

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
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**Opening Statement**

**Jeff Flake**  
**Ranking Member**  
**National Security and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee**

**Hearing on**  
**“National Security Implications of U.S. Policy toward Cuba”**

**April 29, 2009**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me start by thanking you and your staff. I appreciate the bipartisan fashion with which the preparation for this hearing has been conducted.

The purpose of this hearing is to review the national security implications of our current policy toward Cuba.

There is no denying that our current policy toward Cuba has failed to achieve the bipartisan goal of regime change.

Instead, our policy of isolation has turned the island into what retired General Charles Wilhelm has called a “47,000 square mile blind spot in our security rearview mirror.”

We have little to show for this policy but restrictions on the freedom of Americans and tense regional relations.

While I hold no sympathy for the Castro regime, my views on an appropriate direction for U.S.-Cuba policy are well known.

I support ending the trade embargo, which has given the U.S. a needless black eye in the region for far too long.

Along with many in the Cuban-American community, I also support lifting the travel ban for all Americans, our best ambassadors for democracy.

I congratulated the Administration on the recent removal of restrictions on Cuban-American travel and remittances.

I also welcome their willingness to review our current approach to the island -- perhaps the subject of a future subcommittee hearing, Mr. Chairman.

However, I am concerned with the continued emphasis on reciprocity with respect to changes in U.S.-Cuban relations.

Rather than allowing the Cuban government to control the pace and nature of our bilateral relations, I have long felt that the U.S. must act in a manner consistent with our own self-interest and independent of the politics and whims of a foreign leader.

Given the recent emphasis on U.S.-Cuba relations, both domestically and within the region, I welcome the opportunity presented by this hearing to answer important questions such as: are there national security liabilities associated with our policy of isolation?

Given the lack of results of the current approach, are the liabilities justified?

Independent of the imminent shift in U.S.-Cuba relations, are there bilateral steps that can be taken immediately that will improve U.S. national security?

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for your bipartisan efforts in organizing this hearing. I look forward to our witnesses' testimony.