Some quotes on the embargo...
“I think that it is, quite frankly, unconscionable that certain Cuban American groups and others had direct access and input about what would go into the report that affects the entire Nation, while members of Congress with alternative perspectives were excluded. I mean, this is America, and this is, I think, a democracy…

I thought that was what the basic criticism—one of the basic criticisms of Cuba is, that it’s a closed society. Well, it’s been very closed dealing with you all with regard to this report…”

Barbara Lee, Representative from California
AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT BUSH

From 48 former U.S. senators from both political parties,
read into the record by Senator Boxer on May 21, 2002, during a hearing before the
Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs, Foreign Commerce and Tourism,
of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, US Senate,
107th Congress, Second Session

To President George W. Bush and his Administration
and all members of the U.S. House and Senate:

We are a bipartisan group of former U.S. Senators who believe that U.S. policy toward
Cuba needs to change. Our present policy was created as a tool to topple the Castro
government. Fidel Castro has not been in power for 43 years—and we have had ten
Presidents during that time. Our current policy has failed.

We are the only nation in the world that have an economic embargo and boycott of Cuba,
and the clear lesson of recent history is that if economic sanctions are to be successful, they
must have strong international support.

The reality is that the present policy retards the day when the Cuban people will enjoy
fuller freedoms and hurts Americans and Cubans economically. Recent studies by Texas
A&M and Rice University conclude that economic sanctions cost the American economy
upwards of $6 billion in the agricultural and energy sectors alone.

The United States recognizes and trades with several nations that have a human rights
record worse that Cuba’s. Recently, Secretary of State Colin Powell proposed lifting
economic sanctions on Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, while keeping sanctions on weapons. If that
makes sense for Iraq, it certainly makes sense for Cuba where no other nation agrees with
our policy.

We favor normalizing relations with Cuba, while at the same time making clear our
support for human rights. These minimal first steps should be taken:

1. Lift the travel ban on U.S. visitors to Cuba. Unless there is a physical danger for
   American citizens, we should be permitted to travel anywhere.
2. Encourage academic exchanges and other exchanges, so that we can learn as
   much about Cuba as possible, and they can learn as much about us as possible.
3. Lift the barriers to normal trade with Cuba, except for trade that might have
   military significance
4. Repeal laws that cause friction with other nations that carry on normal relations with Cuba.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

James Abourezk (D-SD)  
Mark Andrews (R-ND)  
Lloyd Bentsen (D-TX)  
Daniel Brewster (D-MD)  
Dale Bumpers (D-AR)  
Jocelyn Birch Burdick (D-ND)  
Marlow Cook (R-KY)  
John C. Culver (D-IA)  
Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ)  
David Durenberger (R-MN)  
Thomas Eagleton (D-MO)  
J. James Exon (D-NE)  
Sheila Frahm (R-KS)  
David H. Gramm (R-GA)  
Jake Garn (R-UT)  
Rod Grams (R-MN)  
Mike Gravel (D-AK)  
Fred R. Harris (D-OK)  
Mark O. Hatfield (R-OR)  
William Hathaway (D-ME)  
Walter “Dee” Huddleston (D-KY)  
Roger Jepsen (R-IA)  
J. Bennett Johnston (D-LA)  
Robert Krueger (D-TX)  

Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ)  
Harlan Mathews (D-TN)  
Charles McC. Mathias (R-MD)  
Eugene McCarthy (D-MN)  
John Melcher (D-MN)  
Howard Metzenbaum (D-OH)  
Carol Moseley-Braun (D-IL)  
Frank E. Moss (D-MT)  
Gaylord Nelson (D-WI)  
Sam Nunn (D-GA)  
Charles Percy (R-IL)  
William Proxmire (D-WI)  
Donald Riegle, Jr. (D-MI)  
James R. Sasser (D-TN)  
Richard Schweiker (R-PA)  
Paul Simon (D-IL)  
Alan Simpson (R-WY)  
Robert Stafford (R-VT)  
Adlai E. Stevenson (D-IL)  
Donald W. Stewart (D-AL)  
Steve Symms (R-ID)  
Joseph D. Tydings (D-MD)  
Malcolm Wallop (R-MD)  
Lowel Weicker, Jr. (R-CT)
“...the embargo protects the Castro regime, providing it with an all-purpose alibi for economic hardship and enabling Castro to play the nationalist card, potent with his proud people. Lifting the embargo would very likely drown Castro’s revolution in a torrent of American tourists, investors, consumer goods, and popular culture. That is why anti-Castro dissidents within Cuba, unlike the anti-Castro fanatics in Miami, argue against the embargo.

...Cuba is not a foreign policy issue for the United States, it is an issue of domestic politics. Florida is the fourth-largest state and, as the recent presidential election demonstrated, a crucial prize. The hard-line Cuban-Americans around Miami are thought to hold the key to victory. Their only wish about the embargo is to tighten it. And the brother of the new president is the governor of Florida.

Polls today show that most Americans would welcome resumption of relations with Cuba. This year at least 200,000 Americans will visit Cuba. Farm states see Cuba as a market for their agricultural surplus. Businessmen watch with envy while Canadian, Spanish, Venezuelan, and German competitors invest in Cuba. Even The Wall Street Journal is skeptical about the embargo.

But hardliners continue to claim that tightening the embargo would somehow, after 40 ineffectual years, lead to the overthrow of the regime. They also use the excuse of human rights. Castro is hardly a model human rights practitioner. Still, countries like China and Saudi Arabia, with which Washington has full diplomatic relations, have far worse human rights records than Cuba’s.”

ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY
From an article the April 17 2001 issue of the Boston Globe, on the 40th anniversary of the Invasion at Bay of Pigs:
STATEMENT OF RALPH AND FILOMENA KAehler
at a Hearing before the Committee on Agriculture in the House of Representatives, March 6, 2005

Why develop a friend 80 miles off of our coast, when we can create another enemy instead?

That is what the supporters of the embargo and the recently imposed anti-free trade restrictions are doing.

The Ralph Kaehler Family (Ralph, Filomena, Cliff, and Seth) of St. Charles, Minnesota, has been actively involved with Cuban trade and humanitarian issues since the U.S. Food & Agribusiness Exposition in Havana, Cuba September, 2002. We are a family owned farming operation in southeast Minnesota—Congressman Gil Gutknecht’s area. We raise and sell beef breeding stock, corn, and soybeans on our farm that has been in the family since 1881.

Our boys are 13 and 15 years old—we want them to go to Cuba to continue negotiating contracts—rather than having them sent there with a gun to help keep peace—if the flawed policy of the U.S. Government continues. The last UN vote on the issue of ending the USA embargo toward Cuba was 173 to 3.

1) We need to end the embargo with Cuba. To paraphrase Minnesota Speaker of the House Steve Swiggum, “If you don’t trade food with a country, you end up trading bullets.”

2) Until we end the embargo, we need to interpret the rules of trade with Cuba as Congress intended.

3) We need to have direct banking between U.S. & Cuba to reduce our expenses, make food products more competitive, and make it easier to receive and track payments.

Our small operation has had much success with trade with Cuba:
• exported first livestock since the embargo
• conducted feeding trials and sold the first Distillers Dried Grain
• sold the first large group of dairy and beef heifers first shipment July 2003, second shipment Jan 2005
• sold the first bison
• sold the first sheep—which included 3 different breeds
negotiated the first letter of intent to purchase Powdered Milk—November 2003

Our family’s pending and current contracts that will be negatively impacted by the recent restrictions of free and democratic trade by our government’s new interpretation are:

- 10,000 MT Distillers Dried Grain
- 2nd sheep contract, 30–60 head
- beef and dairy breeding stock, 300 head
- Embryos from our boys’ 4–cattle herd

This will have a severe impact on our family farm business, along with the other farmers who supply us the products.

As one looks into the U.S. Cuba policy, you encounter a broad range of stories and emotions. On our first visit, we went to Cuba with a neutral stance regarding the US-Cuba policy—but now, we wholeheartedly agree with the following observation which so eloquently captures the typical American’s response upon seeing the situation for himself, “If you go to Cuba politically neutral, you will come back an advocate to end the embargo.”

Our family and all 23 producers and business people who traveled to Cuba with us for Alimport Negotiations Events have come back as, “Ardent Advocates for Normalization of Trade Relations with Cuba.” These farmers and businessmen that traveled with us represent the following Agricultural business groups: Beef cattle, Dairy cattle, Sheep, Bison, Sugar Beets, Corn, Soybeans, hay, Edible Beans, Brokerage companies, and journalists.

Cuba is the first nation to buy large quantities of U.S. live beef and dairy breeding stock since the discovery of the BSE cow in December of 2003. Of all the nations that could have shown support for U.S. cattlemen—Cuba stepped up to the plate first.

Other credits to Cuba—it has grown to be our 25th largest export market—we cannot use the term “partner” as our trade with Cuba is one way, due to our Government’s restrictions of imports from Cuba.
In a Democracy, the majority is supposed to rule, not an elite minority. As long as the embargo is in place, this minority is ruling. We respectfully ask you to end the embargo that has been so ineffective, threatens peace with our neighbor, and has been detrimental to both the Cuban people and the American Farmer. In the immediate future, we request that you support the Cuban Trade Facilitation Act of 2005 as introduced by Senator Baucus.

Thank you for taking the time to hear our concerns.
“Even aspirin is in short supply there. And I found that giving people aspirin was something that was often appreciated enormously. But I also gave this to some of my friends who should have had access to drugs like that.

“It really is very sad. There just isn’t enough to go around. But it doesn’t appear that there is preferential access because these people were asking for it as well.”

Mark M. Rasenick, MD, Professor of Physiology and Biophysics, and Professor of Psychiatry; Director of Biomedical Neuroscience Training
As of March 1, 2005 Amnesty International recognizes 71 prisoners of conscience in Cuba. Of these, 63 remain from the March 2003 crackdown and its aftermath. In addition, there are 6 other POCs that were arrested between 1994 and 2002.

Amnesty International urges the United States government:

- To place human rights concerns at the center of its decision-making on Cuba. The United States should take into account the impact its policies will have on day-to-day life for average Cubans and their enjoyment of basic human rights.
- To immediately suspend decisions on any measures that would worsen humanitarian conditions in Cuba and are aimed at destabilizing the country. Political instability and humanitarian crisis place civilians at risk of further human rights violations, and should not be considered as an option.
- To look seriously at ways to reduce hostilities with Cuba and lower the tensions that contributed to the broader negative political context for the latest crackdown. Some specific steps the U.S. might take include:
  - Discontinuing official assistance programs for political dissidents out of concern that such assistance in the past has put the dissidents at risk and been the rationale used by the Cuban government to detain and imprison dissidents.

Eric L. Olson, Advocacy Director—The Americas / Amnesty International USA