

## At last, legal travel to Cuba is on horizon

Traveling to Cuba may soon become a reality for Americans.

Yes, we have heard this before, but this time it seems it could actually happen.

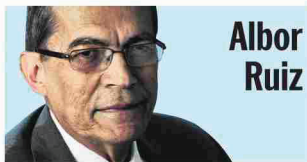
Last Wednesday, the House Agriculture Committee approved House Resolution 4645, which would lift the travel ban to Cuba, the only country in the world to which the U.S. government prohibits visits by its citizens.

Passing the resolution was an important first step toward bringing the bill to a vote on the House floor. It would be the first time in many years that there would be a floor vote scheduled – and a real chance to repeal the travel restrictions.

“We applaud the Agriculture Committee for recommending H.R. 4645 to the House for a full vote to finally put an end to this Cold War relic,” said Center for Constitutional Rights attorney Anjana Samant. “Upholding open dialogue, free exchange of ideas and the human right to travel are essential to a democracy – it is time to end the hypocrisy of U.S. policy toward Cuba.”

The New York-based CCR has represented more than 425 individuals accused of violating the ban.

Introduced by Rep. Collin Peterson (D-Minn.) and Rep. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), the bipartisan bill enjoys broad support. According to the Center for Democracy in the Americas, the legislation has the backing of a coalition of more than 130 organizations covering a spectrum including business (U.S. Chamber and National Foreign Trade Council), agriculture (National Farmers Union and American Farm Bu-



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reau Federation), foreign policy think tanks (Council on Foreign Relations, Cato Institute, Brookings Institution), human rights advocates (The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, AFL-CIO, Human Rights Watch), and many others.

“This bill, which will put more American food on Cuba’s tables, and put more American visitors on Cuba’s streets, will be good for our economy and provide needed support for the Cuban people,” said CDA executive director Sarah Stephens.

Even many of the best known Cuban dissidents – blogger Yoani Sánchez, hunger striker Guillermo Fariñas and Elizardo Sánchez, head of Cuba’s most prominent human rights group, among them – support the law

“We share the opinion that the isolation of the people of Cuba benefits the most inflexible interests of its government, while any opening serves to inform and empower the Cuban people and helps to further strengthen our civil society,” the dissidents said in a letter sent to the U.S. Congress in early June in support of the Peterson-Moran bill.

But – as should have been suspected – recalcitrant anti-Castro politicians and lobbyists are mobilizing against the legislation.

As reported in the Congressional newspaper The Hill, Cuban-American Sen. Robert Menéndez (D-N.J.) issued a statement on Wednesday stating his intention to block the bill. As Senatorial Campaign Committee chairman, Menéndez has in the past used his influence to put the brakes on any attempt by the Obama administration to improve relations with Havana.

“I oppose and will filibuster any attempt to pass the [Peterson-Moran] bill in the Senate,” said Menéndez in reaffirming his undying support for the United States’ 50-year-old policy toward Cuba.

It is urgent for Menéndez – who is U.S.-born, has never been to Cuba and doesn’t know the reality of the Cuban people’s daily life – to take the dissidents’ message to heart.

“We are sure,” they wrote, “that isolation does not foster relationships of respect and support for people and groups around the world who are in favor of democratic changes in Cuba.”

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