

# Observer-Reporter

## Take Cuba seriously in wake of Ebola response

November 8, 2014

To fully grasp the depth of Ebola hysteria in this country, consider the case of Susan Sherman in Louisville, Ky.

A teacher at a Catholic school, she was ordered to take a 21-day paid leave and produce a doctor's note confirming her good health after she and her husband returned from a medical mission trip to Kenya.

Sherman refused and resigned. For good reason. See, Kenya is on the east coast of Africa, while Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, the countries were been most severely stricken by the virus, are on the continent's west coast, a full 3,400 miles away. Kenya and Liberia are about as far apart as New York and London.

There is one country in our neck of the woods, though, that has not assumed a frightened crouch when it comes to Ebola – Cuba, our old Cold War nemesis.

According to The New Yorker, the Caribbean nation sent 165 medical professionals to Africa to offer healing and expertise, far exceeding the number the United States, or any other country, is sending. Shipping doctors to devastated parts of the world has long been a part of Cuba's diplomatic portfolio. Cynics and hard-line opponents of Cuba would argue it's part of the authoritarian nation's increasingly feeble efforts to export communism to other parts of the globe. Maybe so. But these physicians have done considerable good in desolate rural areas and shattered urban landscapes in places like Pakistan and Haiti. Cuba's efforts should be taken seriously and, like it or not, applauded.

They are also another signal the United States' long-standing, and largely failed, economic embargo against Cuba should be lifted.

First imposed in 1960, as the Cold War was reaching its chilliest juncture, the embargo was designed to bring Cuba to heel – the thinking was if Cuba was isolated from the United States, only 90 miles to its north, the regime of Fidel Castro would be so severely undermined, it would crumble. Of course, that has not occurred. Anything but. Castro endured through 10 U.S. presidents, though he is now retired and handed off power to his geriatric brother, Raul. The U.S. embargo instead offered the Castros and their compatriots an easy rationale for Cuba's poorly functioning economy. As Daniel Griswold of the right-leaning Cato Institute put it in The Guardian, "Brothers Fidel and Raul can rail for hours about the suffering the embargo inflicts on

Cubans, even though the damage done by their communist policies has been far worse. The embargo has failed to give us an ounce of extra leverage over what happens in Havana.”

The embargo was kept in place, despite the fact the Cold War is long over and Cuba no longer poses any kind of threat to American security, to placate Cuban-Americans who harbored dreams of returning to the island and reclaiming what was taken from them or their forebears after the country’s revolution. But that generation is dying off and younger Cuban-Americans, who entertain no such illusions about a triumphant restoration of the island to its pre-Castro state, are diverging from their elders and arguing the embargo should be lifted.

They have an ally in the United Nations, which called for an end to the embargo last month in an overwhelming 188-2 vote. The sole dissenters were the United States and Israel. Such organizations as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have also condemned the embargo.

Aside from it making precious little sense in the 21st century, ending the embargo might even bring about a quicker end to the sclerotic communism there. Once its residents enjoy a greater taste of the outside world and its freedoms, the greater the likelihood they will agitate for reforms.

Anyone who has seen photos or video images of Havana boulevards knows they are clogged with exhausted vehicles from the 1950s because Cubans have no other means of acquiring newer and better cars. The embargo the United States is maintaining is as antiquated as those automobiles. And like those worn-out jalopies, the embargo should have long ago been sent to the scrap heap.