



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

NEWS RELEASE

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(Havana, Cuba) U.S. Senator Max Baucus presented the following speech at a press conference held yesterday evening, Sunday, September 14, 2003, concluding his trip to Cuba. The Senator highlighted the memorandum of agreement made with a major Cuban company to purchase up to \$10 million in Montana agriculture products. Baucus also met with a leading Cuban dissident and urged the need to lift the U.S. travel ban and embargo against Cuba, in order to achieve freedom for the Cuban people.

**Statement of U.S. Senator Max Baucus
Press Conference Regarding Cuban Fact Finding Mission
Sunday, September 14, 2003**

Good evening. It's an honor and a pleasure to be with you tonight in Cuba. I've had the opportunity to visit your country once before and I'm as moved this time as I was then. The sights, the sounds, the people. I feel so lucky to have this opportunity. I want you to know that the citizens of the United States regard the Cuban people as friends. We look forward to strengthening our relationships. I am working in the U.S. Congress to end the travel ban and relax the embargo against your country. It's time – in fact, it's past time – to build real bridges between our countries.

I've brought a group of business folks from my state of Montana and across the nation with me on this trip. We're all strong believers in ending the embargo and travel ban and developing strong economic and political ties between our two countries.

If America allowed the Cuban gates to open, the flood of American travelers would follow. And that would be just the beginning. With increased travel comes increased economic activity, increased spread of ideas, and increased hope that democracy will take root and flourish.

And on that note, I would like to announce a major achievement. Yesterday, a group of agriculture producers and I had the privilege of meeting with the president of Alimport, Mr. Pedro Alvarez. Our meeting was extremely successful and I would like to once again thank Mr. Alvarez for his time and interest.

In a few minutes, we will be signing a memorandum of understanding for the purchase of up to \$10 million in Montana agriculture products. My state produces wheat, barley, cattle and beans – crops that will benefit the Cuban people. In the coming days and weeks, we will be working with Alimport to provide them with the specifics of our products so we can move forward to a final deal

as quickly as possible. This achievement marks the beginning of what I hope will be a strong and lasting relationship between Cuba, the Cuban people, and my state of Montana.

This is a historic day for Montana, for American, and for Cuba. With every agreement made between our two countries and every new relationship forged, we develop a stronger understanding between our countries. As President George W. Bush said in August of 2002, “Greater freedom for commerce across the borders eventually leads to greater freedom for citizens within the borders.” I am a strong believer in that statement.

In my time here, I have talked to many Cuban people. One of the most telling descriptions came from a man I talked to yesterday who was selling crafts in the market. When I said I was from America, his eyes lit up and he said, “Ah, Americans, our lovely enemies.” I, of course, said “No, not enemies.” He replied, “No, not true enemies any more, but still “lovely enemies.” I look forward to the day, when the response is, “Ah, Americans, lovely friends.”

I am pleased to be in a position as a U.S. Senator and Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Committee, to help obtain that goal of lovely friendship. Earlier this year, I introduced legislation in the U.S. Senate to repeal the travel ban and end the embargo. We’re gaining strong support on lifting the travel ban, which is an important first step.

In fact, as many of you may know, we made great strides last week when the U.S. House voted to eliminate funding for the enforcement of the travel ban. This vote proves that a majority of Americans legislators agree that the ban is illogical and ineffective. I’ll be working with my fellow Senators to get the same provision passed in the Senate. While this provision won’t eliminate the travel ban, it would ensure that the law has no teeth.

I’ve also received a commitment that my bill to fully, permanently repeal the travel ban is examined in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee this fall. I’ll push for an honest and open debate on the Senate floor and I look forward to passage.

Many of you may be wondering why a Senator from Montana – admittedly along way from Cuba – would care about easing Cuba sanctions. It comes down to democracy. I feel incredibly lucky to enjoy the privileges I do as an American – freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of association, and so on. And I would like to help the Cuban people achieve these privileges as well. It’s the right thing to do.

Today I had the honor of meeting Oswaldo Paya in his home. As a principal founder of the Varela Project, it was very important to me to meet with Mr. Paya personally and hear of his efforts for democracy. It was a significant meeting and I applaud his efforts to give a voice to the people. He emphasized how strongly he believes that social changes must be peaceful – a laudable goal.

In the meeting, we were joined by the wives of three dissidents who have been jailed with 25-year sentences. As they so eloquently emphasized, the jailing of these dissidents is not only punishing the dissidents, but is punishing their entire families. As an American and a representative of the U.S. government, it is important to me that I do everything I can to help the Cuban people.

The most important first step we can take to help the Cuban people obtain their independence is to lift the embargo and travel ban. It’s clear that 40 years of embargo have only served to isolate and

hurt the Cuban people. As is often said, If you do the same thing, expect the same result. And it's time for a new result, it's time for freedom.

I look forward to continuing to work with your country and build more relationships between the U.S. and Cuba. Please know that this has become very personally important to me. It is impossible to come to your country and get to know the Cuban people and not be forever touched.

Thank you again for the warm hospitality the citizens have shown us. I look forward to returning soon. I ask you all to raise your glasses to a toast that I have borrowed from your beloved national hero, Jose Marti, which I will present in your language:

“Cultivo Una Rosa Blanca
En Junio Como En Enero
Para Mi Amigo Sincero
Que Meda Su Mano Franca”

I Cultivate A White Rose
In June as in January
For my Sincere Friend
Who Gives His Hand in Frankness