

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 25, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to ask you to fulfill one of President Joe Biden's campaign pledges by quickly turning the page on the Trump administration's harmful and ineffective sanctions against Cuba. We hope you will emphasize that normalizing diplomatic relations serves America's national interests and urge against conditioning re-engagement on specific Cuban government actions.

As you know, the United States tried for nearly six decades to impose or facilitate regime change in Cuba until the Obama administration acknowledged the abysmal failure of those efforts and began to chart a different course. In a decision as misguided as it was predictable, Donald Trump spent four years rolling back that progress and reviving the tired, ineffective, Cold War campaign to bring Cuba to heel. In one of his final acts as President, Donald Trump rushed to put Cuba on the list of state sponsors of terrorism.

As a candidate for President, Joe Biden committed to "promptly reverse the failed Trump policies that have inflicted harm on the Cuban people and done nothing to advance democracy and human rights." We, too, support a break with the past and ask that you take the following steps as soon as practicable:


- Remove Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Leaving the Trump administration's rushed, unjustified, and last minute designation in place would delegitimize this list as an important U.S. foreign policy tool.
- Develop and put in place a plan to safely staff up the U.S. Embassy in Havana and engage the Cuban government about U.S. Embassy personnel who reported adverse health conditions while stationed in Cuba. We want to understand what happened to these dedicated public servants and prevent it from happening again, anywhere in the world. We were disappointed that the Trump administration chose to politicize these incidents and we stand ready to work with you to ensure the safety of American personnel.
- Lift restrictions on U.S. citizens traveling to Cuba and encourage people-to-people exchanges. We understand that public health considerations may impact travel to Cuba and other countries during the pandemic and we ask that you engage the Cuban government to help minimize the risk to American travelers.

- Ease restrictions on remittances from Cuban Americans to relatives in Cuba. Restrictions have only exacerbated the plight of struggling Cuban families during this unprecedented pandemic.
- Send a high-level State Department official to lead the U.S. embassy in Cuba and prepare to nominate a highly-qualified diplomat or political appointee to serve as the first U.S. Ambassador since 1960.
- Resume productive conversations with the Cuban government on issues of importance to the United States, including respect for peaceful dissent and freedom of conscience and expression.

As you know, the U.S. must engage with Cuba to more effectively protect and promote U.S. interests and advocate for American citizens abroad, and not as some sort of reward for Cuban government action. You have an important opportunity to protect and promote U.S. interests by building on the progress made under the Obama administration—which signed nearly two dozen mutually-beneficial bilateral agreements with Cuba—and to re-engage the Cuban government on issues of trade and exchanges as well as human rights and political and economic reform.

We thank you for considering these requests and look forward to working with you to improve U.S.-Cuba relations for the benefit of the American and Cuban people.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator