

Chris Dodd for President

Remarks of Senator Christopher J. Dodd, as delivered
Cuba Policy Roll-out
The Biltmore, Miami
Saturday, September 8, 2007

Every four years candidates seeking the Presidency rediscover Cuba. They travel to Florida and pledge to maintain sanctions against the government of Fidel Castro until democracy flowers on the Island of Cuba.

Today, with our election 14 months away, the Miami pilgrimage has already begun.

One of my Democratic opponents has already pledged to maintain the embargo.

Another proposes to slightly change the policy.

Today, United States policy toward Cuba has been essentially the same for almost fifty years.

I believe the time has come to say publicly what many Americans believe including many Cuban-Americans – our Cuba policy has neither served America’s interests nor brought democracy to Cuba. It has been an abject failure.

I have the deepest respect for the Cuban American community and the pain, hardship and suffering the entire community has been through. I harbor no illusion about the current state of affairs in Cuba and the extreme difficulties Cubans live under.

But, today I believe that we are at a critical moment in Cuba’s changing political landscape, with Fidel Castro having recently turned over day-to-day authority of running Cuba to Raoul Castro and a small number of loyalists.

I believe we must make a choice – the United States can either be players in helping to shape the Cuba landscape for the next fifty years, or remain on the sidelines while the future of Cuba is determined by others.

To be sure, there is no reason to believe that a policy that has failed to promote the peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba for the last fifty years would succeed in bringing democracy to Cuba in the next fifty.

We all know the dubious achievements of the current policy:

Denying Americans their fundamental right to travel freely and visit their families in

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Cuba;

Restricting the access of American farmers to Cuban markets;

And, preventing American families from benefiting from potentially lifesaving medical advances that are today underway in Cuban laboratories and medical clinics in the fight against cancer and other incurable diseases.

The current policy has also made the lives of the 11 million Cubans living on the island more difficult.

Current policies have denied them access to most American goods and services.

It has restricted visits from their family members and loved ones residing in America, allowing only a single visit every three years, for up to 14 days.

And the policy has barred their American family members from sending more than \$300 every three months to their impoverished Cuban relatives – a mere \$1,200 per year.

In addition, this policy has been yet another source of tension in our relations with allied and friendly governments throughout the Americas and the world.

Other than the war in Iraq, perhaps no other American policy is more broadly unpopular internationally.

And at a time when our standing in the world is already in tatters, compromising our ability to address threats through international cooperation, we can ill afford to continue this failed policy.

But perhaps the most dubious achievement of this 50-year old policy is the gift it has been to Fidel Castro. I am totally convinced that the current policy has had more to do with sustaining Fidel Castro's control over the Cuban people than anything else we have done.

This policy has been little more than a straw man Fidel Castro has been able to point to, to justify economic failures of his regime and political repression he practices in the name of national security.

I come here today to say that the fiftieth anniversary of this policy will be its last.

In a Dodd presidency, on January 20, 2009, America's failed Cuba policy will end – and a new era will begin. An era of greater American safety and security, an era of strength, optimism and confidence, and an era without fear.

Let me tell you what that era will look like and how we will make it possible – beginning with a new policy on Cuba.

I will begin by working to unravel the embargo by seeking the repeal of the Helms Burton Act – a law that has placed onerous restrictions on the ability of the United States to play any meaningful role in the ongoing transition in Cuba.

As President, I will amend the Trade Sanctions Reform Act which places restrictions on Americans' rights to travel and American farmers' ability to access Cuba markets.

I will instruct the Secretary of State to authorize our diplomats to meet more regularly with their Cuban counterparts at all levels and open an embassy in Havana to better serve Americans and American interests in Cuba.

Further, I will reinvigorate the US/Cuba Migration Agreement bilateral talks. They will serve as a forum to discuss outstanding bilateral issues, which this administration has flatly disregarded.

And, I will shut down TV Marti.

American taxpayers should not be asked to subsidize a television station that virtually no one in Cuba can ever see.

And as President, I will repeal the Cuban Adjustment Act – a law which has only encouraged Cuban migrants to risk their lives at sea and fall prey to international smuggling organizations with the promise of gaining legal resident status here in the United States.

I know some will ask, "Why are you doing this? Why now?"

I am proposing these changes to the current policy because they make sense and are the right thing to do – for the Cuban people, but more importantly for America.

And I refuse to let Fidel Castro or his successor determine the timetable for setting America's foreign policy.

Setting America's policy is for the American President to decide and the American people.

I also believe now more than ever before the United States has an opportunity to be a player in influencing the ongoing transition to a post-Castro Cuba.

If Cuban authorities want to stand in the way of these changes they can, but it will be clear to the world—and more importantly to the Cuban people—who is responsible for the impoverished and repressive state of affairs in Cuba – the Cuban government.

The fig leaf of an excuse provided by the U.S. embargo will be gone, and the Cuban people will not only know who bears the responsibility for failure – they will demand accountability and change.

And when that day comes, the road to the peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba will be well underway and America's interests -- our safety and security -- enhanced.

Thank you.