

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Rules

BILL: SR 1728

INTRODUCER: Senator Collins and others

SUBJECT: Tyrannical Cuban Government

DATE: April 18, 2023

REVISED: _____

ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1. Bond	Twogood	RC	Favorable

I. Summary:

SR 1728 condemns the tyrannical Cuban government in general, and condemns the Tampa City Council member and Hillsborough County officials who entertained the Cuban ambassador and other Cuban officials at a dinner meeting in Tampa on March 3, 2023.

II. Present Situation:

Cuba

On January 1, 1959, Fidel Castro led an overthrow of the Batista regime and gained control of Cuba.¹ On April 16, 1961, Cuba officially began the transition to a one-party communist system. Under Castro's leadership, Cuba engaged in military and economic relations with the Soviet Union.² Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Cuban economy faltered; Soviet economic subsidies to Cuba ceased, and without Soviet support, Cuba fell into an economic crisis.³ As a result, Cuba's gross national product fell by nearly one-half by 1993, exports fell by 79 percent, and imports fell by 75 percent. The standard of living of the population also declined significantly.⁴ Castro ruled Cuba until July 31, 2006, when he shifted power to his brother, Raul Castro. In February of 2008, Fidel Castro officially relinquished the presidency to Raul Castro.⁵ Raul Castro maintained the presidency until 2018, when Miguel Diaz-Canel succeeded him.

The United States and Cuba

The United States' long and strained history with Cuba dates back to Fidel Castro's overthrow of the U.S.-backed Cuban government.⁶ Following Fidel Castro's revolution, and in opposition to Cuba's strong relationship with the Soviet Union, the U.S. government began imposing

¹ History.com, *Communism Timeline* (updated July 9, 2019), <https://www.history.com/topics/russia/communism-timeline>.

² Biography.com, *Fidel Castro Biography* (updated April 20, 2021), <https://www.biography.com/dictator/fidel-castro>.

³ One World Nations Online, *History of Cuba*, <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/History/Cuba-history.htm>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Fidel Castro Biography*, <https://www.biography.com/dictator/fidel-castro>.

⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, *U.S.-Cuba Relations* (June 3, 2022), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-cuba-relations>.

economic penalties and instituted a ban on nearly all U.S. exports to Cuba.⁷ In 1961, President John F. Kennedy expanded the sanctions and export ban into a full economic embargo, which included strict travel restrictions into Cuba.⁸

Following the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1962, President Kennedy demanded that the Soviets remove nuclear weapons from Cuba and ordered the Navy to impose a maritime quarantine of Cuba to prevent additional weapons from reaching the island.⁹ In 1982, President Ronald Reagan labeled Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism due to its ties to international terrorism and support of terrorist groups in Latin America.¹⁰

In more recent years, the United States has shown continued support for the embargo against and strict disapproval of Castro's Cuba. In 1992, President George H.W. Bush signed into law the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992, which stated¹¹ that Cuba had repeatedly demonstrated consistent disregard for internationally-accepted standards of human rights and democratic values.¹² The Act noted that the Cuban government restricted the Cuban people's freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and other rights recognized by the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹³ Showing continued support of the embargo between the U.S. and Cuba, President Bill Clinton signed the Cuban Liberty and Solidarity Act of 1996 into law.¹⁴ On December 17, 2014, under President Barack Obama, trade restrictions and sanctions were lessened with Obama's Presidential Policy Directive on United States-Cuba Normalization.¹⁵ However, President Donald Trump reversed President Obama's efforts and re-classified Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism on January 11, 2021. President Trump cited Cuba's repeated provision of support for acts of international terrorism by harboring U.S. fugitives and Colombian rebel leaders as well as Cuba's support for Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.¹⁶

Despite the obviously strained relationship between the United States and Cuba, the two countries have a formal diplomatic relationship. Both countries have an embassy, ambassador, and related staff in the other country. The current Cuban ambassador to the United States is Lianys Torres Rivera.¹⁷

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Mark P. Sullivan, *CRS Report for Congress: Cuba and the State Sponsors of Terrorism List* (updated May 13, 2005), <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL32251.pdf>.

¹¹ H.R.5323 - 102nd Congress (1991-1992): Cuban Democracy Act of 1992, H.R.5323, 102nd Cong. (1992), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/house-bill/5323>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ H.R.927 - 104th Congress (1995-1996): Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996, H.R.927, 104th Cong. (1996), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/house-bill/927>.

¹⁵ Presidential Policy Directive: United States-Cuba Normalization (October 14, 2016), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/10/14/presidential-policy-directive-united-states-cuba-normalization>.

¹⁶ Matt Spetalnick, *Trump Returns Cuba to U.S. List of State Sponsors of Terrorism*, REUTERS (January 11, 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-cuba-terrorism-list/trump-returns-cuba-to-u-s-list-of-state-sponsors-of-terrorism-idUSKBN29G1Y9>.

¹⁷ Embassy of Cuba in USA, <https://misiones.cubaminrex.cu/en/usa/embassy-cuba-usa> (last visited April, 17, 2023).

Communism

Karl Marx proposed his ideology of Communism in his *Communist Manifesto* in 1848.¹⁸ Communism is a political ideology and form of government by which the state owns the major resources in a society, including property, production, education, agriculture, and transportation.¹⁹ Communism seeks to eliminate the class system through redistribution of income²⁰ and envisions a world without private property; all property is communally owned and each person receives a portion of the property based on what he or she needs.²¹ A strong central government controls all aspects of economic production and provides citizens with food, housing, health care, and education.²²

Communist regimes throughout history typically promise a utopian society in which the working class will enjoy unprecedented prosperity. However, Communist regimes have historically been correlated with massive poverty and repression.²³ Documented historical injustices of communist regimes include mass murder, repression, deprivations of freedoms, loss of property, and criminalization of ordinary economic activity.²⁴ Joseph Stalin and Vladimir Lenin (Soviet Union), Mao Zedong (China), and Fidel Castro (Cuba) are among the most notorious communist leaders.²⁵

Communist governments currently exist in China, Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam, and Laos.²⁶

July 11, 2021 Cuban Protests

Spurred by a steep increase in COVID-19 cases, significant lack of medical care and supplies, scarce resources, and a weakened tourist economy, thousands of Cuban citizens took to the streets in protest of the government on July 11, 2021.²⁷ The protesters displayed discontent with the current dictatorship and pleaded for access to food, water, medicine, and electricity. In response to the protests, hundreds were detained, and the police staked out the homes of participants and activists, sparking widespread fear.²⁸ President Diaz-Canel called on

¹⁸ Terence Ball and Richard Dagger, *Communism*, BRITANNICA (updated March 27, 2023), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/communism>.

¹⁹ The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Center for European Studies, *Communism: Karl Marx to Joseph Stalin*, <https://europe.unc.edu/iron-curtain/history/communism-karl-marx-to-joseph-stalin/>.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Sarah Pruitt, *How are Socialism and Communism Different?*, History.com (November 4, 2020), <https://www.history.com/news/socialism-communism-differences>.

²² *Id.*

²³ Ilya Somin, *Lessons from a Century of Communism*, THE WASHINGTON POST (November 7, 2017), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2017/11/07/lessons-from-a-century-of-communism/>.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ History.com, *Communism Timeline* (July 9, 2019), <https://www.history.com/topics/russia/communism-timeline>.

²⁶ Sarah Pruitt, *How are Socialism and Communism Different?* (November 4, 2020), <https://www.history.com/news/socialism-communism-differences>.

²⁷ Lioman Lima, *Cuba Protests: Three Key Issues That Explain the Rare Unrest*, BBC NEWS (July 12, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-57802170>.

²⁸ Ernesto Londono and Daniel Politi, *'Terror': Crackdown After Protests in Cuba Sends a Chilling Message*, NEW YORK TIMES (July 28, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/world/americas/cuba-protests-crackdown-arrests.html>; see also Human Rights Watch, *Case Descriptions of Protestors Detained by the Cuban Government*, July 2021 (Oct. 19, 2021), <https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2021/10/19/case-descriptions-protestors-detained-cuban-government-july>.

government supporters to take back the streets and explicitly issued a “call to combat.”²⁹ Protesters reported that the Cuban government had shut down internet access and electricity to citizens and sent police to beat and arrest protesters.³⁰

In a July 15, 2021, news release, Governor Ron DeSantis, along with the FCC Commissioner Brendan Carr, urged President Biden to assist the Cuban people by providing Internet access. Governor Desantis stated that “[w]e are seeing on the island of Cuba people fighting against a communist dictatorship. . . . The one thing that communist regimes fear the most is truth, and if we are able to help Cubans communicate with one another and with the outside world, that truth is going to matter.”³¹

In a March 20, 2023 press conference, United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken criticized Cuba’s response to the protests, saying that Cuban “courts have issued draconian jail sentences to hundreds of people for protesting for their rights.”³²

March 3, 2023 Tampa Meeting

On March 3, 2023, the Cuban ambassador to the United States, Lianys Torres Rivera visited the Mise en Place restaurant in Tampa. There, she met with Guido Maniscalco, the Tampa City Council member who represents West Tampa; Karen Perez, a Hillsborough County School Board member; and Cindy Stuart, the Hillsborough clerk of court and comptroller.³³ They were met by protesters who demanded to know why they were meeting with Ambassador Rivera. “The Cuban dissidents were led by Roberto Pizano, 84, a member of Casa Cuba in Tampa and a prisoner for 18 years under Castro’s reign. Also there was his son, Rafael Pizano Jr., 42, who has worked with international movements seeking the release of dissidents.”³⁴

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The resolution declares:

That the actions of Guido Maniscalco, Karen Perez, and Cindy Stuart and all others involved in the March 3, 2023, dinner meeting with Cuban Ambassador Lianys Torres Rivera and her delegation, who represent an oppressive and tyrannical government, are condemned.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ NBC Miami, ‘*We Need Intervention*’: *South Florida Leaders Call on US to Support Cuban Protesters* (July 12, 2021), <https://www.nbcmiami.com/news/local/south-florida-leaders-call-on-federal-government-to-support-cuban-protesters/2493048/>.

³¹ Executive Office of the Governor, *Governor Ron DeSantis and State and Federal Leaders Urge the Biden Administration to Immediately Provide Internet Access to the People of Cuba* (July 15, 2021), <https://www.flgov.com/2021/07/15/governor-ron-desantis-and-state-and-federal-leaders-urge-the-biden-administration-to-immediately-provide-internet-access-to-the-people-of-cuba/>.

³² U.S. Department of State, *Secretary Anthony J. Blinken on the 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (March 20, 2023), <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-on-the-2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/>.

³³ Chavez, *Cuban ambassador’s dinner in Tampa sparks protest, scorn*, TAMPA BAY TIMES, <https://www.tampabay.com/news/tampa/2023/03/04/cuba-ambassadors-dinner-tampa-sparks-protest-scorn/>

³⁴ *Id.*

That the Florida Senate stands with all Cubans residing in Florida who have escaped communism and those still in Cuba who are searching for a means to escape systemic oppression.

That the Florida Senate stands with the Cuban exile community to honor “¡Patria y vida!”³⁵ and support freedom for the oppressed.

A Senate resolution is ceremonial in nature. It is an expression of the Senate as a body.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

³⁵ The literal translation to English is “homeland and life!” In the context of this resolution, it appears to refer to a popular hip-hop song named *Patria y Vida*, released in February 2021 as a collaboration between Cuban musicians in exile Alexander Delgado and Randy Malcom of the duo Gente De Zona; Yotuel Romero, founding member of the pioneering Cuban hip-hop band Orishas; and singer-songwriter Descemer Bueno. Contributors Maykel Osbore (Castillo) and Eliécer “el Funky” Márquez are both still on the island. Full lyrics with English language translation and backstory are at: <https://www.npr.org/sections/atlantico/2021/07/19/1017887993/explaining-patria-y-vida-the-cuban-song-defying-an-evil-revolution>.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

At line 41, the bill references protests that occurred in Cuba on July 11, 2022, but perhaps is intended to reference the protests of July 11, 2021.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

None.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.