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January 15, 2021

President-Elect Joseph R. Biden
c/o Senator Ted Kaufman
Transition Leader

Dear President-Elect Biden,

I am so looking forward to working with you on the many domestic, national security and foreign policy priorities facing our great nation and restoring America's leadership in addressing global challenges. One of these is repairing relations between the United States and Cuba. I urge you to act early, quickly and comprehensively to repair the great harm that has been done to U.S.-Cuban relations, to the Cuban and American people, and to U.S. international relations with our European and Latin American allies over the past four years.

I remember so clearly when you called to invite me to meet Alan Gross at Andrews Air Force Base on December 17, 2014, the same day the White House announced the normalization of relations and sweeping changes in U.S. policy towards Cuba. The next two years were marked by an explosion of positive change: the fledgling Cuban private sector flourished; innovation, the Internet, social media, communications and political space greatly expanded; and scientific, social and cultural exchanges between our two peoples multiplied. Not to mention that official cooperation advanced significantly between our two governments on law enforcement, anti-narcotics, migration, human trafficking and the environment, and that dialogue began on economic reform and human rights.

The world has changed since 2016 – the COVID-19 pandemic alone may slow a full return to travel and exchanges. The deterioration in relations over the past four years will require a restoration of trust on both sides. The Trump Administration has imposed by executive order new restrictions on remittances, travel and commerce; hurt diplomacy with unnecessarily strict limits on the number of U.S. personnel at our Embassy in Havana; and baselessly returned Cuba to the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism (SSOT). In my decades of engagement on Cuba, however, I've always argued that normal relations between Cuba and the United States is the right thing to do for the American people, as well as the Cuban people. It is a step most Americans support. You and I have seen that normal relations facilitate progress on human rights in Cuba, encouraging internal processes of change, while hostility and confrontation does the opposite. I urge you to prioritize the following actions:

- **Act early, quickly and comprehensively to reverse all Trump-imposed policies, restrictions and sanctions against Cuba.** I believe the biggest mistake the United States could make in our policy toward Cuba is to adopt an incremental approach when undoing the damage of the last four years. There are too many foreign policy crises facing America as you take office that require your urgent and undivided attention. You should not need to return time and again to repair Cuba policy bit by incremental bit. This is particularly true as the U.S. prepares to host the April 2021

Summit of the Americas where your Administration will need to focus on other high priority Latin American challenges and opportunities. Do it all, as comprehensively as possible, in one fell swoop. And do it early, including again removing Cuba from the SSOT list and restoring the waiver on Title III of the Helms-Burton Act. Provide U.S. non-profit and private sectors ample space to then do the work for you to advance relations, programs and projects. Like you, I have always believed the American people are our very best ambassadors and we need, once again, to unleash them and provide them with the maximum ability to support and reestablish relationships with the Cuban people.

- **Restore a fully functioning U.S. embassy and consular services in Cuba to be headed by an experienced, highly-skilled ambassador.** The United States has suffered from a skeletal diplomatic operation in Cuba. In 2019, on two congressional trips to Cuba, I saw firsthand how a shuttered U.S. Embassy in Havana adversely affects our ability to advocate effectively on behalf of U.S. interests in Cuba and throughout the region. As access, exchanges and programs in Cuba resume, we will need an ambassador, staff and embassy services that can advance your priorities with the Cuban government; provide support to U.S. private sector, non-profit and humanitarian initiatives; manage Cuban petitions for legal travel and migration; and navigate a return to normal relations. Restoration of full U.S. embassy and consular services in Havana would include the reciprocal restoration of services at the Cuban embassy in Washington, D.C. This is needed for normalized relations to proceed, as well as the processing of visas and support services stemming from renewed U.S. programs, projects and exchanges in Cuba. The U.S. must also safeguard the health and safety of our diplomatic personnel in Havana. Over the past four years, we have discovered this is a matter of *global* concern for *all* of our diplomatic corps abroad and needs to be addressed as such. American law enforcement agencies established fairly early that the Cuban government was not the perpetrator of alleged attacks against U.S. personnel. As such, there is no justification for our embassy in Havana to remain minimally staffed.
- **Decouple U.S.-Cuban relations from U.S. policy towards Venezuela and from Florida domestic politics.** The former requires a carefully calibrated, multilateral strategy focused on the well-being of the Venezuelan people and stability in the region. While Cuba might play a role in advancing those goals, it is impossible to ask Cuba to be a partner while threatening its own existence and stability. On the latter, there are many among the Cuban American and Latin American communities in Florida and elsewhere who support engagement with Cuba, and it would be wise to inform and include them in planning and encourage them to voice support for your policies. The political work required to strengthen and rebuild a base of Democratic support within an array of immigrant communities in Florida, in particular Asians and Latin Americans, requires dedicated and long-term investments by the Democratic Party, not the State Department. That work requires state-wide party and base-building, nurturing voices of influence within these communities and addressing the many well-coordinated and subversive disinformation communication networks and campaigns that target these communities. As successes result from your Cuba policies, they may animate more supportive views in Florida and elsewhere, but only if you move aggressively to change the current policy landscape.
- **Open up travel, interchanges and commerce between the American and Cuban people.** Given the slender majorities we hold in each chamber, I hope that we might see modest successes on travel, agricultural financing and advancing commerce between our two nations, issues that can create confidence and momentum towards ending the U.S. embargo that so ties the hands of every Administration in developing constructive U.S. policies on Cuba. In addition, I strongly encourage you to work quickly to end sanctions and restrictions against the financial sector, restore financial and banking transactions, and end all caps on financial transactions between our countries. This will allow individual and family remittances to again support the Cuban people,

private sector and other cultural, scientific, humanitarian and educational initiatives. Cuba's private sector gives Cubans a route to economic independence and has important implications for pluralism. While far from perfect, Cuban policies have improved by allowing private businesses to import and export and, most recently, by opening the door to foreign investment in private farm cooperatives. This expands the ability of U.S. engagement to help these small businesses to survive and thrive.

- **Immediately end the application of any sanction against food, medicine and other humanitarian assistance to Cuba.** It is an outrage that the United States impeded and halted air and sea shipments to Cuba of urgently needed humanitarian aid from other nations and non-profits while a global pandemic is raging.
- **Renew the collaborative working groups and dialogues, including on human rights and economic and financial reforms.** These fruitful and highly collaborative working groups and dialogues resulted in significant advances during the two years of normalized relations that you oversaw, especially in the areas of law enforcement, national security cooperation, migration, human trafficking, environmental cooperation and counterdrug operations. They should include the relevant staff from the Departments of State, Justice, Commerce and others, including the Coast Guard. The U.S. has long been critical of Cuba's restrictions on human rights, including freedom of expression and freedom of association. These are concerns about the inherent rights of Cuban citizens, but also about the right of U.S. citizens and organizations to interact with their Cuban partners, including artists, religious groups, academics and others. The U.S. needs a forum that will enable us to go beyond mere criticism to actual dialogue with Cuban officials about these issues, and offer a space to press them, not just about cases, but about changes in behavior that would enable larger sectors of Cuban society to operate more freely and interact with their U.S. counterparts. Re-establishing the human rights working group would offer such a space.

Finally, it's my understanding that a coalition of non-governmental organizations provided your Transition Team with a detailed roadmap on restoring U.S.-Cuba relations. I encourage a thorough and thoughtful review of its proposals and recommendations.

I look forward to working with you as a partner and ally in the days ahead to restore and advance U.S.-Cuba relations. I offer my assistance and that of my staff. I wish you every success during this critical moment in our history. Your success is our success, and the thoughts and prayers of so many Americans are with you as you prepare for the road ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James P. McGovern". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress