

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing: Cuba: Assessing the Administration's
Sudden Shift
February 4, 2015
(As Prepared for Delivery)**

This hearing will come to order. Today we look at the Obama Administration's sudden shift in Cuba policy.

And sudden it was. Members of Congress were left in the dark. Most of the Administration – including the State Department – was left in the dark. Instead, talks with the Cuban regime were conducted by two White House officials. Unfortunately the White House was unwilling to provide these key witnesses today. This Committee, charged with oversight of our foreign policy, is handicapped when those officials most involved in policy making are unavailable. The Administration's growing track record of secret negotiations, whether Iran or the release of the "Taliban Five," is increasingly troublesome.

Had the White House consulted more widely, it may have heard that Havana is facing the threats of losing Venezuelan oil subsidies and mounting public pressure for basic reforms. This could have been used to leverage meaningful political concessions by the regime. But this was a one-sided "negotiation," with the U.S. making a *series* of concessions to Havana.

The release of 53 political prisoners is one area in which the Administration *did* secure a commitment from the Cuban government. But in an odd twist, the Administration kept these names secret for weeks. Only after bipartisan pressure from the Committee was the list released. Human rights advocates can now track whether these individuals are put back in jail, harassed or monitored.

Of course, four years ago, Raúl Castro promised to release *all* political prisoners. Yet a recent Freedom House report reads: "systematic use of short-term 'preventative' detentions—along with harassment [and] beatings," are used to intimidate the opposition, isolate dissidents, and maintain control. Advocates put the number of political arrests in Cuba last year at over 8,000.

Assistant Secretary Jacobson – I appreciate your meeting with dissidents while you were in Havana last month. But I am very concerned that your Cuban counterparts are attempting to link your discussions to a commitment that the U.S. cease all democracy programs.

Indeed, Castro is making even more demands. Last week, the dictator called for the return of the U.S. Naval Station, an end to U.S. broadcasts, and "just compensation." There is little debate over the importance of this facility for the U.S. Navy to conduct counter-narcotics, intelligence, and humanitarian missions. And of course, our broadcasts are vital until a free

media is allowed to operate. I hope the State Department is here today to assure us that none of Castro's demands are being considered.

In defending this policy change, the President has compared our economic relationship with Cuba to that of China and Vietnam. But in China and Vietnam - while Communist - at least foreign firms can hire and recruit staff directly, without their pay going directly to the government.

Not so in Cuba, which is more like North Korea than China. A Cuban worker at the foreign-owned resort receives only a fraction of their salary – as little as 5 percent. Castro or Kim, the method is the same – extract hard currency from foreign business and invest in the security apparatus.

Instead of dismantling a 50-year-old failed policy, as it claims, the Administration may have given a 50-year-old failed regime a new lease on life to continue its repression at home and militant support for Marxist regimes abroad.

Before going to Mr. Engel, I'm now going to yield my remaining time to Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the Chairman Emeritus. Born in Havana, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen fled Cuba as a refugee at age 8. Her years of work on this Committee have been marked by a tireless commitment to freedom and democracy for people around the world.