



International Policy **BRIEF**

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An Amendment that Must Not Pass By Wayne S. Smith

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If Representative Mario Diaz-Balart has his way, Cuban Americans will no longer be able to freely visit their families on the island or to send them remittances. Rather, according to the amendment he put forward on June 23, they would again suffer under the kind of restrictions imposed by the administration of George W. Bush in 2004 -- visits only every three years to a restricted list of family members. Very painful. These rules were eliminated by President Obama in April of 2009. Since then, Cuban Americans have been allowed to visit families as often as they wished and to send remittances.

But, Diaz-Balart has suggested that the Cuban American community, indeed, as many as 90% of them support his amendment, i.e., they are opposed to the freer family travel made possible by Obama and again want it restricted.

Could it be that Diaz-Balart is out of touch with his constituency? If not, how to explain that in the past year, according to the airline companies, some 400,000 Cuban-Americans have flocked to Cuba, and that flights are booked well into the future. That could hardly be the case were the majority opposed to the freer travel made possible by Obama.

Fortunately, the Diaz-Balart amendment faces further legislative obstacles before it might become law. There will have to be a vote on the House floor and most likely

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reconciliation between the House and Senate versions. It is especially difficult to imagine the Senate allowing any measure so counterproductive -- and with so little support -- as Diaz-Balart's amendment to get through.

Further, the Diaz-Balart amendment should be rejected not only because it would cause pain and suffering to Cuban families, but because it would serve no useful purpose; indeed, would be counterproductive. Hardliners have been telling us for 50 years that the embargo, travel controls and other restrictive measures would bring down the Castro regime. Not only have they not done so, but there is considerable evidence that they have actually been useful to the Castro regime. The embargo gives them an excuse for economic difficulties -- many of which are of their own making. Travel controls cast the U.S. as opposed to more normal contacts and greater openness. Certainly that would be the case here. Sharper U.S. restrictions on the travel of Cuban Americans to visit their families would be offensive not only to Cuban Americans -- and Cubans -- but to international public opinion.

This, then, is an amendment that must not go forward.