Democratic Candidate Positions On U.S.-Cuba Policy

Below are the 2020 Democratic presidential candidates' positions on U.S.-Cuba policy in order of their appearance at the DNC debate in Miami, Florida on June 26 and 27, 2019.

Of the 25 declared candidates, 24 have made public statements in support of a U.S. policy of engagement with Cuba. Senator Cory Booker is the only one who has not yet stated a public position on the issue.

Wednesday, June 26

BILL DE BLASIO

- Met with Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel in New York in 2018 and said, “we would like to see a positive relationship between our two countries.”¹

TIM RYAN

- Cosponsored the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act.²
- Traveled on a trade and research mission to Cuba and said in a statement, “I stand ready to continue working with the Cuban government and our public and private sector to ensure Northeast Ohio will benefit from the lifting of this decades-long embargo. I am excited about the possibilities that lay ahead and look forward to helping foster and grow a robust business relationship between our region and Cuba.”³
- Penned an op-ed in The Morning Journal in support of ending the U.S. embargo on Cuba and expanding trade relationships.⁴

²https://www.congress.gov/bill/111th-congress/house-bill/874/cosponsors?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22%5C%22travel+to+cuba%5C%22%22%5D%7D&s=8&r=22&overview=closed#tabs
⁴https://www.morningjournal.com/opinion/another-viewpoint-open-cuba-presents-opportunities-for-ohio/article_7947bcc8-866e-5c66-a88a-30c647b384bf.html
JULIAN CASTRO

- In an interview, Castro said, “I can understand why there’s some who have a different view.... if we want to see a Cuba that is more free and more open, the better course is to open up those diplomatic relations.”
- “When it comes to Cuba, I support what the Obama administration did in terms of opening diplomatic relations.”

ELIZABETH WARREN

- Cosponsored the Freedom to Export to Cuba Act of 2019.
- Cosponsored the Freedom for Americans to Travel to Cuba Act of 2017.
- Co-signed Senator Klobuchar’s June 2019 letter strongly opposing the Trump Administration’s decision to eliminate group “people-to-people” educational travel to Cuba, including a ban on cruise travel.
- “I’m not sure when it will work out to do that, but we’re clearly on a path to try to develop a stronger relationship with the people of Cuba, and I think that’s the right thing for us to do,” Warren said.

BETO O’ROURKE

- “I don’t think the embargo makes sense...our policies have been counterproductive, have produced harm and suffering.”

AMY KLOBUCHAR

- Plans to lift trade and travel restrictions on Cuba in her first 100 days in office.
- Lead sponsor of legislation to repeal the U.S. trade embargo on Cuba, the Freedom to Export to Cuba Act of 2019
- Traveled to Cuba with President Obama in 2016.
● Original cosponsor of the Agricultural Export Expansion Act of 2019, legislation that would increase U.S. agricultural exports to Cuba.\textsuperscript{15}
● Led letter to the Secretaries Mnuchin and Ross at the Departments of the Treasury and Commerce strongly opposing the Trump administration’s decision to eliminate group “people-to-people” educational travel to Cuba, including a ban on cruises.\textsuperscript{16}
● “Isolating Cuba for more than 5 decades has not secured our interests. We need to move our relationship forward, not backward,” she said in a Tweet.\textsuperscript{17}

TULSI GABBARD
● Tweeted in response to new Cuba travel restrictions imposed by the Trump administration in 2019: “Basically Americans will no longer be free to travel to Cuba, because Cuba is a communist country & therefore its people are not free. So now the Trump Administration, in the name of freedom, is taking away Americans’ freedom. Make sense?”\textsuperscript{18}

JAY INSLEE
● Cosponsored the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act.\textsuperscript{19}
● Signed a letter to congressional leaders urging them to end the embargo.\textsuperscript{20}

JOHN DELANEY
● Said in an interview that he sees engagement with Cuba as an opportunity for commercial U.S. businesses while encouraging the incorporation of Cuba into the global economy. He also mentions that he plans to travel to Cuba.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} https://twitter.com/amyklobuchar/status/1136245058964021248
\textsuperscript{18} https://twitter.com/TulsiGabbard/status/1136072513803509760
\textsuperscript{19} https://www.congress.gov/member/jay-inslee/I000026?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%2C%22within%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%2C%22within%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%7D&searchResultViewType=expanded
\textsuperscript{20} http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2016/mar/26/editorial-editorial-end-cuba-trade-embargo/
\textsuperscript{21} https://www.mymcmedia.org/delaney-on-cuba-and-regional-opportunities-video/
Thursday, June 27

MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

- In an interview, Williamson said "I would end the embargo with Cuba. It would be good to move towards normalization of relations, with open eyes to the problems with the Cuban government."  

JOHN HICKENLOOPER

- Traveled to Cuba in 2017 on a delegation seeking to establish cultural and economic exchange between the United States and Cuba.

ANDREW YANG

- In an interview, Yang said, “The trade embargo with Cuba is largely symbolic, in that it’s not going to effect regime change when the rest of the world is willing to trade with the island nation. The embargo has cost American billions of dollars. We should lift the embargo so that we can exert more direct influence on Cuba in order to combat their human rights violations and improve the living conditions for those who live on the island.”

PETE BUTTIGIEG

- “We’ve made a lot of progress with the relationship with Cuba, and I don’t think we’re going to see that society become more open and more free if we go back down the path of freezing them. We see reviving policies of the past. The policy toward Cuba did not work when it came to dislodging the authoritarian regime there. Why we would go back to a policy that didn’t work is hard for me to understand,” he said.

JOE BIDEN

- Helped reestablish diplomatic relations with Cuba while serving as Vice President in the Obama administration.

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23 https://www.denverpost.com/2017/02/06/hickenlooper-colorado-cuba-trade/
25 https://twitter.com/JoshNBCNews/status/1119389322552147968/photo/1
Wrote in an opinion piece, “[President Trump] has rolled back the travel and commerce that afforded Cuban entrepreneurs and families greater independence from the Communist state.”

Of the Obama administration opening with Cuba, Biden said at a conference, “[President Obama decided] we weren’t going to be bound by the mistakes of the past or shaped by an outdated ideology [toward Cuba].” He called U.S. trade and travel restrictions an “ineffective stumbling block to our bilateral relations with other nations in the hemisphere.”

Wrote in an op-ed that, “Trump’s...callously limiting the ability of Cuban Americans to reunite with and support their families in Cuba, and the administration’s Latin America policy, at best, is a Cold War-era retread and, at worst, at worst, an ineffective mess.”

BERNIE SANDERS

Cosponsored the Freedom for Americans to Travel to Cuba Act of 2017

Said during a Democratic debate in 2016: “I think we have got to end the embargo. I believe that we should move towards full and normalized political relations with Cuba. ...it will be a good thing for the Cuban people. It will enable them, I think when they see people coming into their country from the United States, move in a more democratic direction, which is what I want to see. ...I think by restoring full diplomatic relations with Cuba, it will result in significant improvements to the lives of Cubans and it will help the United States and our business community invest.”

Co-signed Senator Klobuchar’s June 2019 letter strongly opposing the Trump Administration’s decision to eliminate group “people-to-people” educational travel to Cuba, including a ban on cruise travel.

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26 https://www.americasquarterly.org/content/joe-biden-western-hemisphere-needs-us-leadership
30 https://www.newsweek.com/democratic-debate-full-transcript-miami-435555
KAMALA HARRIS

- Cosponsored the *Freedom for Americans to Travel to Cuba Act of 2017.*

KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND

- Cosponsored the *Freedom for Americans to Travel to Cuba Act of 2017.*
- Cosponsored the *Freedom to Export to Cuba Act of 2017.*
- Gillibrand opposes the U.S. embargo against Cuba. "The best antidote to the Castro regime is opening Cuba to America," she said.

MICHAEL BENNET

- Worked with Engage Cuba to establish the Engage Cuba Colorado State Council.
- Lead sponsor of the *Agricultural Export Expansion Act of 2019.*
- Cosponsored the *Freedom for Americans to Travel to Cuba Act of 2017.*
- Cosponsored the *Freedom to Export to Cuba Act of 2017.*
- Traveled to Cuba on a congressional delegation in 2017 to "continue the progress begun by President Obama to bring U.S.-Cuba relations into the 21st Century and explore new opportunities to promote U.S. economic development with Cuba."
- Issued a statement critical of the Trump administration’s June 2019 Cuba travel restrictions: "The President's decision to revert back toward an old policy of isolation with Cuba - a policy that failed to work for decades - is a mistake. American businesses and farmers deserve an opportunity to compete in the Cuban market. ...This disappointing announcement does nothing but limit economic and cultural potential for our state and country."

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34 https://www.congress.gov/member/kirsten-gillibrand/G000555?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%2C%22within%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%7D&searchResultViewType=expanded
37 https://www.congress.gov/member/michael-bennet/B001267?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%2C%22within%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%7D&searchResultViewType=expanded
39 https://www.congress.gov/member/michael-bennet/B001267?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%2C%22within%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%7D&searchResultViewType=expanded
ERIC SWALWELL

- Indicated in a Tweet that he is in favor of U.S. engagement with Cuba.\(^42\)

No Public Position

CORY BOOKER

Did Not Qualify for Debate but Have a Public Position:

STEVE BULLOCK

- Supports ending the U.S. embargo on Cuba.\(^43\)
- Signed a letter in 2015 with a bipartisan group of governors to congressional leadership encouraging the normalization of trade relationships with Cuba.\(^44\)

MIKE GRAVEL

- Supports ending the U.S. embargo on Cuba.\(^45\)
- “The embargo against Cuba has always had one goal: to cripple vital sectors of its economy and then step back to claim their system cannot work,” Gravel said in a Tweet.\(^46\)

WAYNE MESSAM

- “I support President Obama’s policy which lifted the travel ban to the island. I also believe that measured trade restrictions should take place. Our engagement, the more opportunity it’s citizens will have ending decades of isolation,” he wrote in a Tweet.\(^47\)

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\(^42\) [https://twitter.com/ericswalwell/status/1143603410186452992](https://twitter.com/ericswalwell/status/1143603410186452992)
\(^45\) [https://jacobinmag.com/2019/05/mike-gravel-democratic-primary-anti-imperialism](https://jacobinmag.com/2019/05/mike-gravel-democratic-primary-anti-imperialism)
\(^46\) [https://twitter.com/MikeGravel/status/1133842963287695361](https://twitter.com/MikeGravel/status/1133842963287695361)
\(^47\) [https://twitter.com/WayneMessam/status/1144362433257099264](https://twitter.com/WayneMessam/status/1144362433257099264)
SETH MOULTON

- Cosponsored the Cuba Agricultural Exports Act.\(^48\)
- Cosponsored the Cuba Trade Act of 2017.\(^49\)
- Cosponsored the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act of 2015.\(^50\)
- Traveled to Cuba in 2017 and met with Cuban President Raul Castro.\(^51\)
- Traveled to Cuba with President Obama in 2016.\(^52\)

JOE SESTAK

- Cosponsored the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act.\(^53\)
- Cosponsored the Export Freedom to Cuba Act of 2007.\(^54\)
- Cosponsored the Free Trade With Cuba Act.\(^55\)

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\(^48\) [https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/525?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=2]

\(^49\) [https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/442?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=2]

\(^50\) [https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/664?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=6]


\(^52\) [https://www.wcvb.com/article/us-reps-jim-mcgovern-seth-moulton-to-join-obama-on-cuba-trip/8232856]

\(^53\) [https://www.congress.gov/member/joe-sestak/S001169?q=%7B%22sponsorship%22%3A%22cosponsored%22%2C%22search%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%2C%22within%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%7D&searchResultViewType=expanded]

\(^54\) [https://www.congress.gov/member/joe-sestak/S001169?q=%7B%22sponsorship%22%3A%22cosponsored%22%2C%22search%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%2C%22within%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%7D&searchResultViewType=expanded]

\(^55\) [https://www.congress.gov/member/joe-sestak/S001169?q=%7B%22sponsorship%22%3A%22cosponsored%22%2C%22search%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%2C%22within%22%3A%5B%22cuba%22%5D%7D&searchResultViewType=expanded]