

These two issues have come up in the last few days and have certainly aroused my suspicions. I call on the good offices of the Secretary of Defense, who I think personally is doing a very good job, to see that his organization snaps to and produces the documentation the Senate needs in its oversight capacity.

VARELA PROJECT

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, in just a few minutes we will have a vote on a resolution, thanks to the chairman of our Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, Senator DODD, and the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. He so graciously, for me, has set this vote in just a few minutes on a resolution that passed out of the Foreign Relations Committee unanimously commending, as a Senate resolution, the very courageous citizens in the country of Cuba who have put their lives on the line by putting their names and addresses on the line under the Cuban Constitution, petitioning for free elections, petitioning for freedom of speech, petitioning for a release of political prisoners, petitioning to move from a state-controlled economy to an economy of free enterprise. Those 11,000 courageous citizens, operating under the Constitution of Cuba, stepped forth under the constitutional provision that says if over 10,000 petition the Government, the Government will take up the matter in the National Assembly to act on those four freedoms I just mentioned.

I want to bring to the attention of our colleagues the fact that these people have put their lives on the line. The Castro government could stop it tomorrow. But today the Senate will send a strong message of support for these courageous citizens of Cuba who are playing by the rules and who want to see the winds of change and the fresh breath of freedom suddenly start to be realized in Cuba.

I am so grateful to the chairman of the full committee and the chairman of the subcommittee that they have brought forthwith so quickly this resolution so that the Senate can stand on record to commend these citizens in Cuba.

I see my colleague, the chairman of our subcommittee, ready to speak. Few people knew about this project called the Varela Project until President Carter went to Cuba. When he had that chance to speak live to the Cuban people by radio and TV, he spoke about the Varela Project and how courageous these folks were. All the people of Cuba now know what it is. Today, the Senate is going to have a chance to go on record to support them.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.
The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, there are only a few minutes before the vote. What time is the vote?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time is 5:45.

Mr. DODD. I see my colleague from the State of Washington who wants to address another matter. I will be brief.

I commend our colleague from Florida for crafting this resolution, which will be voted on shortly, by the Senate. He is absolutely correct, it did come out of our committee with a unanimous vote.

Mr. President, I rise in support of S. Res. 272. All too often when we have engaged in debate on matters related to Cuba, there have been a great deal of polemics—a lot of heat but very little light shed on the subject matter under debate. That is not the case with the resolution we are considering this afternoon.

I have been critical in the past on various policies the US has pursued regarding Cuba. The audience we ought to listen to most are the people behind the projects like the Varela Project, the people who have stayed in Cuba to try to bring about change there—those who have been incarcerated for 15, 20, 25 years, in some cases longer—because of their political views. Those who have authored this Varela Project deserve a great deal of credit for having the courage to round up 11,000 signatures, which is remarkable considering some of the pressures they will be under.

I commend Senator BILL NELSON of Florida for crafting this resolution. He has attempted to stick to the facts and to keep the spotlight on what is actually happening on the Island of Cuba.

This resolution recognizes a remarkable occurrence—the fact that 11,000 Cubans have petitioned their government for the holding of a referendum on civil, political and economic changes they wish to see. It is also refreshing that, thus far, the government of Cuba has taken no action against the organizers of this effort.

Thanks to the recent visit of former President Jimmy Carter to Havana last month, the Varela project now has international visibility. More importantly, because President Carter's speech, including references to this effort, was broadcast on Cuban TV and radio, and reprinted verbatim in the official Cuban newspaper, the Cuban people are now aware of this as well.

The organizers of Varela have chosen to exercise their rights under the Cuban Constitution to submit legislative proposals to the National Assembly for its consideration. Some in the Cuban exile community have been critical of this effort because they believe it legitimizes the Cuban constitution and therefore it should be opposed. I reject that argument.

For too long we in the United States have tried to tell the Cuban people what is best for them. We did so at the time of Cuban independence from Spain and we did so again during the Batista regime. The result was the 1959 Cuban revolution and the Castro Government.

Let's listen to the voices inside Cuba. Let's listen to those who have stayed

in Cuba and sought to change it from within.

Those voices have called for the United States to engage with Cuba. Those voices have called for an end to the travel ban.

If the Carter visit demonstrated anything, it demonstrated that the presence of Americans in Cuba offers opportunities for more political space in Cuba not for shoring up the Castro regime.

Mr. President, the Varela project was inspired by Cuban citizens. These citizens have taken advantage of rights provided to them under the Cuban Constitution. The Cuban government should honor those rights and give serious consideration to this request.

We in the United States should demonstrate self restraint and allow Cubans to retain ownership of this initiative. We need to be careful not to appropriate these internal efforts inside Cuba. If we give it too much of a label of "made in the U.S.," then this project will be hurt and the effort will be hurt. We have been warned repeatedly by dissidents and human rights activists inside Cuba that, too often, if we become associated with efforts there, they are seen as nothing more than tools of United States foreign policy with regard to Cuba. We should try not to give the Castro government any opportunities to suggest that this is just another plot by the United States to attack the Cuban people.

I commend the organizers of the Varela initiative and all who have joined with them in their effort to seek peaceful change in Cuba. I stand ready to listen to their voices and assist them in any way they believe will be helpful in bringing their aspirations to fruition.

What is most important is not what we do, but rather what they are doing in Cuba, what they are showing by their tremendous sense of commitment to democracy and freedom. For those reasons, we are endorsing their effort with this resolution, and I strongly support it and urge its adoption.

I yield the floor.

THE VARELA PROJECT'S COLLECTION OF CERTIFIED SIGNATURES IN SUPPORT OF A NATIONAL REFERENDUM AND THE DELIVERY OF THESE SIGNATURES TO THE CUBAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the clerk will report the resolution by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 272) expressing the sense of the Senate regarding the success of the Varela Project's collection of 10,000 certified signatures in support of a national referendum and the delivery of these signatures to the Cuban National Assembly.

The Senate proceeded to consider the resolution, which had been reported from the Committee on Foreign Relations with an amendment and an