



## LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP EDUCATION FUND

### **Cuba Fund Campaign 2012**

#### **Frequently Asked Questions**

*1) What types of LAWG activities will my donation be supporting?*

The LAWG Cuba Program has four main components: 1) Grassroots engagement and expansion; 2) Congressional advocacy; 3) Engaging the Cuban-American community; and 4) Having a strong voice in the US policy debate about Cuba.

*2) So why is now such an important time for US-Cuban relations? After all, the embargo and travel restrictions have been in place for 50 years.*

Recent changes in US policy have made it possible for more US citizens to travel to Cuba, and for Cuban Americans to visit family on the island and to send remittances to family members with no limits. It's important that we protect these gains from those in Congress who would roll them back, and work to convince the US government to further expand opportunities for US educational, business, scientific, and religious communities to interact with their Cuban counterparts. Public opinion polls show that most United States citizens oppose the trade embargo and travel restrictions, and it's frankly time to end 50 years of failed Cold War type policies against Cuba.

*3) Your group has been involved in US-Cuba policy issues for more than 15 years. why are you undertaking this big fundraising campaign now?*

There are two main reasons. First, we believe this is a critically important period for opening up US-Cuban relations and moving beyond 50 years of failed policies. If President Obama is re-elected, there will likely be opportunities for even greater engagement with Cuba, and we want LAWG to be in a strong position to take advantage of that. At the same time, if a new administration comes in and seeks to reverse the recent broadening of US-Cuban relations, it's just as important that groups like LAWG have the resources to convince Congress and the US public not to retreat into Cold War politics regarding Cuba.

4) *What do you mean by LAWG grassroots engagement and expansion?*

LAWG works to increase the travel possibilities to Cuba for US citizens, and to provide more objective information about Cuba to the public. As a coalition, LAWG is in a unique place to be able to relate to and share our message with a broad range of groups and individuals. Regarding travel, we believe that people-to-people exchanges between US citizens and Cubans are one of the most positive steps our country can take to produce strong examples of how our two countries can relate that could also lead to positive changes in Cuban politics and society. In just the past six months, the Cuban government has begun to allow the creation of private businesses and the buying and selling of real estate. These are meaningful changes that greater interactions between Cuba and the United States can help support. Grassroots efforts by LAWG are focused on increasing this public awareness and motivation both to travel to Cuba and to contribute effort to change U.S.-Cuba policies.

5) *When you say engaging the Cuban-American community, isn't this group one of the biggest defenders of the trade embargo and travel restrictions?*

Attitudes among Cuban Americans have changed a great deal from what they were 10 or 20 years ago. Recent credible public opinion polls show a majority of Cuban Americans in favor of ending the travel ban and expanding US trade with Cuba. In 2011, more than 400,000 trips to Cuba were made by Cuban Americans; and it is estimated that remittances provided by Cuban Americans to family and friends on the island have increased from \$400 million to around \$ 2 billion a year since these restrictions were relaxed by the Obama Administration. This increased availability of capital in Cuba will help support the creation of private businesses and real estate ownership that has recently been allowed by the Cuban government.

6) *What other areas of US-Cuban relations are important?*

For many years, important sectors of the US business community have been promoting greater trade with Cuba, especially in agriculture and pharmaceuticals. The US medical and scientific communities strongly favor abolishing restrictions on cooperation in the arenas of health, science and technology. Such co-operation could be especially important in regard to the environmental protection of the Gulf of Mexico. As Cuba proceeds with oil drilling in its own territorial waters, as fully permitted by international law, it is vitally important that the United States and Cuba have in place mitigation programs to prevent another BP-type oil spill. The current lack of official relations between Washington and Havana makes such cooperation impossible.

7) *What about the situation of Alan Gross, the government employee jailed by the Cubans for providing cell phones to the minority Jewish community in Cuba?*

The situation of Alan Gross is very unfortunate, but there are misperceptions about his work in Cuba that need to be cleared up. First, Mr. Gross is not an employee of the US government; he was working as a subcontractor for a USAID program that is supported by those in Congress seeking regime change in Cuba. Mr. Gross traveled five times to Cuba, without declaring his intentions to provide not only cell-phones but sophisticated computers and communications equipment to various groups on the island. This equipment included special mobile phone chips that are used by our intelligence agencies to prevent detection of the phone signals. Also, Mr. Gross exploited several of his travel companions to carry equipment through Cuban customs without their knowledge. Yet, Mr. Gross has been quoted describing himself as a “trusting fool” who was duped by his employers. We believe all efforts should be made to secure his release from prison, while at the same time acknowledging that US “regime change” policies toward Cuba are only counter-productive and subject people like Alan Gross to great harm.

*8) You say that Cuba is liberalizing economically, but isn't it true that Cuba remains a dictatorship, with no free speech, civil liberties, or political parties?*

Cuba remains a one-party state, with limited political and civil liberties. But changes are occurring on the island, and not just economically. For example, the visit of Pope Benedict II to Cuba in March 2012 helps create more space for freedom of religion in Cuba than previously existed. As greater economic freedoms take hold, and if the US normalized relations with Cuba, we think there could be a similar opening up of Cuban society.

In closing, we believe that supporting the engagement with Cuba of a broad range of US groups – business, educational, cultural, scientific, religious, political – is the best way to achieve more productive US-Cuban relations for the benefit of both countries and peoples.