
After A Recent Trip To Cuba, Leahy Urges Congress To Restore Full Diplomatic Relations

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Sen. Patrick Leahy has returned from a recent trip to Cuba and says he's even more convinced that Congress should restore full diplomatic relations with the island nation as soon as possible.

Leahy says the change is needed because he says U.S. policies over the past 50 years have failed.

Audio for this story will be posted at approximately 11 a.m. on Tuesday, June 30

The senator has been working on this issue for more than a decade. This past weekend, he traveled to Cuba as part of a bi-partisan Congressional delegation that met with government officials, business representatives and religious leaders.

Leahy says the time has come to fully recognize the Communist government in Havana and end this country's "cold war" foreign policy against Cuba. "There are those who want to continue the 50 year policy. I'm one of the ones that believe it didn't work, it hasn't worked for any of that 50 years, so let's try something different," he says.

Not everyone in Congress agrees with Leahy's plan. In the past few months, the U.S. House has voted not to lift travel bans between the two countries. It's also voted to maintain a strict ban on trade with the Cuban military.

Leahy says the House approach is shortsighted. "My response to that is here we are one of the greatest nations history has ever known, and for us to be there and without a real embassy, without a full embassy, without the chance to show the Cubans what America really is, doesn't help us at all," Leahy says. "In fact it hurts us."

And Leahy thinks restoring full diplomatic relations with Cuba will lead to political changes in that country. "I think the more openness we have with them the more it's going to change Cuba," he says. "Their leaders are somewhat worried about that because once we have real Internet service, they will try to censor some of that but you can't really censor it."

Leahy says he expects that the Obama Administration and the Castro government will announce plans to partially open embassies in the near future.
