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## U.S. should continue to accept Cuban refugees

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More Cubans will arrive at America's borders this year than at any time in decades. By year's end, probably close to 60,000 Cuban immigrants will have entered the country — the most in one year since 1980. Like the waves of Cuban refugees in years past, these immigrants should be welcomed.

Cubans are not sneaking into the country. More than 95 percent present themselves for security checks at legal entry points. Cuban immigrants are able to enter in such an orderly manner because Congress in 1966 said that it simply would not send Cubans back to communism. Under the Cuban Adjustment Act, Cubans can automatically — if they are not criminals or communists — receive asylum upon reaching land in the United States.

In light of the influx, however, some members of Congress are asking whether Cubans should continue to receive special treatment under America's immigration laws. The basic principle that people should not be treated differently based on national origin is valid, but Cubans receive special treatment not due to *where* they are from, but due to *how* they are treated where they are from.

Cubans aren't treated uniquely because they are *Cubans*, but because, according to Freedom House, Cuba is the only “unfree” country in the Western Hemisphere. The communist system has no electoral process, political dissent is a criminal offense, corruption is rampant, independent media is banned, and all forms of every day activities are regulated, including internal movement.

Cuba is 12th most unfree country in the world. It is less free than Iran and South Sudan. Even communist China received a higher score. No other country in the Americas comes close. In 2015, the pretend socialists in Venezuela were still 50th and ranked “partly free.” Haiti and Honduras came in at 57th and 62nd respectively. This is why Cubans are singled out.

Congress stated in 1996 that the law would end when “a democratically elected government in Cuba is in power.” As long as Cuba remains unfree, America will continue to welcome Cubans. Rather than repeal this principle, Congress should expand it to any country in our part of the world that is unfree. If Venezuela joins the ranks of the “unfree” next year, its refugees — many of which are coming here — should be treated the same as Cubans.

Some politicians have blamed the flow of refugees on President Obama's attempt to normalize diplomatic relations with Cuba, saying that it's causing Cubans to panic about the future of the law. But the increases started before the president announced any reforms. Rather, its origin is the Cuban government's 2013 decision to allow Cubans to leave the country without restrictions. Many Cubans have taken it up on its offer.

Repealing the CAA wouldn't end the flow. It would just redirect it back over the dangerous seas or drive it underground — away from security checks and into the black market smuggling networks in Mexico. It is better for the United States to allow Cubans to come to the United States with documents and willingly submit to background checks than waste limited resources deporting them back to communism.

Congress can take action to make the policy of accepting Cuban asylum-seekers less costly. It could eliminate the special welfare benefits that Cuban immigrants receive that other immigrants cannot. Rep. Carlos Curbelo has a bill that would do just that, and Congressional Budget Office has found that it would save \$2.5 billion over 10 years.

Nearly 60 percent of Cuban Americans oppose granting Cuban immigrants public assistance, according to a poll by the Sun Sentinel. Cuban Americans understand that their communities can incorporate these new immigrants without aid from the federal government.

Cuban immigrants have contributed greatly to the United States, especially to Miami where they have rebuilt and revitalized neighborhoods. Americans benefit from Cuban culture, food, and music as well. Now that the communist dictatorship to our south has decided to release its "prisoners," we should continue to welcome them while decreasing the burden on taxpayers.

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