

In recent years, there has been an understandable note of frustration in their voices over the direction that our country is headed.

These folks know all too well the struggle to find a job and pay the bills. They are angry that it takes an average 111 days just to make enough money to pay the government before starting to keep what they earn for the year. They have watched an oppressive government intrusion into health care make it far too difficult and expensive for many to do business. They are discouraged by an uncertain regulatory environment that is wreaking havoc on both employers and employees. They are outraged at the President's unprecedented attempt to grant amnesty to millions of illegal aliens when there are so many individuals who have waited years for the opportunity to come to this country the right way.

Over the last 4 years, the U.S. House of Representatives has done everything in our power to put this Nation on a better path. We have passed numerous pieces of legislation to encourage job growth and strengthen America's standing in the global economy. We have also passed bills that would decrease energy costs, allow workers to have more flexibility to spend time with their families, and increase transparency in how tax dollars are spent. However, we were stymied again and again by Democrats in the Senate.

Despite the short time we have had, the obstacles we have faced and the enormity of our task, House Republicans have still managed a number of conservative victories. For example, this summer legislation I authored was signed into law to streamline the Federal workforce development system, including the elimination of 15 duplicative programs. Last month we passed legislation that has since been signed into law to allow families of a severely disabled child to save for their child's long-term disability expenses in the same way that many families currently save for college through popular 529 investment plans, encouraging personal responsibility instead of increasing dependency on the government.

We all wish we could have done more, much more; however, we will have greater opportunities over the next 2 years with a Republican-led House and Senate. The 114th Congress offers new chances to pass legislation that will take the country down a road of economic recovery that results in lower unemployment, a fair Tax Code, and opportunity for all. We will work to reduce the size and scope of the Federal Government, protect against executive overreach, reform Federal spending, and keep America strong.

My priorities for this year include continuing efforts to increase transparency and accountability in government. That is why H.R. 50, the Unfunded Mandates Information and Transparency Act, which we call UMITA, is the first bill I introduced in the 114th Congress. This legislation

would improve transparency and public disclosure of the true cost—in dollars and in jobs—that Federal dictates pose to the economy. I have offered this legislation in the past four Congresses, and it has successfully passed the House with bipartisan support on three separate occasions, only to be ignored by the Senate. My hope is that this year will be different.

Congress will also face off against the White House this year over President Obama's attempts to short-circuit the American immigration process. By extending funding for the Department of Homeland Security only through February 2015, the House and Senate are prepared to confront the President's unparalleled power grab without the threat of a looming government-wide shutdown, and we will do everything we can to stop his destructive actions.

Congress will be addressing the American people's greatest priorities in the 114th Congress, and we will work hard to build a better future for American families.

I yield back the balance of my time.

UNITED STATES-CUBAN RELATIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from California?

There was no objection.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, this evening I stand with my colleagues to discuss an issue that is very important to this country, and that is our country's relations with Cuba. It has been 50 years—five decades—of a failed policy. Our wrongheaded policy toward Cuba, born of cold war tensions, has failed. Our policies have been in dire need of updating ever since. This island nation, which lies just 90 miles from our shores, one of our closest neighbors, should be a partner in our hemisphere, not an estranged country or enemy. Along with many of my congressional colleagues, many of whom are gathered here tonight, we have been fighting to make that a reality for decades.

I would now like to move toward and talk a little bit about some of the issues that many of us have been involved in, and then I will yield to my colleagues.

In the past, addressing our failed policies toward Cuba really had strong and clear bipartisan support in Congress. Recent polling shows it has bipartisan support amongst the American people. According to a 2014 survey commissioned by the Atlantic Council, more than 60 percent of Americans sup-

port lifting the travel and economic restrictions on Cuba, and 56 percent of Americans support changing overall United States policy towards Cuba. That includes 63 percent of Floridians, 62 percent of Latinos, and 52 percent of Republicans.

Thanks to recent, very bold actions from President Obama, we have finally made some headway in this fight. We have started down the long and hard road towards ending our failed policies and establishing policies that promote the freedoms of Americans and Cubans, encourage trade and job creation here in the United States, and support the open exchange of critical medical development and research to treat diseases that afflict many Americans.

In December, the President announced that the United States will reestablish diplomatic ties, facilitate travel, improve commercial exchanges and telecommunications and a variety of other policies. This is a welcomed and long-overdue response to our calls and the calls of many advocates both in this body and outside, from Cuba, the United States, and around the world.

Today we come to the floor first to thank President Obama for his leadership and to discuss the important changes he has brought about through his action; but at the same time, we are here to call on this Congress to act to end the outdated embargo while maintaining our Nation's unwavering commitment to human rights and democracy.

I personally began my efforts to end the embargo when I was a congressional staffer for my predecessor and mentor, Congressman Ron Dellums, in 1977. Since then, I have traveled to Cuba more than 20 times and have led several congressional delegations to that island. Quite frankly, each time I am there, I am struck by how much both of our nations would benefit from improved relations. Over the years, many Members have been proud of their young people who have received their medical education at the Latin American medical school, ELAM, which allows students from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds to study medicine in Cuba for free, returning to the United States to practice in underserved areas.

When I was chair of the Congressional Black Caucus in the 112th Congress, I was honored to lead a delegation to talk with Cuban officials, including President Raul Castro, to determine their willingness to engage in dialogue with no preconditions in an effort to move toward normalization of relations.

Recently, we led a bipartisan delegation to examine a new treatment for diabetic foot ulcers that afflict millions of Americans every year. Tragically, this condition often ends in amputations and sometimes death for patients. This new treatment has been developed. It is highly effective. Hopefully Americans can benefit from this treatment if we end the embargo.

So I will continue to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to ensure that this development and other areas of common interest to the American and Cuban people are pursued and developed, which I will review later in my closing statement.

Now I yield to the gentlelady from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON), who has visited Cuba and really understands the trade and business aspects and the job-creation aspects of why we need to move forward to end this failed policy.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlelady very much.

I rise in support of President Obama's recent announcement that updates our diplomatic policy approach to Cuba. I am very pleased to see that our outdated approach to U.S.-Cuban relations will end and we will begin to normalize our relationship with Cuba. Not only does the Obama administration's announcement reestablish positive diplomatic ties with Cuba, it also helps to empower the Cuban people by updating travel restrictions, remittance policies, and quality of life.

One of the most positive outcomes of the updated policy announcement is the lifting of many trade restrictions between the United States and Cuba. In my home State of Texas, the Texas Farm Bureau has long supported improved trade policies with Cuba because of the potential to export Texas farm products. This provision not only serves the U.S. economy positively, but it is also very meaningful to the Cuban policy, which has struggled tremendously in the past.

While trade provisions and helping to improve the livelihood of Cuban people by allowing the Cuban economy to build are constructive measures, we must focus on additional viable resources Cuba could provide to the United States. For instance, with the opening of diplomatic ties, I sincerely hope that our State medical boards in the United States will consider the educational value that Cuban medical schools provide to future health professionals who wish to practice medicine in the United States. I have had students from my district attend medical school in Cuba. I am aware that Cuba has offered nurses and physicians around the world in needy countries where needed.

The aforementioned examples are only a few of the many ways that opening our diplomatic relations with Cuba will be positive for our country, and I urge my colleagues to support the Obama administration's decision to update our relationship with our neighbor and future ally.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I now yield to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CASTOR), who represents Tampa and has certainly been a bold leader and understands clearly the economic benefits in her district as they relate to ending the embargo.

Ms. CASTOR of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlelady from California

for her longstanding leadership, her commitment to human rights and change in a positive way for the relationship between the United States of America and Cuba.

I also would be remiss if I didn't recognize some of my other colleagues who have been in this, have encouraged a change in policy for many, many years, if not decades: Congressman FARR, Congresswoman DELAURO, Congressman MCGOVERN, Congressman VAN HOLLEN, Congressman POLIS, Congressman MEEKS, and many others who have taken it upon themselves to visit the island of Cuba, like the average American is not allowed to do, and learn about the real situation on the ground there.

□ 1600

I also commend the Obama administration and the President for his bold move in finally moving this outdated, anachronistic policy towards Cuba into a positive direction. Because just think about this: since the embargo has been in place and our policy of isolation has been in place, we had a war with Vietnam, but we have come to reconcile with the Vietnamese, and now the Vietnamese people have seen great economic reforms because America was engaged. Even after World War II, when we had a world war against Germany, you have to turn the page and move on in human history, and we were able to do that with one of our closest allies now with Germany. So why not Cuba?

In the Tampa Bay area I represent a lot of Cuban-American families. In fact, the bulk of my constituent work often involves family unification. It is not uncommon every week to have a situation where there is a dying grandmother in the United States and her grandchildren in Cuba would like to come and visit. And yet over the past years, they have been subjected to the worst kind of bureaucratic red tape that has not allowed them to travel freely to America, and the same for American citizens.

Did you know that Americans are not allowed to travel freely to Cuba? Many people don't know that Cuba is really one of the only nations in the entire world where our constitutional rights to travel are restricted. And we think now with the Obama administration's move we will begin to open the door to greater travel, in recognition of our own human rights and constitutional rights.

But I think it is really for our families to be able to unify them. It is only a 1-hour flight from Tampa to Havana. It is less than that, and it is a beautiful flight. And yet it has been off limits for so long. So thank you to the Obama administration for beginning to take the steps to open this up.

I want folks to know Cuba is changing. Just like the Congresswoman who has traveled there multiple times, I traveled on a fact-finding mission not too long ago. There are meaningful economic reforms under way. America

needs to be there to encourage it, to move it along faster and farther.

People now in Cuba can own some private property. There are new small businesses and entrepreneurs that have the ability to step away from government control and take control of their own lives. There is decentralization of power. But unless America is engaged, we are not going to be able to continue those economic reforms and press for improvements in human rights.

This is also an important time for America to capitalize on the changes in the world economy. Remember for a long time it was the Soviet Union that supported Cuba, or it was Venezuela. Well, now with the energy revolution in America, there has never been a better time for America to use its influence in the world, its economic power, its pressing for human rights, as Venezuela doesn't carry the day anymore. Their economy is in turmoil. The same for Russia. The economic conditions now play to our advantage, and we need to use it to improve human rights on the island, to improve family unification, and begin to establish those all important diplomatic ties.

In my hometown of Tampa, they have led the way. My Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce has traveled a number of times. They would like to reestablish trade ties. There have been enormous numbers of cultural exchanges. The Florida Orchestra had a multiyear exchange with the Orchestra of Cuba. Ybor City businessmen have instituted art celebrations with the Cuban people right in the heart of Tampa. The University of Tampa's baseball team went and played the Cuban national team. Yes, and the University of Tampa did prevail, much to the chagrin of the Cubans.

But these are the ways that you build a relationship, a greater foundation for economic reform and human rights reform. In fact, it is the Saint Lawrence Catholic Church in Tampa that is going to fund the first Catholic parish on the island of Cuba in the coming years. If we cannot stand as leaders in the Western Hemisphere for religious freedom, for human rights, for economic engagement and improvement, who will? It is our time. I thank the leaders in this Congress that have pressed for this change, I commend President Obama for taking this bold move, and I encourage all Members of Congress to travel there and listen to the people, listen to their cries for positive change. We have it within our power to lift the embargo and begin to press on these issues, and I hope that we will.

Ms. LEE. I thank the gentlewoman for laying out just really a glimpse of the possibilities, and again, thank you for your leadership.

Now I would like to yield to Congresswoman SHEILA JACKSON LEE from Texas, who has been a longtime supporter and advocate for ending the embargo, who also, I was reminded earlier, in her role as the Immigration

Subcommittee ranking member, she was very instrumental in the Elian Gonzalez case and was able to really help forge a path forward to return Elian to Cuba.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, as you notice, Members who are on the floor today have come from a variety of States, a variety of political philosophies and positions. I think it is appropriate to acknowledge Congresswoman BARBARA LEE for galvanizing Members on both sides of the aisle on an important and enormous leap of change that we have made over the years by her determination and persistence and knowledge. So I thank her very much for that kind of leadership, allowing many of us to travel to Cuba on any number of occasions, meeting with Fidel Castro, speaking about issues of government and the needs of the Cuban people and the needs of the American people.

To my colleagues, everyone who has visited, they have found the Cuban people hospitable and friendly, desiring peace, and respecting America. If there is ever one impression that you have when you leave Cuba, it is the desire for strong relationships and the connectedness between Cubans, Cuban-Americans, and Americans.

As a Representative from Texas, I can assure you that over the years I have heard often from members of my agricultural community about their desire to begin engaging with trade in Cuba. And they do so as proud Americans, as Americans who have sent young men and now young women to faraway shores in military uniform to defend this Nation.

What they see in Cuba, as has been indicated, is a friend with which we had disagreements, but a friend with which we now can find a pathway forward. As was mentioned, we had engaged in a war in Vietnam, we have engaged in a war in Iraq and Afghanistan, soldiers coming home now with few soldiers left behind. And, Mr. Speaker, we are engaging in diplomatic relations with Iraq, Afghanistan, and certainly Vietnam. How in the world can an island 90 miles away be held in such contempt that we cannot find a pathway forward.

So I strongly support the executive order of this President, and I will tell you why in just a few minutes of the time that I have remaining. I serve on the Homeland Security Committee, and previously on Judiciary, on which I continue. My colleague is correct. At the time of the young boy by the name of Elian Gonzalez, who was found near the shores of our great Nation, his mother deceased trying to escape, of course, from Cuba with a number of others, there was this custody fight, if you will, about whether or not his relatives here or his father should have custody over him, his father being in Cuba. What a sensitive question for a very young boy who could not make a decision on his own. What a traumatic experience in those difficult waters watching his mother not survive.

So as a member of that committee, working with my fellow colleagues and working then with the Clinton administration and then Attorney General Janet Reno, though it was not, if I might say, a clear and pretty scene, we knew that in the best interest of the child the parent was the best custodian or guardian, whether or not that child was, in fact, having to go to Cuba.

But as I said earlier, the Cuban people are peaceful people. Every country has had a revolutionary path, and Cuba has as well. But it was a right decision for Elian, who is now a young man, and to all accounts is performing his duties as a responsible adult. But that was a very tough incident in our political life, if you will, to see a child snatched by officials of this government to take him home to Cuba. Maybe that was, in fact, the first statement of an altered policy.

Let me close by saying why I believe the President's executive order is legitimate in the context of his legal authority, and I am excited about the beginning of the change in diplomatic relationships between Cuba and the United States.

Mr. Speaker, would you not want to know who is 90 miles away from you in this time of franchise terrorism? Wouldn't we want to know who our allies are in the Caribbean, or who our allies are in fighting horrific drug trafficking? Well, I think we can find that in the entity of the Cuban government. We know that we have not seen a terrorist incident in that particular country. That is why we need to normalize relations.

I am grateful for Mr. Gross' return, who was brought out by many Members of Congress, including my colleagues here, including Congresswoman LEE, and as well some of the other political prisoners who have been released, including some in recent days.

And then lastly let me say, let us celebrate the Cuban people for the magnificent export that they have: medicine, medical research, and physicians. Everyone knows that in the Ebola fight, the largest contingent, or one of the largest contingents of medical professionals, doctors fighting against Ebola on the continent of Africa, is and has been Cuban doctors alongside of the international workforce of medical professionals, Good Samaritans who sacrifice their lives to fight this deadly disease. But every single medical crisis in the world, you can count on Cuban doctors being there, as well as in conflicts and wars, such as over in the Mideast, Cuban doctors go to save lives.

I want to thank the gentlewoman for this Special Order. I look forward to joining her in further codels to visit and to be part of the continued normalization. I say this not out of disrespect of the feelings of others who have experienced a crisis in their relationship with Cuba, but only to say that now may be the time for peaceful reconciliation, for families to be reconciled and

for us to begin this peaceful journey with the nation of Cuba. Let me thank you, thank President Obama, and thank those who are very much a part of this.

Ms. LEE. Let me thank you, Congresswoman JACKSON LEE, for being with us here tonight and reminding us of much of the history that cannot be forgotten as we move toward normal relations with Cuba.

Also with regard to Alan Gross. Yesterday, Alan and his wife, Judy, they were with us, and we all were so thrilled to see Alan Gross, and we are pleased that the President's action actually resulted in the long overdue return of our friend Mr. Gross.

Every time that many of us went to Cuba we wanted to meet with Alan. It was important to learn more about his case, but more importantly to do what we could do to help with humanitarian relief and to encourage and lift his spirits.

One of those individuals who has been so key in this is Congressman GREGORY MEEKS from New York, who has consistently talked about the importance of normalized relations with Cuba in the context of Latin American policies, our policy role in the Western Hemisphere.

□ 1615

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank BARBARA LEE for her steadfastness, for her tenacity, for her consistency in trying to bring a change in a policy that has been faulty, for it has been the policy that we have been doing over and over and over again, we have had over and over again and getting the same results: zero.

I want to thank BARBARA for her hard work on this. I look forward to continuing to work with her as the President has opened up the opportunity for diplomatic relations with Cuba again, but we know that we still have a lot of work to do, and I look forward to working side by side with her until we have the kind of relationship and we have the kind of movement in this Congress where we really end the embargo, so that we can come together and make sure that change has happened within our relationships.

I want to thank President Obama for his bold move, for indeed the camera of history is rolling and has brought us to this historic point which will take the United States of America and Cuba in a new and more positive direction after over five decades of severed diplomatic relations.

American policy towards Cuba since 1961 has left our Nation out of sync with our neighbors in the Americas—for that matter, out of sync with our friends and allies all over the world.

Our outdated policy, highlighted by our trade embargo, which has lasted for over half a century, has not only been ineffective but has blocked investment and trade opportunities for U.S. businessmen and farmers, it has kept families apart, and has done virtually nothing to change Cuba's policies.

In fact, just 90 miles away, if we had these trade agreements, if we were able to trade and bring markets and food to the shores of Cuba, it would be the humanitarian thing to do because people are starving simply because they don't have that opportunity on the island of Cuba.

Clearly, when you think about the world which is smaller now—and one of the things that we should have learned by now is that unilateral sanctions don't work; if anything, they have further isolated us from the global community. We have got to work collectively with others, not just doing something out on our own. It has not worked. It does not work.

As mentioned, denying American citizens the freedom to travel to Cuba to visit its many historic and cultural attractions, to meet its people, has been a stain on our democracy. I think the gentlelady from Florida talked about where we, as Members of Congress, have opportunities to go when we have travel.

I can recall traveling, for example, not only to Havana, but Santiago de Cuba, and feeling the rich heritage and culture and looking at the people in Santiago who were poor, but I saw something when I looked in their faces: they were poor, but they were not hopeless. They were not destitute.

They welcomed us into their homes to see how they were living. They had music playing, and they had hope for a better tomorrow and a better relationship with the United States of America. In fact, they scratched their heads, did not understand why they didn't have this better relationship with the United States of America, so I say that so that they want us to come. Others are going; we should permit our citizens to do the same.

Now, the question is what is happening here in America. Well, a December 17 through 21 ABC News and Washington Post poll of adults nationwide showed that 64 percent of Americans supported establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba, with 31 percent opposed; 68 percent supported ending the trade embargo, while 74 percent supported ending restrictions on travel to Cuba. Americans support the President's actions to normalize relations with Cuba.

The United States International Trade Commission has concluded that if U.S. restrictions on financing and travel to Cuba were lifted in 2008, U.S. agricultural exports to Cuba would have increased between \$216 million and \$478 million, and the U.S. share of Cuba's agricultural imports would have increased from 38 percent to 49 and 64 percent, which also would prevent some of the hunger that is taking place in Cuba.

U.S. wheat, rice, soy, and meat producers have said that their industries will benefit from normalized relations with Cuba, now that trade financing restrictions are to be alleviated. President Obama's plan to establish rela-

tions and facilitate trade and commerce is a major market opportunity.

It is good for Cubans, but it is also good for Americans because when you do that, you are also creating jobs for Americans right here in the United States, so it is a win-win because we are all about creating jobs in the United States. We are all about that commerce.

We are also all about making sure that trade facilitation helps us in America, but it also can help people who have a great need on that island called Cuba.

President Obama's actions to open the relationship and reestablish diplomatic relations with Cuba will bring us closer, as BARBARA LEE indicated, to our allies in the region who have pursued more open relationship with Cuba while we have not.

I serve on the Foreign Affairs Committee; I sit on the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee. I have had the opportunity to have dialogue and conversations with heads of states from throughout the hemisphere.

For example, one of our closest allies, Colombia, one of our strongest partners, they are negotiating with the FARC on the island of Cuba; and when I talk to many of their individuals, they said the one thing that they think could help the entire hemisphere is for the United States to change its relationship with Cuba.

Now, Colombia is one of our strongest, one of our most reliable allies, but they, too, have engaged with Cuba and are asking and looking and saying that our engagement with Cuba will change and help the hemisphere.

Panama has invited President Castro to the Summit of the Americas, and the rest of our hemisphere wants this change, and our antiquated policy has been holding us back and hampering our ability to cooperate with countries in the region on a wide range of issues.

Let me begin to conclude by saying this: the President's historic announcement has been universally well received by the region, which is heralding it as a major step forward in regional integration.

The Presidents of Brazil, Argentina, and—as I said—Colombia and Mexico have praised President Obama's announcement. The announcement has also been applauded by regional organizations, including the Union of South American Nations and the Organization of American States.

I conclude by saying that I have visited Cuba many times. I have worked tirelessly throughout my years in Congress to foster an improved relationship between United States and Cuba, and I believe the President's actions are good for both our countries and our hemisphere.

American businesses will benefit, U.S. citizens will be able to travel to Cuba on a more regular basis and send remittances to their relatives by reopening our Embassy in Havana. We will be a safer place, and finally—fi-

nally—the world often looks to the United States to be a leader militarily. We should be proud that the world can also look at us as champions of diplomacy.

Through our President's new Cuba policy, we have shown our neighbors in the Western Hemisphere—and indeed the rest of the world—that we are committed to building new partnerships and that we will not be beholden to antiquated policies and that we are optimistic about what is possible through dialogue and diplomacy, and I thank the chairman.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from New York for his very comprehensive statement and overview, but also for his tremendous leadership and key policy initiatives on the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere; and as a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, you are so critical in this overall movement for us, so thank you again for being here tonight.

I want to yield to Congresswoman JACKSON LEE who wants to say something before I yield to Congressman POLIS.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Having written a letter to join with other colleagues for the release of Alan Gross, I want to make sure the record said Alan Gross and not Alan Grossman. Best to his wife and him at this time.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, how much time do we have remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ALLEN). 24 minutes.

Ms. LEE. I now yield to someone who has been very interested in and a tremendous leader on this whole issue of trade and ending the embargo, the gentleman from Colorado, Congressman JARED POLIS. Thank you again.

Mr. POLIS. Mr. Speaker, I thank Congresswoman LEE for her constant leadership on this issue.

When I was born in 1975, the embargo with Cuba was already more than a decade old. I never knew a time when Americans could go to Cuba or legally import goods and products from Cuba.

Growing up, I remember the end of the cold war, when the Soviet Union fell. The last real excuse for the treatment of Cuba was that they were allied with the Soviet Union during the cold war.

Well, the Soviet Union fell, Soviet subsidies and support for Cuba ended, and I really began to wonder why we continued this failed cold war policy of an embargo—travel embargo and trade embargo against Cuba. Presumably, it was designed to bring Fidel Castro's regime down.

Now, again, this policy predates my birth by 10 years. It actually means that he is the longest-serving head of state in the entire world. Obviously, it didn't work. It didn't work. Are we going to keep doing the same thing? Maybe a different path would have worked, and that is what the President has now proposed.

For more than 50 years, we have isolated our southern neighbor, restricting trade, travel, commerce, as well as

the flow of ideas, discussion, cultural exchange, the very things that can lead to a change and more support for human rights within Cuba.

It really defies logic to expect that the status quo that has led to Fidel Castro being the longest regime and head of state in the world will somehow lead to the end of the very regime that it has actually helped to preserve.

Unfortunately, the sanctions have hurt everyday Cubans without mobilizing political change or expanding their freedoms. Our policy of isolation was counterproductive, and it only prolonged the suffering and lack of freedom of the Cuban people. Our present landscape is particularly promising for restoring the U.S.-Cuba relationship.

Now, let me be clear. Just as there are many countries that we have normal relations with that we continue to make sure we are outspoken about any human rights violations, of course, if there are political dissidents or others that are improperly jailed in Cuba, you will hear Members of this body, including myself, speaking out, just as we do for the oppression of Tibetans in China, while we continue to support ongoing normalized relationships with China, just as we do in countries where we want stronger labor laws or stronger anti-child labor laws, yet continue to have a basic trade and travel relationship.

Cuba can do better. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, America can do better with regard to human rights, and we discussed that in different contexts about expanding civil liberties for all Americans; but, yes, Cuba should do better.

Guess what? The way to help show and lead Cuba to the promised lands of human rights and democracy is by engaging the Cuban people and by engaging the regime and showing them the many benefits that dealing with their neighbor to the north can bring.

Now, let us make sure we are not mistaken here; the President's actions don't end the embargo. That requires congressional action, as outlined in the Helms-Burton Act of 1996. What President Obama did is he exercised his legal right to establish diplomatic relations and expand travel, facilitate remittances, and promote commerce.

Congress does need to act. The President's step alone is a great step in the right direction, but to fully normalize our relationship with Cuba, Congress will need to act, and I continue to sponsor legislation that will help that occur.

Of course, we should continue to call for transparency with regard to Cuba's human rights record, to speak out for political dissidents, just as we do in dozens and hundreds of countries that we have normal trade and diplomatic relations with.

I was proud to sign a letter authored by our great leader, BARBARA LEE, on this issue, encouraging President Obama to use the 2015 summit as a platform for stimulating this type of productive, regional dialogue.

Now, decades of adversity between the United States and Cuba cannot be wiped away with a stroke of the pen. It will take time.

□ 1630

But together we can build bonds of trust between the Cuban people and ourselves, and we can overcome the decades of mistrust and propaganda on both sides to lead to the betterment of the relationship between the Cuban people and the American people and the greater prosperity to both peoples through trade and commerce.

I strongly support continuing to move forward to engage with Cuba and will continue to support the President's actions and similar legislative action here.

Welcome to our new Cuban friends—bienvenidos a nuestros amigos nuevos Cubanos.

Ms. LEE. Thank you—muchas gracias. I thank the gentleman from Colorado for that very succinct and clear statement and for your continuing leadership for a policy that really is in the United States' best interest. So thank you again.

I now yield to my friend from California, Congressman SAM FARR, who has really forged a path toward where we are today for many, many years with the administration as it relates to establishing diplomatic relations, someone who has visited Cuba, who has the respect of the Cuban people, but also the respect of our own administration, and someone who continues to plug away each and every day for normal relations with Cuba and ending the embargo.

Mr. FARR. Thank you very much, my dear colleague from California and our distinguished Member of Congress, BARBARA LEE. And I can't think of any other Member who has made more trips and taken more people and influenced this change of policy in the United States Congress than BARBARA LEE.

I have had the pleasure of traveling to Cuba on six different mission trips and each one of them has been very interesting, one with my constituents in Santa Cruz, California, who have a sister city relationship with an area called Guama, and it looks much like the California coastline, and a very interesting area of trying to help rural people with a better connection by learning about their rural delivery of medicine, which far exceeds the way we treat rural people in this country, and learning from them how we might be doing a better job, at the same time improving the facilities they have, and things like that, just a cultural exchange.

I find that every time I am there, whether it is Havana or other parts of Cuba, that there is always kind of a curiosity of learning about another country, a very well-educated country, a sophisticated country, yet a very, very poor country.

I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Latin America, in Colombia. I lived in

barrios without water and without lights. People in Cuba might have access to water and lights, but the living conditions that they live in are really restricted, and some of the conditions in Havana are the greatest poverty I have seen in the world.

So this will change when you get people that are well-educated and get an economy growing. I think that the action of President Obama is absolutely awesome. It is real diplomatic leadership. It is the ability to change the United States' isolated, backward, close-the-door policy to opening it up with all the other Presidents of this hemisphere.

As we prepare to go to Panama in the spring, President Obama now will be joining every President of this hemisphere, 36 different countries in the Western Hemisphere, all of whom have diplomatic relationships, travel relationships, normal relationships with Cuba, except the United States of America, and he is going to be applauded for his leadership in joining the hemispheric unity.

When you think about the opportunities of this hemisphere, we can get along in this hemisphere in three languages: Spanish, English, and Portuguese, a little bit of French. We are not at war with anybody. This is a magnificent hemisphere to unify, and to be isolated from that unification by having this archaic policy towards Cuba is just wrong.

So, Mr. President, you are a hero, and I look forward to you being welcomed as a hero at the hemispheric summit this spring.

I would also like to say, I am ranking member on the Agriculture Subcommittee of Appropriations, and this is an opportunity for 11 million people living in Cuba and hungry, and really hungry. Cuba has to import almost everything. They have trade importations from the United States, so buying agriculture products isn't new. What is going to be new is the ability to trade in normal functions, in using the financial instruments that all trade negotiators have.

It is very difficult to export to Cuba because of the requirements that we make in the United States. We are not allowed, as Americans, to use credit cards or to get credit. All the other countries can. So what happens is these other countries are taking away market share where we could be in there with our products.

I am very proud, in agriculture, to see the leadership of our States, our agricultural States, the Governors—bipartisan. This is not Democratic. This is a bipartisan, sort of the American outreach, and we have formed a coalition of agricultural groups to work on, really, opening up the trade.

I am very proud to say that the International Dairy—I am going to read off this list. The International Dairy Foods Association, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, National Association of

Wheat Growers, National Barley Growers, National Chicken Council, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, National Milk Producers Federation, National Turkey Federation, North American Meat Institute, the U.S. Dairy Export Council, the U.S. Wheat Associates, the USA Rice Federation, et cetera, et cetera, are all interested in helping promote our relationship with Cuba.

So congratulations, President Obama. You are a true leader in this hemisphere.

Thank you, BARBARA LEE, for setting aside this time for us to discuss it.

I want to personally thank BARBARA LEE for inviting Alan Gross to be here yesterday when we were sworn in. I was fortunate to be able to meet with Alan Gross when he was incarcerated in Cuba. I brought him salami from the Eastern Market here and he just loved that. So last night he gave me a bracelet that he made when he was incarcerated. It is so nice to see him back in the United States in the Halls of the United States Congress.

America is changing, and this is a big step.

Thank you.

Ms. LEE. Let me thank you, Congressman FARR, for that really very positive, upbeat statement, also for your leadership on so many issues.

I just want to remind this body that Cuba still finds itself on the list of state-sponsored terror countries, and Congressman FARR along with other Members have really led in trying to get our administration to really understand, as William Cohen issued a white paper in 1998 saying that there is no conventional threat by the Cuban military—that has decreased; there is none—and this should be lifted very quickly.

So thank you, Congressman FARR.

I now yield to Congressman COHEN from Tennessee, who understands very clearly the importance of lifting the embargo not only for our foreign policy goals, but also in terms of his constituents and in terms of the benefits to American businesses and the efforts in our job creation and economic revitalization efforts.

Thank you again for being here with us.

Mr. COHEN. You are very welcome, Representative LEE, and I thank you for bringing this Special Order. You have indeed, as people have said, been the leader on this issue for many years, and I appreciate that and so many other issues you have been a leader on, but this in particular.

Also, Mr. RANGEL has been an important leader on this issue, as have Mr. MEEKS and others.

I had written the President and talked to Valerie Jarrett about what I considered the three Cs that he could engage in with executive authority, one of which was Cuba, and I commend him for taking this leadership role; the second of which was commutations, which he has not done nearly enough to

commute unjust sentences here in this country; and the third is cannabis, which should be rescheduled to a schedule III drug so we could do research on medical marijuana and Charlotte's Web, that can help children with epilepsy who otherwise are either dying or not being treated.

But I commend the President for his actions toward Cuba. This is a policy that many have mentioned has been a failed policy for over 50 years. We do have engagements and diplomatic relations with China, where the Maoists are getting more and more power, with Vietnam and with Russia. Why should we not have relations with Cuba? There was no reason. The only reason was Florida and electoral votes. So I commend the President for rising above politics and doing the right thing for human beings and for Americans.

As Representative CASTOR said, so many Americans want to travel to Cuba; and for many years I thought it was absurd that I couldn't travel to Cuba, because I wanted to and I couldn't because my country was stopping me from doing it.

People were going through Canada or going through Mexico and other countries and getting in and subverting the law, but that wasn't right. If you were going to follow the laws of your country, you couldn't go and you didn't go. It was wrong.

I did have the opportunity to visit Cuba as a Member, and I found the Cuban people very, very, very friendly. As I was walking around Havana, I thought: This is so strange. I am supposed to think that these people aren't going to like me, that this is our enemy. They are on the terrorist list. I should be concerned.

But I felt as safe as I was anyplace in the United States or anyplace in the world, and people were very friendly and very nice. It was no different than being anywhere else in the hemisphere.

I really like the old cars, the old fifties cars that are all over Havana, and they are kind of part of the culture now. While I like them because I remember as a child those cars and my parents having them and seeing them and thinking fondly upon them, I also thought about AutoZone in my district and all the parts they could be selling in Havana to make those cars work more efficiently and maybe have less impact on the environment.

I also thought about Federal Express and how many packages that might be shipped in and out of Cuba by America's number one and the world's number one carrier of products. I thought about the hotel industry that is located in my community—we used to have Holiday Inn; we have still got Hilton—and the hotels that could be built there. Other countries—mostly, I think, Spain and Sweden and Canada and even Israel—had hotels and restaurants and businesses, but not America. So it made no sense.

I remember Katrina and the great tragedy just south of Memphis in New

Orleans and when Cuba offered medical aid, doctors and medical aid, and we turned it down. How foolish of us to turn down an offer of humanitarian aid, but we did. And they offered aid after 9/11 as well.

Now, my appreciation for Cuba goes back to my childhood. In 1955, I was befriended by a baseball player whose name was Minnie Minoso. His real name was Aurelio Saturnino Armas Minoso, the Cuban Comet, number 9 with the White Sox, with the Indians, a little bit later with the Cardinals and the Washington Senators. Minnie befriended me and gave me a baseball when I was just 5 years of age. It was in the segregated Memphis, Tennessee, so the player who gave me the baseball originally was a White player named Tom Poholsky. I guess I didn't have to say he was White when his name was Tom Poholsky, but he was.

I went to thank him. I had crutches at the time. I had just gotten out of the hospital some months earlier from polio and had a White Sox T-shirt and cap—it was an exhibition game—and thanked him. He said: You don't need to thank me. You should thank number 9 over there, the darkest player on the field.

And so Minoso came over and we thanked him.

What it was is he was kind of inhibited from the segregation laws in the South of being the nicest guy on the baseball field and coming up and giving me a ball. He became my buddy. I have known Minnie Minoso ever since. He is my *nom de plume* on some email sites and some phone books and some other things where I need kind of an alias, and he has been my friend and we have visited back and forth.

He was a Cuban player who was beloved in Chicago, and I think is the most beloved player in Chicago today. A lot of Cuban players have gone to play in Chicago, and they play great baseball. We could have a great baseball relationship with Cuba, a great tourism relationship, a great cultural relationship and medical care.

In traveling to Latin America as a Congressman, I have been told the biggest impediment to our relations with Latin American countries is our treatment of Cuba. The President, by starting to formalize relations with Cuba, has helped America in Latin America, which is our number one—South America, Central America—our number one trading partner. It makes a lot of sense economically as well as humanely.

I look forward to the time when all Americans can visit Cuba, the great culture, and exchange good wishes. They are our friends.

Thank you, Representative LEE, for having this session on this program which shows President Obama's leadership.

Ms. LEE. I want to thank the gentleman from Tennessee for being with us this evening and really laying out many of the benefits to your constituents, to America, as they relate to ending the embargo against Cuba, but also

just for being here and kind of sharing your stories, because I think it is very important that we hear the stories of Americans who have had relationships with Cuban people who really don't and can't figure out why everyone can't have these normal relations with the people of Cuba as we do with people around the world. So thank you again very much.

I now yield to the gentlewoman from Connecticut, Congresswoman DELAURO, who has visited Cuba several times, who really has been very focused on the business aspects, the agricultural benefits to our own country and to Cuba as they relate to ending the embargo, also on women's issues and so many issues that really require us to normalize relations with Cuba. She has been in this fight a long time and still continues each and every day to move us forward.

I really thank you again for your leadership, for being here and for being with some of us when we have been in Cuba and really raising these issues to a level that really, I think the Cuban people understand that Americans are spirited and they really want to be there and to help move Cuba forward as well as our own country forward. So thank you again.

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Ms. DELAURO. I want to thank the gentlewoman, first and foremost, for her leadership. This is not an issue for the faint of heart or for people who want to say, "Oh, my gosh. If we don't see success immediately, then we will wash our hands and go off and do some other thing." This has required tenacity and courage and passion and deep concern. We are grateful to you for your leadership in this area, and it has been a pleasure for me to work with you.

Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues, we are no fans of the Castro regime. This is not about the regime. It is about the Cuban people and what we can do to help our near neighbors realize their aspirations for freedom and prosperity. Judged against that worthy goal, our policy for the last 54 years has been a dismal failure. It has not helped ordinary Cubans one bit. In fact, the sanctions have harmed them and us by holding back Cuba's democratic and economic development.

Back in 2007, I had the opportunity to chair the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee. At that time, I led a bipartisan group of Members on a trip to Cuba. On that trip, it was so interesting to me that one of the things that one or two of my colleagues—and, again, in a bipartisan way—wanted to do was to go to the port and see the off-loading of rice. The fact of the matter is that, instead of getting their rice from the United States, which Cuba could do, they are getting their rice from Malaysia. Imagine if we could make an economic difference for our rice farmers, for our agricultural community, and because of a policy that

has been so shortsighted, we are putting our own economic interests aside.

I had the honor of taking part in another delegation to the island last year, led by our colleague BARBARA LEE. What we saw on the visit was an immense and an untapped potential. It was at that time as well that I accompanied Congresswoman LEE to visit with Alan Gross and to understand his plight. He was arrested and put in prison for 15 years, having served 5 years. What destruction it was doing to him physically and mentally, and unnecessarily so. We were so excited yesterday, when we were sworn in as newly elected or just elected Members of Congress, that Alan Gross and his wife, Judy, were in the audience to see it—back home, here, in the United States, with family, and enjoying all of the freedom that he deserves. Again, the immense benefits, the untapped potential.

We also saw and met—and my colleague BARBARA LEE will bear this out—with entrepreneurs. There are many young women who have opened stores; they have opened restaurants; they have opened other small businesses. We spoke with people who are finding innovative ways to improve their lives and the lives of their families; yet, because of a lack of a financial infrastructure or the ability of U.S. banks to participate in Cuba, they are held to a modicum of what they can do.

There is palpable hunger for change in Cuba. We need to do our best to support it. Opening the economy will help to unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of the Cuban people. We have engaged with the Soviet Union and Communist China, both of which pose potentially severe threats to our country. Cuba poses no such threat.

I applaud the President for his historic first step to normalize relations between the United States and Cuba. We must stop persevering in a senseless cold war policy. This Congress must act to end this embargo.

I thank the gentlewoman for the time.

Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues, I am no fan of the Castro regime. But this is not about the regime. It is about the Cuban people, and what we can do to help our near neighbors realize their aspirations for freedom and prosperity.

Judged against that worthy goal, our policy of the last fifty-four years has been a dismal failure. It has not helped ordinary Cubans one bit. In fact, the sanctions have harmed them—and us—by holding back Cuba's democratic and economic development.

Back in 2007, when I chaired the Agriculture appropriations subcommittee, I led a bipartisan group of members on a trip to Cuba. This year, I took part in another delegation to the island. What we saw on both visits was immense untapped potential.

I met entrepreneurs who have opened stores, restaurants, and other small businesses. I spoke with people finding innovative ways to improve their lives and the lives of their families.

There is a palpable hunger for change in Cuba. We should do our best to support it.

Opening the economy will help unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of the Cuban people.

We engaged with the Soviet Union and Communist China, both of which posed potentially severe threats to our country. Cuba poses no such threat. Stonewalling the Cuban government only backs up the regime's claim that the United States is the enemy. By contrast, engaging diplomatically gives us the openings we need to address important issues like democracy and human rights, as we have done with China and many other countries.

So I applaud the President for his historic first step to normalize relations between the United States and Cuba. This new direction will benefit both nations. The President has done a great deal, within the confines of his available powers, to reestablish diplomatic relations, increase commerce, and advance shared humanitarian interests.

There is more he can do: for example, he should do away with a Bush Administration policy that drains Cuban talent by encouraging doctors to defect.

But lifting the embargo itself will require Congress to act. I have been arguing for an end to sanctions for many years. The Cuban people have suffered needlessly for too long. We ought to free them to join the international community and participate in the global economy. For our own businesses, lifting the embargo would ensure access to new markets just 90 miles from our shores.

I am in favor of re-establishing formal diplomatic relations with Cuba. But our best ambassadors would be the American people themselves. Every American should have the right to travel freely to Cuba. The resulting flood of contact would give Cubans access to America's most valuable export: our nation's ideals and values. That is the surest path to freedom for the Cuban people.

We must stop persevering this senseless Cold War policy. Congress must act to end this embargo.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 4 o'clock and 50 minutes p.m.), under its previous order, the House adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, January 8, 2015, at 10 a.m. for morning-hour debate.

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS, ETC.

Under clause 2 of rule XIV, executive communications were taken from the Speaker's table and referred as follows:

4. A letter from the Assistant Attorney General, Office of Legislative Affairs, Department of Justice, transmitting the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act Annual Report for 2014, pursuant to 52 U.S.C. 20301 to 20311; to the Committee on House Administration.

5. A letter from the Chief, Publications and Regulations Branch, Internal Revenue Service, transmitting the Service's IRB only rule—Changes to Employee Plans Determination Letter Processing (Announcement 2015-1) received January 5, 2015, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Ways and Means.