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LETTER TO SECRETARY OF STATE CALLS CUBA POLICY A FAILURE; BAUCUS, COLLEAGUES SEE OPPORTUNITY IN LEADERSHIP CHANGE

Bipartisan group of Senators seeks to improve U.S.-Cuba relations by easing sanctions against trade and travel, promoting human rights and a free economy

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) led a group of two dozen Senators in sending a letter today to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, questioning the effectiveness of U.S. policy toward Cuba and calling for an overhaul of U.S. strategy from one of estrangement to one of cooperation. The Senators appealed to Rice to modify U.S. trade and travel sanctions on Cuba in the wake of Fidel Castro’s resignation in order to facilitate American influence in the areas of human and civil rights, travel and tourism, as well as free and open markets for American farmers, ranchers and other business.

“Recent events have given us a real opportunity to be proactive in addressing our failed relationship with Cuba. Our current policy does not give us a seat at the table with a secure and growing Cuba. We must seize the day and begin to foster healthy relations with this once and future U.S. trading partner,” said Baucus. **“We have a responsibility as a leading nation and thriving example of democracy to move beyond differences and get our Cuba policy right by easing trade and travel restrictions so that American goods and values can flow more freely.”**

The Senate Committee on Finance has jurisdiction over U.S. trade policies and programs.

The full text of the Senators’ letter follows here:

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

Dear Secretary Rice,

On Tuesday, February 19, Fidel Castro resigned after serving as Cuba’s leader for nearly 50 years. This welcome and historic event provides the United States with an important opportunity to reflect upon and reconsider U.S. policy toward Cuba.

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Our current policy of isolation and estrangement has failed. Cuba's political system is stable after five decades of American efforts to force change on the island. New laws that tightened sanctions in 1992 and 1996 have had no effect. The administration's 2004 sanctions and its comprehensive plan to bring about transition in Cuba have failed in their objective. The absence of Fidel Castro for 20 months has not led to a change in the system.

Instead, our current policy deprives the United States of influence in Cuba, including the opportunity to promote principles that advance democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. By restricting the ability of Americans to travel freely to Cuba, we limit contact and communication on the part of families, civil society, and government. Likewise, by restricting the ability of our farmers, ranchers, and businesses to trade with Cuba, the United States has made itself irrelevant in Cuba's growing economy, allowing Cuba to build economic partnerships elsewhere.

There is no magic U.S. policy that will transform Cuba. But with Cuba facing a period of change, we have a new opportunity to seize. Our policy based on sanctions, passivity, and waiting should end. We need a new approach that defends human rights, is confident about the value of American engagement with Cubans, builds new economic bridges between America and Cuba, and seeks every possible avenue of increasing American influence.

We urge you to take a fresh look at our policy toward Cuba. We should seize upon Castro's long-awaited and welcome departure to chart a new course that favors hope and engagement over isolation and estrangement.

Respectfully,

Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT)

Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY)

Sen. Chris Dodd (D-CT)

Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-LA)

Sen. Larry Craig (R-ID)

Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID)

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Sen. Russ Feingold (D-WI)

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR)

Sen. Tim Johnson (D-SD)

Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-AR)

Sen. Mark Pryor (D-AR)

Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA)

Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-NE)

Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)

Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)

Sen. Kent Conrad (D-ND)

Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-ND)

Senator Pat Roberts (R-KS)

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)

Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA)

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA)

Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-HI)

Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA)

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA)

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