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Cuban American Group Explains Why It's in Washington

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The chorus of voices clamoring for changes in U.S. policy toward Cuba has been growing louder and more varied in recent months. Whether it's Hillary Rodham Clinton saying she favors normal relations with Cuba or former Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte signing a letter calling for greater engagement with the island nation, the momentum for a new approach to Cuba is undeniable.

It is within this context that our group, Cuban Americans for Engagement, is visiting Washington this week. CAFE is a community organization of Cuban Americans and American citizens from throughout the United States that attempts to facilitate a new relationship between the two countries based on principles of exchange, engagement, normalization of relations and diplomacy. We've come to Washington to convey an important message to policymakers: A new generation of Cuban Americans has come of age, and we're ready to talk about engaging with Cuba.

Our stories and perspectives are different from most of the Cubans who left the island in the years immediately following the revolution. Many of us were born after the revolution and grew up in socialist Cuba before leaving for the United States. We travel back to Cuba to visit family, and we've remained connected to the island and the realities of daily life there.

We are not starry-eyed about Cuban society; we are aware of its problems and challenges. We're also not fans of the U.S. government's policy toward it. The 52-year-old embargo has failed to force change on Cuba, or to starve the Cuban government or the Cuban people into

submission. Instead, it has served only to isolate ordinary Cubans — our families and friends — from the rest of the world. It's high time for a new relationship that recognizes and responds to the realities of Cuba today.

A new poll released by Florida International University shows that a majority of Cuban Americans agree with us. Since 1991, FIU has conducted this annual poll to measure the views of Cuban Americans in Miami-Dade County about U.S. policy toward Cuba. The methodology used to conduct the poll and the questions asked have remained largely the same since its inception, making it a comprehensive gauge of the evolution of Miami's Cuban-American community's attitude toward Cuba over time. In 1991, for example, 88 percent of respondents favored tightening the embargo. Fast forward to 2014: In this year's poll, 52 percent of Cuban Americans in Miami-Dade County opposed continuing the embargo. And an even larger number — 71 percent — thought the embargo was “not working at all” or “not working very well.”

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