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Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. I am Professor of Government and Dean Emeritus in the School of Public Affairs at American University and have studied Cuba and U.S.-Cuban relations for most of my academic career. Most recently, I coauthored the book *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana*, which the American Academy of Diplomacy named the best book on American diplomacy in 2015.

In deciding to engage with North Korea, President Trump recognized that over the years, sanctions alone had failed to halt North Korea’s nuclear program, so he took a different approach. Time will tell whether it works; I hope it will.

The basic idea behind his approach is no different than the idea behind President Obama’s opening to Cuba. After decades of using the stick of sanctions against an adversarial regime without success, it made sense to try to advance U.S. interests through engagement.

Whether your principal concern is human rights, or compensation for nationalized U.S. property, or the return of U.S. fugitives, or Cuba’s support for the failing regime in Venezuela, there is no chance of making progress on any of those issues with a policy of hostility that relies exclusively on sanctions—especially when no other country in the world observes those sanctions. The historical record is clear that sanctions only work when they are multilateral.

Moreover, our current economic sanctions targeting the whole Cuban economy, rather than specific individuals, harms the living standards of ordinary Cubans. That is why the last three Popes, including John Paul II, who was no friend of communism, opposed the embargo.

The idea of engaging with Cuba is not new. Every president since Dwight D. Eisenhower—including both Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan—entered into negotiations with Cuba because they realized there were some problems they could only solve with Cuban cooperation. That is even more true today when so many of the issues we face in the Western Hemisphere are transnational—issues like migration, environmental protection, human trafficking, and organized crime.

Engagement with an adversary in order to advance U.S. interests does not constitute a moral endorsement of that adversary's behavior. President Trump's meeting with Kim Jong Un was not an endorsement of North Korea's human rights record, nor was President Obama's opening to Cuba an endorsement of that regime's human rights record.

Our current *National Defense Strategy*, approved by the president in December, identifies China and Russia as our principal adversaries in the world today. Both are authoritarian regimes with terrible human rights records, yet we engage with them every day on a variety of issues because doing so serves our national interest. There is no reason not to do the same with Cuba. Moreover, as we back away from engagement with Cuba, China and Russia are rushing in to fill the vacuum.

With regard seeking criminal indictments against Cuban officials for human rights abuses, even if there were legal grounds for securing such indictments, the accused could not be brought to trial because Cuban law prohibits the extradition of Cuban nationals. In 1982, four Cuban officials were indicted in Florida for narcotics trafficking, and the only effect of those indictments was to delay the establishment of counter-narcotic cooperation between the United States and Cuba until the late 1990s. In 2003, the two Cuban pilots responsible for shooting down the Brothers to the Rescue planes were indicted in Florida, along with their commanding general, on a variety of charges, including murder. That case had not progressed either.

Pursuing human rights indictments today might be symbolically satisfying to some, but it would only serve to poison the atmosphere of bilateral relations and impede existing law enforcement cooperation, which has been improving. That would endanger our ability to secure the extradition of U.S. nationals who commit crimes here and then flee to Cuba, and our ability to pursue the prosecution in Cuba of Cuban nationals for crimes committed in the United States. These are areas in which there has been significant progress since 2014, progress that has continued despite the Trump administration's decision to back away from the normalization of relations.

In short, I believe more has been gained, and more can be gained, through a policy of engagement and cooperation on issues of mutual interest than through a policy of hostility and heightened sanctions, real or symbolic.

I agree with Congressman Tom Emmer that American farmers ought to be able to finance agricultural sales to Cuba, especially at a time when other countries are imposing tariffs on our farm products.

I agree with Congressman Mark Sanford that restrictions on travel to Cuba should be lifted because Americans have a constitutional right to travel.

I agree with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that American business ought to be able to trade and invest in Cuba because it will strengthen our economy and create jobs.

And I agree with former Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez when he argues that engagement is the best way to help a new generation of Cubans modernize their economy and their political system.

Cuba today is going through a process of change, both in its leadership and in its economy. The old generation that founded the regime is leaving the political stage—most are already gone. At the same time, Cuba is trying to move from the old Soviet-style economic system to some version of market socialism like Vietnam and China. Economic reform is providing Cubans greater economic freedom and, if it succeeds, it could raise their standard of living significantly. U.S. policy ought to facilitate that change, not impede it.

Ultimately the people of Cuba will determine their nation's future and decide issues of accountability. If the United States wants to have a positive influence on these developing changes, it has to be engaged, not sitting on the sidelines.