

Thank you Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires, and Members of this Committee, for your leadership and attention to this important matter to Americans from throughout the United States.

My name is Carolyn Chester Lamb, and I live in Omaha, Nebraska. I'm a single divorced mother with one teenage son, who has been the sole supporter of my family since 2010. I have a modest lifestyle, live in a small home, and drive a 16-year-old car.

I represent my family's lost properties that were taken by the Communists, when they took over the Cuban government in 1959. The Castro government took all properties, belonging to all Americans in Cuba, and then began to take properties from all other countries operating in Cuba, including the properties of Cuban citizens.

My father was Edmund A. Chester and he was the director of CBS News, but most of you probably have never heard of him. My father supervised famed reporters such as Edward R. Murrow, Eric Severide, and Howard K. Smith, all recognizable names, but not his. My father was a true patriot and combated communism as a soldier and as an executive with CBS when he worked with our U.S. State Department's Office for Inter-American Affairs' Voice of America. When the Communists in Cuba took over the radio stations, TV stations, and newspapers, they were able to manipulate and rewrite history. That is when the lies and slander of those who were in Cuba before 1959 started. My father's best friends were all patriotic Americans and one of his best friends was my Godfather, General Timothy McNerny, who served as Lieutenant Colonel on General Eisenhower's staff and as the Director of Public Relations for the U.S. Department of Justice.

In 1964, legislation was enacted that allowed Americans who were victims of this confiscation the opportunity to file a claim against Cuba for their losses. I have included documentation along with this statement, of a letter that my father wrote to the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission, that explains in more detail the circumstance and properties that were expropriated. I was just a baby when this happened, so I refer to my father's letter to the Foreign Claims Commission to explain the events. The letter states that my parent's properties were taken in January of 1959, so it appears he was one of the first Americans that had his properties taken.

Thank goodness my father was back in our home in Mount Dora, Florida for the Christmas holidays, otherwise we are sure that he would not have made it out of Cuba alive. My parents spoke frequently about Cuba and I didn't know much about the details of what happened to them. However, I always knew even as a young child, that Fidel Castro was the bad man that stole from our family. I remember hearing my parents say that maybe when Fidel Castro was gone from Cuba, maybe then we would get our properties back. I heard that all my life and after my mother passed away, I found a file folder full of newspaper articles that she had clipped concerning Cuban relations and the status of the embargo. She followed any and all news stories about the embargo, because she always held on to the hope that she would see change come to Cuba in her lifetime, but it did not.

I know from speaking to people about the U.S. Certified Claims, that most of them don't understand anything about it. It's very simple: we were Americans citizens, who were living, working, and investing in Cuba when the communists took over the pro-democracy government in 1959. We were not at war with Cuba and this was the first time in U.S. history that American properties were expropriated during peacetime. It appears however, after reading articles from newspaper archives from when this expropriation occurred, that Fidel Castro held our properties for ransom, and used it as a ploy to force the United States to continue to buy sugar from them at higher prices set by him. That's called blackmail and extortion and the communists used it readily and often, to try to get what they wanted.

Families lost their livelihoods and suffered financial ruin from the loss of their possessions. Castro didn't just confiscate our properties, but he took the hopes and dreams that our parents once had for us, their children! The confiscation also affected my father's health and I was only 11 years old when his health began to decline. I remember that my father was in and out of hospitals many times over the years and my mother took care of him for many years, always hoping that he would improve, but he did not.

Edmund Chester Sr. died in 1973, when I was only 15 years old. I never really knew what he died from, but in hindsight, I think it was a series of strokes, because one side of his face appeared to be paralyzed. He also suffered from bouts of confusion, and I remember one incident, where he was frightened because he imagined that Castro's henchmen were in our living room, looking for him. Of course no one was there, but he had good reason to be scared. I didn't really know much about this incident, but apparently right after the overthrow, there was a drive by shooting at our home in Mount Dora, Florida. I remember later in life, hearing about it, and then being shown the bullet holes in the wall of our home, and also being told that it was Castro's men.

After my father passed away, my mother was left alone, to raise her children without any source of income. My mother did the best she could, and in the end sold everything, including personal items, to survive and support us. We never faulted her for selling off our inheritance in order to make ends meet, and in the end, we were left with debt to pay back to her creditors.

We didn't abandon our properties; they were taken from us, and in many cases claimants had their properties taken at gunpoint by Castro's soldiers. We didn't have any warning by our government that the new Cuban government was planning to steal our properties, yet apparently Castro's manifesto written years earlier and published in Mexico, threatened that he would do this. Our government failed to protect us then, and now some 56 years later, has not bother to acknowledge our existence or recognize our certified claims. The recent declaration by our president about the easing or removal of the embargo, spoke about the freedom of the Cuban people, but that was just a guise and what he was really saying was that American businesses want to make money in Cuba, and he's going to let them. If the president really cared about freeing the people of Cuba, he would insist on

change in Cuba's labor practices, and would insist on full compensation for us, the Americans he's supposed to represent.

And now here we are, defending our claims, and begging for fair payment, as promised to us when our claims were certified by the FCSC. We know that there are those who are attempting to rewrite history by tainting our reputation by portraying us as something other than what we really are, but it's all very simple. We are the Americans who were victimized and now, this needs to be made right! When Castro seized power in Cuba, he also seized all the newspapers, and when he did that, he was able to re-write history to his liking and will. I know and understand why our reputation has been smeared, and nothing I can say or do will change the minds of those who have been influenced and indoctrinated by Castro's propaganda machine. The notion that claimants now should discount their claims, in order to make way for commerce, is unacceptable. Furthermore, the pain, suffering, and health issues caused by this expropriation, to our family, should have been calculated as punitive damages and included in the compensation of our claims. We've been paying for this for the past 56 years, and it's time to resolve our claims and compensate us fairly and in accordance with the FCSC decision.

In 2008, I began researching the claims issue and working to rebut the various groups of people who were diminishing the value of our claims. These same groups have also lobbied to end the embargo and have written various reports to back up what they say. I question the validity of these reports, because many of them have uncomfortably close relationships and dealings with the Cuban government. These same groups of Cuban Experts may say that our claims are worthless because of the economic situation in Cuba, but to their business clients, they profess that Cuba is the next best investment paradise. So when I'm told that my claim is worthless, but what's being told to others is that investing in Cuba is wise, these statements appear to be contradictory and borderline treasonous.

The U.S. Cuban Trade Embargo was put in place in order to force the return of the American properties, and that did not work. Castro used the seizure of the American properties as a ploy and threatened that these properties would never be returned, unless the U.S. agreed to continue to pay for Cuban sugar. So thus began the half a century ransom of our properties!

There have been all sorts of amendments and changes to the restrictions of the U.S. Cuban Embargo, yet no one has addressed or discussed resolution to the family claims until now. The myth that Cuba has no money and no one is doing business there because of the U.S. Embargo is not true. The Canadians, UK, Spain, China, and Germany have been in Cuba for a long time, and even our U.S. Chamber of Commerce president began to make trips to Cuba in 1999. Our allies have always been countries like Great Britain and Canada. However, in order to protect their investments in Cuba, they enacted legislation to repeal the Helms Burton Act.

All foreign businesses must have a 50/50 partnership with the Cuban government and all foreign business employers must pay the salaries of their Cuban workers, directly to the Cuban government. The government keeps 96 percent of it and therefore continues to

keep its citizens in economic shackles and treats them like slaves. Where is that money going? It is not being reinvested in Cuba or used for betterment of their daily lives. Both U.S. and foreign businesses know this is the way the communist government operates. I think it is ironic that the Americans that were in Cuba before 1959 are called greedy capitalists, yet the insults should be hurled at American businesses that currently want to exploit this cheap labor, in order to profit in Cuba. Not only is the cheap workforce enticing American investors, but Cuba will not tax you, and you'll be guaranteed to have your own monopoly, since you'll be in business with the Cuban government, and they don't allow competition in the Cuban markets.

No money is being spent on Cuba's infrastructure and Cuba collects assistance from agencies worldwide, including the United States. Cuba collects a portion of the remittance that Cuban Americans send home to their relatives and they keep most of their workers' salaries. All foreign businesses operating in Cuba must be approved by and be in a contractual partnership with the Cuban government, so that means that profits are being split. So my question is, why is Cuba poor and where is all that money going? The communist leaders in Cuba never did share their ill begotten wealth, as their revolutionary rhetoric promised. They have kept it for themselves. Even more disturbing is the well-known fact that the Junta running Cuba has hired expert international accountants and lawyers, to hide their fortunes in offshore accounts that can never be traced.

Cuba does have the means and ways to pay us back. Additionally, this will only increase, if trade restrictions are lifted. The U.S. Office of Foreign Asset Control has collected 180 billion dollars in fines from banks and businesses that broke our laws and were fined, so a portion of that money should have always been used to pay back the Americans that were harmed in those countries. Another solution is for one of these large conglomerates, or a group of them, to just buy our debt. That way we are no longer in the equation, and now no one had to deal with 5,913 claimants, because we'll be paid and gone. All we want is full payment for our claims, as set by the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission!

I have provided to the committee supplemental documentation, such as a biography on my father, personal letters written home from Cuba, archival news stories concerning this subject matter, and photos and documents from my father's archives. I felt that these materials were important to present and supports my testimony to the committee.

Thank you again, for allowing me to speak on the behalf of my parents U.S. Certified Claim, CU-1704