

CUBA TRAVEL BAN

Mr. MENENDEZ. I have come to the floor many times to speak out about the Castro regime's abuses of the Cuban people. Today, I come to the floor once again, this time in strong opposition to any attempt in this Chamber to pass any bill that in any way lifts or lessens the travel ban on Cuba. I wish to make it absolutely clear that I will oppose and filibuster, if I need to, any effort to ease regulations that stand to enrich a regime that denies its own people basic human rights. I do not want to obstruct the business of this Chamber, but I know my colleagues on both sides of the aisle are well aware of how deeply I feel about freeing the people of Cuba from the repressive regime under which they have suffered for too long.

The fact is, the big corporate interests behind this misguided attempt to weaken the travel ban could not care less whether the Cuban people are free. They care only about opening a new market and increasing their bottom line. This is about the color of money, not the desire for freedom.

The very fact that a travel bill has moved through the House Agriculture Committee makes one wonder why American agricultural interests would even care about tourist travel to Cuba. One can only assume it is about generating increased tourism dollars for the Castro regime to buy more agricultural products. That would only serve to enrich the regime and do absolutely nothing to bring democracy to the island.

Let's be clear. Those who believe that increasing travel will magically breed democracy in Cuba are simply dead wrong. For years, the world has been traveling to Cuba and nothing has changed. Millions of tourists from democratic nations have visited Havana, and the Castro regime has not loosened its iron grip on its people. It has not ended its repressive policies. It has not stopped imprisoning and brutally abusing prodemocracy forces.

Now, sometimes I wonder; those who lament our dependence on foreign oil because it enriches regimes and terrorist states such as Iran should not have a double standard when it comes to enriching a brutal dictatorship such as Cuba right here in our own backyard.

How coincidental that suddenly, now that the Congress is considering lifting a travel ban, the Castro regime is hoping the world will believe it will release 52 prisoners of conscience. Well, let's set the record straight. Many people are wrongly under the impression—wrongly, reading and watching media reports—that 52 political prisoners have already been released and are free in Cuba. The fact is, only about seven have been released, and forcibly—forcibly—deported from their country—another human rights violation—instead of allowing them to stay and peacefully advocate for change within their own country.

So even when the regime releases people whose simple crime was trying

to peacefully create change in their country and who get imprisoned for years for that peaceful act, then when they are released, they are released only with the understanding that they will be deported out of their country so they can no longer be advocates, peaceful advocates, for civil society and democratic change. Imagine if those of us who are Americans could be arrested simply because we disagreed with the government, sought to peacefully change it, and then ultimately, after being arrested for years, were deported to some other country in the world.

The remaining 47 prisoners are set to be released but not now, not tomorrow, not next week, not even next month, but sometime during the next 3 to 4 months, we are told—or so the regime says.

According to reports in the Miami Herald, nine of those prisoners have said they will refuse to leave for Spain if released, and many who were released and forcibly deported to Madrid have vowed to continue their activism in exile. They have told reporters they feel the shock of being forced to leave their country. Omar Rodriguez Saludes told a reporter he feels "like I was still in prison. I left behind part of my family. I still feel like I have the cuffs on my hands."

The released men said conditions in the prison were horrendous. They shared their cells with rats. Diseases infested the prison. And they told of inmates trying to kill themselves or do themselves bodily harm because of the squalid prison conditions they were forced to endure. Remember, these are political prisoners, not people who committed common crimes.

Julion Cesar Galvez, one of the dissidents, told reporters:

The hygiene and health conditions in prisons in Cuba are not terrible—they're worse than terrible. We had to live with rats and cockroaches and excrement. It's not a lie.

Galvez, a 66-year-old journalist who was sentenced to 15 years simply because of what he sought to write, 15 years of his life in these horrible prisons, said:

There were outbreaks of dengue fever and tuberculosis.

He said there were more than 1,500 prisoners in the prison in Villa Clars—40 prisoners to a cell measuring 32 square feet.

Another prisoner, Norman Hernandez, said:

The prisoners are tired of demanding their rights . . . They lose all hope. They lose their desire to live, and they try to hurt themselves so they will get attended to.

These men were lucky to be released, but they will not give up. They will continue to tell their stories, and they will continue to fight for freedom for all Cubans.

It took the regime one night in March to arrest these 52 people—one night. That scooped up 52 people who were peacefully advocating for change in their own country. So we might ask ourselves: If it took you one night to

arrest 52 political prisoners, why will it take 4 months to release all of them?

It is not a coincidence that during the next 3 or 4 months, there will be Members of the Congress who will be looking to provide the Castro regime with billions of dollars of added tourism revenue. It is not a coincidence that in September, the European Union will once again deliberate the wisdom of its remaining sanctions. The nagging question that lingers in my mind is, Will the 47 ever see the light of day or will they be forcibly deported from their country and another 52 arrested overnight to take their place?

It is possible the regime will never release them because they do not want the world to see them because of the torture to which they have been subjected. Here is one of those prisoners. Last month, a man named Ariel Sigler was released from a Cuban prison on the verge of death. He was a 250-pound amateur boxer. You see him there in great health. This is the picture of his release—a 100-pound paraplegic. A 100-pound paraplegic. He did nothing to deserve that set of consequences.

Last month, the regime once again refused to let the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture visit the island, which, in my own view, speaks volumes about the conditions of the thousands of Cubans who have been imprisoned.

When you oppose the Castro regime, you are called dangerous, and there is a charge of dangerousness. Thousands of Cubans have been sent to Castro's prisons because of dangerousness. That is dangerousness: simply opposing the regime and seeking change in your home country—and for other trumped-up political charges.

If that is what is happening to the 200 internationally recognized and known political prisoners, then how much worse must it be for the thousands of anonymous political prisoners who have not been reported because they fall under the charge of dangerousness?

According to the State Department:

The total number of detainees is unknown because the government does not disclose such information and keeps its prisons off limits to human rights organizations and international human rights monitors.

Again according to the State Department:

One human rights organization lists more than 200 political prisoners currently detained in Cuba in addition to as many as 5,000 people sentenced for dangerousness.

Yet, in the face of this repression, some Members want to provide the Castro regime with its No. 1 source of income: tourism. This is not about travel; this is about rewarding a repressive regime. We already have hundreds of thousands of Americans who travel to Cuba for family, education, or humanitarian reasons under our existing law. But tourism to Cuba is a natural resource, akin to providing refined petroleum products to a country such as Iran. It is reported that 2.5 million

tourists visit Cuba each year—1.5 million from North America, 1 million Canadians; more than 170,000 from England; more than 400,000 from Spain, Italy, Germany, and France combined; all bringing in nearly \$2 billion in revenue to the Castro regime.

Yet nothing has changed in Cuba except the amount of tourism dollars the regime has at its disposal. What does it do with nearly \$2 billion of resources from tourism? Does it put more food on the plates of Cuban families? Does it create a better quality of life for the Cuban people? No. Even with all of that money coming in, the Castro regime still rations people's food. They have to stand in line with a coupon to get access to a simple meal, waiting in long lines for a subsistence meal. Of course, when the regime rations people and they are in line just trying to get a meal for the day, there is no time for promoting democracy or human rights. The people are just trying to exist, trying to keep their family fed. There is no time but to stand in line, despite several billions of dollars to the Castro regime from tourism.

To me, that is an irreversible concession to a regime that this week arrested a Cuban American for providing laser printers and ink cartridges to a rural woman's opposition movement in Santiago. He was interrogated, the head of the movement's home raided by a dozen state security agents, the printer and cartridges confiscated. What a threat, a bunch of printers and ink cartridges. What a threat. He was subsequently released and put on a plane back. Meanwhile, an American remains in prison for helping the island's Jewish community connect to the Internet. After 6 months in jail, this individual still faces no trial and no charges, a U.S. citizen, jailed simply because he was trying to help the Jewish community in Havana to access the Internet. What a crime. What a crime. Yet for the most part we are relatively silent.

They were looking to help the Cuban people. But the regime doesn't want anyone engaging with the Cuban people. They want tourists to provide only one thing—hard currency, dollars, money.

Visiting the beaches of Varadero and sipping a Cuba libre, which is an oxymoron, provides money to continue repression, but it will not let the Cuban people sip the sweetness of freedom. It will not change the plight of the Women in White. These are women who are the mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives of those many political prisoners in Castro's jails who each week, normally on Sunday, march dressed in white in peaceful protest with a gladiola and, in doing so, are ultimately trying to say: Free my relative.

This photograph shows the consequence of what they face. State security, dressed up as civilians, ultimately, as we can see, assaulting them, hurting them, arresting them. It will

not change the fate of the Women in White, and it will not change the fate of their family member who remains jailed.

It will not change the fate of being imprisoned by the regime and then being released, as they have done so many times when there is some international spotlight on an individual, only to be rearrested over and over and over.

It will not change the tragic fate of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, who was deemed a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International, who died in February after being on a hunger strike in a Cuban prison for 85 days protesting horrific prison conditions. It will not end the desire for freedom or change conditions in Cuba for men like Guillermo Farinas who began his hunger strike after the death of Zapata, ending it after he heard of the prisoner release, but vowing that he and other courageous Cubans would join in yet another hunger strike, if the 52 other political prisoners are not released and put back in their homes by November 7.

This photograph shows what he has been emaciated to in his hunger strike.

Lifting the travel ban, allowing tourist dollars to flow to the regime will not end any of it. It will not free the people of Cuba. It will not change the fate of the Women in White or the desire for freedom of Guillermo Farinas and the other political prisoners. It will only enrich the regime.

Reports this week have pointed out the economic impact opening travel to Cuba will cause to the Gulf States, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and other democratic neighbors in the Caribbean. The dollars that will be transferred from those tourism economies should be for the benefit of a democratic government in a free Cuba not to bail out a brutal regime. The Castros don't deserve it, and the U.S. Gulf States and our Caribbean friends cannot afford it.

According to the Jamaica Daily Gleaner:

The results of various studies of the likely impact on the Caribbean of lifting of the U.S. travel ban suggests that Cuba's tourism arrival would surge to full capacity at the expense of other Caribbean destinations. . . .

. . . Apart from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the most heavily dependent Caribbean destinations on the U.S. and the most vulnerable, should the legislation to lift the travel ban pass, ultimately include [many of the islands in the Caribbean that would have an enormous economic damage to them].

It seems to me we should be promoting tourism to the beaches along the gulf coast, not to the apartheid beaches of Castro's Cuba.

You are not even allowed, as a Cuban citizen, to go to the beaches, many of the beaches of your own homeland, because they are reserved for tourists. You can't enter some of the hotels unless a tourist in your own country brings you in. That is why we call it apartheid. You cannot have access in your own homeland.

Imagine in my home State of New Jersey, where we love the New Jersey shore, imagine me not being able to go to any of the beaches in New Jersey because the government wants to restrict me from interacting with tourists and that those beaches would be reserved only for foreign tourists in my own home State in my own home country. That is what goes on.

Allowing the regime to benefit from increased tourism will not change a thing in Cuba. It will not bring democracy to Cuba. It will not make conditions for the Cuban people any better or change the history of the brutality of the Castro regime, a brutality that continues to this day. Sometimes I think some of my colleagues just don't have a sense. This is not using the word "brutality" for the sake of it. The pictures speak a thousand words.

I would like my friends in the Senate and others beyond, who may not have fully engaged in understanding what this brutality is all about, to recall the words of Armando Valladeres who wrote the prize-winning book "Against All Hope." He was imprisoned in the infamous Isla de Pinos in 1960 for his opposition to communism. He lived through the hell of Castro's jail, suffering violence, forced labor, and solitary confinement. His writings were smuggled out of Cuba, read throughout the world. He was finally released after intense international pressure, 22 years after he was taken prisoner. They had to rehabilitate him because they didn't want him released and shown to the world in the circumstances that some of these prisoners are.

Here are some of his memories of activity at the hands of the Castro brothers while in captivity:

I recalled the two sergeants, Porfirio and Matanzas, plunging their bayonets into Ernesto Diaz Madruga's body. . . . Boitel, denied water, after more than fifty days on a hunger strike, because Castro wanted him dead; Clara, Boitel's poor mother, beaten by Lieutenant Abad in a Political Police station just because she wanted to find out where her son was buried. . . . Officers . . . threatened family members if they cried at a funeral.

I remember Estebita and Piri dying in blackout cells, the victims of biological experimentation. . . . So many others murdered in the forced-labor fields, quarries and camps. A legion of specters, naked, crippled, hobbling and crawling through my mind, and the hundreds of men mutilated in the horrifying searches.

Eduardo Capote's fingers chopped off by a machete. Concentration camps, tortures, women beaten. . . .

And in the midst of that apocalyptic vision of the most dreadful and horrifying moments in my life, in the midst of the gray, ashy dust and the orgy of beatings and blood, prisoners beaten to the ground, a man emerged. . . .

. . . the skeletal figure of a man wasted by hunger with white hair, blazing blue eyes, and a heart overflowing with love, raising his arms to the invisible heaven and pleading for mercy for his executioners.

"Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do." And a burst of machine-gun fire ripping open his chest.

I hope my colleagues remember these memories of Armando Valladeres and

the realities of Castro's prisons before we think about rewarding the Castro regime in any way. Their sins are too great, and this is not a thing of the past. Their brutality and repression have been going on since the inception and still go on today. It has never stopped. It has never gotten better. It has never changed. It never will for so long as the regime is in power.

When I hear my colleagues come to the floor and talk about lifting the travel ban, I am compelled to ask, Why is there such an obvious double standard when it comes to Cuba? Why are the gulags of Cuba so different than the gulags of other places in the world? Why are we willing to tighten sanctions against some but loosen them when it comes to an equally repressive regime in Cuba, in effect rewarding them? Why are we so willing to throw up our hands and say: It is time to forget?

I don't believe it is time to forget. We can never forget those who have suffered and died at the hands of dictators anywhere, and certainly not in Cuba. It is clear the repression in Cuba continues unabated, notwithstanding the embargo, notwithstanding calls by those who want us to ease travel restrictions, ease sanctions, notwithstanding the fact that we have millions of visitors from other places in the world bringing billions of dollars, and still the repression goes on. In good conscience, I cannot do that. I will not step back.

I have come to the floor in the past to oppose any attempt to do that, to pass any bill that in essence lifts the travel ban on Cuba. I will continue to do so. I will continue to do so until we have the opportunity to make sure the Cuban people are ultimately free, make sure they have the basic fundamental rights that you and I enjoy in this great country, and to ensure the voices of all who languish in Castro's jails—for which the world seems to be deaf to their cries, does not seem to care, does not speak about, does not do anything about—will continue to raise their voices in this Chamber and beyond.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of Colorado). Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRAVEL TO CUBA

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, sometimes on the floor of the Senate, good friends disagree—perhaps not as often as some would think, but on occasion that is the case, and it is the case today, when I observed and listened to a presentation by my colleague from New Jersey on the subject of Cuba. I

am sure we do not disagree about some parts of this subject; that is, I do not like the Cuban Government. I want freedom for the Cuban people. We, I assume, both believe that and believe the imprisonment of political prisoners in Cuba—who languish in Cuban jails for exercising their right of free speech and who are doing that in dark cells—is wholly unfair and we should as a country do everything we can to try to bring the vestige of freedom to the Cuban people. I understand all that. I support that strongly.

I have been to Cuba. I have spoken to Cuban Government leaders. I have spoken to dissidents. I have spoken to people on the streets of Cuba. And I want Cuba, an island 90 miles off the shore of our country, to be a free country.

Let me describe how long Cuba has had Communist rule and, by the way, how many Presidents we have had during that Communist rule and, therefore, the embargo that has been leveled against Cuba all these years. Let me describe how many Presidencies that embargo has existed through. The Presidencies begin with John F. Kennedy and go through this administration. That is 10 Presidencies.

We slapped an embargo on the country of Cuba and punished the American people in the process by saying: We are going to limit your right to travel to Cuba. And we were going to shut off all commerce to Cuba, including, by the way, most of these years, a restriction on sending food and medicine to Cuba.

The embargo has not seemed to work very well. It is now 50 years old, and it still exists. Well, what has happened as a result of the embargo? We have now a debate about what should happen with respect to our relationship with Cuba at this point. My colleagues say: Well, don't do anything that would reward the Cuban Government. Far from it. I have no interest in rewarding a government that I substantially disagree with, a government that I believe throws innocent people in jail. I have no interest, nor do the people who support the bill Senator ENZI and I have now offered in the Senate, with 40 Senators cosponsoring it—we have no interest in rewarding the Cuban Government. That is not the issue. But we do believe the restriction on the American people's rights—the decision by a government that says: We are going to tell the American people where they can and cannot travel—we believe that is inappropriate. We do believe that ought to change.

So what I would like to do is talk about a couple things, including, No. 1, lifting the travel ban to Cuba and making it easier to sell food to Cuba.

I was the person who changed the law 10 years ago that allowed for the first time just a crack in this embargo that allows us to sell food into Cuba if it is paid for with cash. I think it is immoral for a country to use food as a foreign policy weapon. I do not think food ought to be part of any embargo. I think that is immoral.

By the way, using food as a part of an embargo just hurts poor, sick, and hungry people. Do you think the Castro brothers have missed breakfast or lunch or dinner because we had an embargo on food shipments to Cuba? Hardly. So 10 years ago, I got the law changed. In fact, it was the Dorgan-Ashcroft amendment. I got the law changed. That allowed us to begin selling food into the country of Cuba. That was the first opportunity to make any changes at all in this embargo.

Now the question is travel to Cuba by the American people. Should we continue to say to the American people: You have no right to travel to Cuba. We do not like the Cuban Government, so what we are going to do is restrict the rights of the American people? We have been doing that for 50 years, and it is time—long past the time—for it to change.

Let me describe a letter that came recently to the House of Representatives.

By the way, the reason this issue has now come to the forefront is the Agriculture Committee of the House of Representatives just passed a bill that lifts the travel restrictions on the American people to travel to Cuba. It also makes some changes in the conditions under which agricultural goods can be sold to Cuba, which is very important to do as well because even though 10 years ago I got the provision enacted into law that allows the sale of farm products for cash into Cuba, in 2003, as a runup to the 2004 election, President Bush tightened all of those provisions and actually changed a rule so that in order for Cuba to purchase goods from our country; that is, agricultural commodities, they had to pay in cash before the commodities were even shipped. Well, that never happens in a transaction. You pay cash when you get the goods. But President Bush was attempting to restrict the sale of agricultural products to Cuba. So we need to fix that as well.

But the House of Representatives Agriculture Committee has now passed a bill lifting the travel ban. That means this issue is going to be front and center here in the Senate. Senator ENZI and I have the bill—it is bipartisan—that would lift the travel ban to Cuba, and we have 40 Senators who are cosponsors.

Let me read to you a letter that was sent to the U.S. House of Representatives by 74 Cuban human rights leaders, dated May 30, 2010, just a month and a half ago. They said:

The supportive presence of American citizens, their direct help, and the many opportunities for exchange, used effectively and in the desired direction, would not be an abandonment of Cuban civil society but rather a force to strengthen it. Similarly, to further facilitate the sale of agricultural products would help alleviate the food shortages we now suffer.

The current Cuban government has always violated this right [to travel] and in recent years has justified its actions with the fact that the government of the United States