

‘Cuban health assistance could make a huge difference in South Central and East LA’

written by John Parker
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John Parker testifies before the Los Angeles City Council, May 24. SLL photo: Maggie Vascassenno

Statement by Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice Coordinator John Parker at the Los Angeles City Council hearing on May 24.

Hello, my name is John Thompson Parker. I'm the coordinator of the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice. I also ran for the U.S. Senate on the Peace & Freedom Party ticket in 2022, when I received 105,000 votes.

I was planning on running again for the U.S. Senate. Unfortunately, I may not be able to do that because a few weeks ago, I had a very dangerous stroke that required surgery to get a blood clot out of my brain. I temporarily lost the ability to move my right side. My communication ability is still challenged.

My surgeon said it would be important to be seen by a neurologist and a cardiologist, in addition to a speech therapist, as soon as possible. Unfortunately, my HMO medical plan made it impossible to schedule these specialists until more than a month after my stroke. This wait is a problem since a stroke is more likely to repeat within a month, which could create dire medical consequences or death.

People who look like me share that same situation of lack of health care. The Los Angeles Times quoted a report in the Journal of the American Medical Association this month that showed the higher mortality rate among African Americans, which resulted in 1.63 million excess deaths relative to white people in this country over more than two decades. These deaths are fueled by the higher rate of heart disease and the enormous number of Black people who died from COVID-19 in 2020.

But Cuba is making a difference for people who look like me in Latin America and on the African continent because they're getting health assistance from the Cuban government - especially during the COVID crisis. Vaccines and doctors and clinics. Cuba developed four new COVID vaccines along with a new diabetes drug that prevents amputations.

This makes a huge difference in the world, and it could make a difference in South Central and East LA, where your Black and Brown constituents reside. Cuba tried to show up for Black people here in the U.S. Remember Hurricane Katrina and the flooding in New Orleans. Cuba had hundreds of doctors and relief workers ready to help and could have prevented deaths, but then-President George W. Bush refused to allow that Cuban-provided aid.

We recently invited delegates of the Cuban Mission to the United Nations to talk, among other things, about the health care that could help your constituents. The mayor's office found out the Cuban diplomats were in LA, and the vice-mayor met with the Cuban delegates before our event at the Harriet Tubman Center.

Our meeting showed how our communities can benefit with more doctors and more clinics. Cuba can also provide urgently-needed diabetes drugs and preventive COVID medicine. Cuba even trains doctors for free - young constituents in your districts can go to Cuba, become doctors, and come back and serve in our oppressed communities debt free.

The meeting with the two Cuban diplomats occurred on April 19, one day before I almost died from a stroke on April 20. I now understand how Cuban-provided health care that prioritizes the most oppressed communities would help me. I continue to be in jeopardy, waiting to see specialists. That is the same situation of Black and Brown members of your constituency and my community.

One thing that is stopping Cuba from being able to help us is the designation of Cuba as a State Sponsor Of Terrorism (SSOT). President Obama took Cuba off the list. The Trump administration put Cuba back on that list, and unfortunately, President Biden has continued that policy. We are here today to ask you to join with others to call on President Biden to help Cuba and help us.

I have a long list of 100 or so city councils, labor unions, and community

organizations – including the city council of Washington, D.C., the capital of this country – that have passed resolutions that call on President Biden to take Cuba off of the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism and lift the U.S. blockade of Cuba, policies that deeply harm the ability of the Cuban government and its people to carry on with the basic functions of life.

This request for the Los Angeles City Council to pass the resolution to take Cuba off the SSOT list and end the U.S. blockade is supported by many groups and individuals, including the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice; the Black Alliance For Peace; Unión del Barrio; Pastor William Smart Jr., president of the Southern California Southern Christian Leadership Congress; and Code Pink.

Hopefully, this wish won't be a dying request as I wait for the time when I can finally see the brain and heart specialists in June. Hopefully, my experience will help you see that passing this resolution will benefit your constituents in our oppressed communities, who also suffer from the same life-threatening lack of health care. Take this resolution seriously.

Resolution Urging that Cuba Be Removed from the U.S. List of State Sponsors of Terrorism

Presented to the Los Angeles City Council on May 24, 2023

WHEREAS: President Biden has the authority to remove Cuba from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list by executive order, and to recommit to the normalization of relations with Cuba begun by the Obama-Biden administration; and

WHEREAS: For the past 62 years, the United States has imposed an economic, commercial and financial embargo on Cuba that prevents most engagement and trade with the United States, and punishes other countries that engage with Cuba; and

WHEREAS: Los Angeles would benefit from the economic and health care exchanges – due to the lack of health care suffered by Black and Brown communities, with especially higher deaths from COVID and heart disease; and

WHEREAS: Cuba can also provide urgently-needed diabetes drugs and preventive COVID medicine, provide doctors and clinics in the City of Los Angeles, and whereas Cuba has programs so that Los Angeles residents go to Cuba, train to become doctors and come back and serve in our oppressed communities debt free; and

WHEREAS: The only thing stopping Cuba from being able to provide these essential health care needs to Los Angeles is the designation of Cuba as a State Sponsor Of Terrorism (SSOT) and the U.S. embargo; and

WHEREAS: The consequences of this embargo continue to inflict daily hardships and deprivations on the Cuban people, creating shortages of basic necessities like food and medicine, and severely restricting international financial and trade opportunities; prevents Cuba from obtaining vital medical equipment and supplies, and even impedes humanitarian aid responses to catastrophic events like Hurricane Ian which devastated both Florida and Cuba, thus harming the Cuban people who President Biden’s administration claims to support; and

WHEREAS: The United Nations in 2017 estimated that this embargo had cost the Cuban economy \$130 billion, averaging more than \$2 billion each year; and

WHEREAS: The United Nations General Assembly voted to condemn the U.S. embargo against Cuba for the 30th time on Nov. 3, 2022, with 185 of 193 nations decisively voting in favor, and only the United States and Israel opposed; and

WHEREAS: The Trump administration imposed 243 new sanctions on Cuba, including restrictions on Cuban Americans who send remittances to families and businesses in Cuba. These sanctions contribute to a mass migration of Cubans,

creating U.S. border security concerns; and

WHEREAS: Former President Trump arbitrarily reinstated Cuba's designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism less than a week after the Jan. 6, 2021, attempted coup, reversing the Obama-Biden administration's 2015 decision to remove this status after an exhaustive review by the U.S. State Department, although Cuba does not satisfy any criteria for inclusion on this list; and

WHEREAS: Cuba's arbitrary designation has subjected it to further sanctions and international financial restrictions that limit the nation's ability to carry out critical financial transactions, including those needed to advance efforts to combat the COVID pandemic and improve its economy; and

WHEREAS: In 2021, 117 members of the U.S. Congress called for the removal of Cuba from this list, noting in a letter, "a policy of engagement with Cuba serves U.S. interests and those of the Cuban people";

Therefore:

Be it RESOLVED that _____ strongly urges President Biden and Congress, each federal representative in its jurisdiction, to call on the federal government to remove Cuba from the United States list of State Sponsors of Terrorism; and

Be It Further RESOLVED that _____ urges our congressional delegation to pass legislation that will eliminate those aspects of the embargo that have been codified into law; and remove all sanctions against Cuba by the United States. Allow the peoples of the United States and Cuba to travel and trade freely between the countries; and

Be It Further RESOLVED that _____ issues a press release regarding the details of this resolution to its media contacts within its jurisdiction.

