



**Testimony Submitted for the Record by OpenCuba.org, a
Campaign to Connect Americans and Cubans through Travel**

**Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs
United States House of Representatives
November 19th, 2009**

Hearing on: “Is it Time to Lift the Ban on Travel to Cuba?”



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Chairman Berman, Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen, and members of the committee: The OpenCuba.org campaign is pleased to take this opportunity to provide its views on the Committee’s consideration of ending restrictions on the ability of U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba.

The OpenCuba.org campaign was designed to create a grassroots platform for those that want to see an end to the U.S. ban on travel to Cuba. Launched by online travel company Orbitz Worldwide on May 11, 2009 -- and supported by a broad range of non-governmental organizations, including several Cuban-American groups, industry trade associations, and travel companies -- the campaign calls on U.S. lawmakers, President Obama and Vice President Biden to remove the ban on travel to Cuba.

Recently, the OpenCuba.org campaign announced that more than 100,000 individuals had signed the online petition seeking to restore every Americans’ right to travel to Cuba. Appendix 1 provides a state-by-state breakdown of the petitioners. Never before in the history of the U.S. ban on travel to Cuba has there been such an upwelling of popular support for a change in U.S. policy. The 100,000 OpenCuba.org petitioners are sending a powerful message to U.S. lawmakers, President Obama and Vice President Biden that the time to act is now. The time has come to restore to Americans the freedom to travel to Cuba.

According to a poll conducted earlier this year by Orbitz and the research organization Ipsos, 67% of Americans say they would support a policy that would allow all Americans to travel to Cuba, and 72% agree that expanding travel and tourism from the U.S. to Cuba would have a positive impact on the day-to-day lives of the Cuban people.

Cuba is the only country in the world to which the U.S. government bans travel. Americans today are free to travel to any other country, including countries such as Iran, Libya and North Korea.

The OpenCuba.org campaign believes that:

- 1) Americans should have the freedom to travel where they choose, and
- 2) travel -- and the resulting exchange of ideas between people from different countries and cultures -- can be a powerful force for peace and understanding.



American travelers around the world have served as ambassadors of the ideals and culture that we as a country hold so dear. The U.S. ban on travel to Cuba undermines our ability to use travel, and the resulting interactions between Americans and Cubans, to improve relations between our two countries.

Tourism also has the potential to significantly enhance the economic situation of developing countries around the world. Repealing the U.S. ban on travel to Cuba will help Cuba build a stronger tourism industry that will benefit the lives of its general population.

Efforts to end the ban on U.S. travel to Cuba are led by Senators Byron Dorgan and Mike Enzi and Congressmen Bill Delahunt and Jeff Flake. In their respective chambers, these members have introduced bipartisan legislation, each called the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act. These bills have attracted more than 180 co-sponsors in the House and more than 30 co-sponsors in the Senate. The OpenCuba.org campaign is a strong supporter of this legislation and of the work of Senators Dorgan and Enzi and Congressmen Delahunt and Flake thus far. The OpenCuba.org campaign thanks Chairman Berman for his leadership in holding this hearing today.

Submitted by the OpenCuba.org Campaign:

Orbitz Worldwide
Cuban American Alliance Education Fund
Cuban American Commission for Family Rights
Friends of Caritas Cubana
National Foreign Trade Council
USA*Engage
Fund for Reconciliation and Development
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
National Tour Association
United States Tour Operators Association
Adventure Travel Trade Association
iExplore.com

And -- 100,000 signers of the petition to end the travel ban.



Appendix I

Signatories from the OpenCuba.org campaign's petition to end the Cuba travel ban breakdown on a state-by-state basis as follows:

Destination	Petitioners	Destination	Petitioners	Destination	Petitioners
CA	14289	OR	1719	OK	393
NY	9095	WI	1501	RI	378
FL	7593	CT	1406	VT	363
AL	5828	IN	1086	ID	286
IL	4804	DC	980	NE	279
TX	4712	MO	977	AR	265
MA	3367	TN	966	AK	251
NJ	3186	SC	893	DE	248
PA	3179	LA	773	MT	228
WA	3130	NV	766	MS	221
CO	2792	NM	752	WV	200
VA	2765	UT	575	WY	128
MD	2288	ME	538	SD	90
GA	2282	KY	533	ND	65
MI	2268	IA	492	QC	5
OH	2208	KS	489	ON	5
NC	2178	HI	485	BC	3
AZ	1904	PR	433	Not in USA	2401
MN	1790	NH	431		