban government. I appreciate that these views are deeply held and based on personal and professional experience with Cuba and with broader issues of foreign affairs.

Our policy towards Cuba is based on a clear-eyed strategy that empowers the Cuban people to determine their own future by creating new economic opportunities and increasing their contact with the outside world. That is why we made it easier for Cuban-Americans to travel and send remittances to their families in Cuba, and opened new pathways for academic, religious, and people-to-people exchanges. These changes create powerful new connections between our two countries and help the nascent private sector in Cuba, which is already creating opportunities on the island. The steps we have implemented build on this

foundation by increasing authorized travel, authorized commerce, and the flow of information to, from, and within Cuba.

Our new approach emphasizes targeted forms of commerce that offer economic opportunity to independent Cuban entrepreneurs or, like expanded communications, benefit all Cubans. Comprehensive changes in our economic relationship will require Congressional action to lift the embargo. The President has urged Congress to begin that effort. In the meantime, we are using available policy tools to promote a prosperous, democratic, and stable Cuba.

In a short period of time, we have already started to see U.S. enterprises seizing the new opportunities. The regulatory changes we announced are intended to increase the financial and material resources available to the Cuban people and the emerging Cuban private sector. They also enable U.S. companies to offer expanded telecommunications and internet services in ways that will help all Cubans, including students, academics, entrepreneurs, and members of Cuban civil society, advance their aspirations and collectively become more prosperous.

Regarding the Administration's decision to rescind Cuba's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism, as President Obama said, "throughout this process, our emphasis has been on the facts. So we want to make sure that, given that this is a powerful tool to isolate those countries that genuinely do support terrorism, that when we make those designations we've got strong evidence that, in fact, that's the case. And as circumstances change, then that list will change as well." We will continue to have differences with the Cuban government, but our concerns over a wide range of Cuba's policies and actions do not relate to any of the criteria relevant to that designation.

While progress has been made in our efforts to reestablish diplomatic relations, we are not there yet. There are still outstanding issues that need to be addressed to ensure a future U.S. Embassy will be able to function more like other diplomatic missions in Cuba and elsewhere in the world. Even today, under challenging circumstances, our diplomats do their very best to represent the interests and values of the United States, just as we do in hundreds of places around the world. The services our Interests Section offers to Cubans are no different than those we offer in most other U.S. embassies. Our engagement with the broadest range of Cubans will expand once we establish diplomatic relations with Cuba.

We will continue our discussions with members of Congress as we move toward a new relationship with Cuba. As this process moves ahead, we hope that we can also work together to find common ground towards our shared goal of enabling the Cuban people to freely determine their own future.

We appreciate your attention to these important issues. Thank you and I welcome your questions.