

## [The Seven Members OF Congress Who are Visiting Us](#)

An important US political delegation is visiting us right now. Its members belong to the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) which, in practice, has worked as the most progressive wing within the Democrat Party.

The Congressional Black Caucus was founded in January 1969 by the twelve Afro-American legislators who belonged to the US Congress at that moment. During the first 50 years of the 20th century only four Afro-Americans were elected to Congress.

At present, as a result of the struggles they have waged, the CBC is made up by 42 members. Several of its representatives have maintained very active and constructive positions on topics related to Cuba.

The first Caucus delegation that visited us came to Cuba on February 1999 and was presided over by Maxine Waters; the second came on January, 2000.

Influential members of that Congressional group publicly expressed their positions and carried out other positive actions during the battle for the return of the child Elián to his homeland.

On May 2000, another Caucus delegation visited us. It was presided over by James Clyburn, from North Carolina, who was then its main leader, and was made up by Bennie Thompson, from Mississippi, and Gregory Meeks, from New York. These congressmen were the first to know through me about Cuba's readiness to grant a number of scholarships to low-income youths, who were to be selected by the Congressional Black Caucus, so that they could come to Cuba and study medicine. We made a similar offer to the "Pastors for Peace" NGO, which is presided over by Reverend Lucius Walker, who sent the first students to the Latin American Medicine School (ELAM).

When the Bush administration anti-Cuban pressures and actions against travels and the presence in Cuba of persons under the US jurisdiction became more severe, the Black Caucus legislators addressed Secretary of State Colin Powell and managed to secure a license that legally allowed American youths to continue their Medicine studies -which they had already started- in Cuba.

Powell, a military chief of great authority and prestige, could have been the first black President of the United States, but he refused to be nominated out of respect for his family which, reminding themselves of Martin Luther Kings' assassination, tenaciously opposed his being nominated.

The Black Caucus delegation visiting Cuba this time is presided over by Barbara Lee, Representative from California. She first traveled to Cuba accompanying the then black Congressman Ronald Dellums. She was his assistant and afterwards occupied his seat when he retired. On that occasion I had the honor of meeting her personally and admire her combatant spirit and capacity for struggle.

The group she is presiding right now is made up by seven members of Congress. The other members of the delegation are: Melvin Luther Watt, from North Carolina; Michael Makoto Honda, from California; Laura Richardson, also from California; Bobby Rush, from Illinois; Marcia L. Fudge, from Ohio; and Emanuel Cleaver II, from Missouri.

Patrice Willoughby, Executive Assistant of the Congressional Black Caucus, plus four military of the Congressional Liaison Office, under the orders of lieutenant colonel Daniel Wolf, are accompanying the delegation.

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I highly assess the gesture of this lawmakers group. They have been strictly complying with the visit program they asked for. The aureole achieved by Luther King is accompanying them. Our press has given a broad coverage to their visit. They have been exceptional witnesses of the respect with which we always welcome Americans visiting our homeland. Very hardly have they seen any face expressing hatred, and maybe they admire the total absence of illiterate people or children shining shoes on the streets. The swarms of children, teenagers and youths attending schools and universities; the day-care-centers, senior citizens homes, hospitals and polyclinics run by highly skilled medical staff offering assistance to all citizens will not escape from any critical eye. In the midst of this international economic crisis there are no citizens queuing up to apply for a job. Persons who move on the streets in an active and almost always happy manner do not match with the stereotyped images that most of the times are portrayed about Cuba abroad.

Our homeland is showing that a small Third World country, which has been besieged, attacked and blockaded for tens of years, can put up with its poverty with dignity. Many citizens in the richest nation of the world do not receive the same treatment, and a considerable number of them do not even vote. However, that right is exercised quite often by more than 90 per cent of our population, which knows how to read and write and has acquired a not inconsiderable culture and political knowledge.

Among the visitors there are opinions which are shared by all; others are personal points of view. In general, they believe that 68 per cent of the American public opinion favors a change in the policy towards Cuba.

One of them expressed that it was necessary to take advantage of this historical moment, when the presence of a black President in the White House coincides with a current of opinion that is in favor of the normalization of relations.

When Alarcón explained that the removing Cuba from the list of terrorist States –where it has been arbitrarily included- was a moral duty, he was reminded that both Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress were labeled as terrorist by the US Congress.

Another member of the delegation thanked the Cuban authorities and the presidency of the Black Caucus for promoting the trip and arranging for this type of exchange.

Another representative explained Obama's great significance for the United States and the need for him to be re-elected. He said that the President believes himself a political leader who should govern for all social sectors of the country. Nevertheless, he said he was sure that Obama will change the policy towards Cuba, but Cuba should also help him.

A fourth member of the Caucus said that despite Obama's electoral victory, the American society continues to be racist. He added that Obama represented the only opportunity that nation had to move on and leave behind all the wrongdoings accumulated by former governments. He said that the President can not go beyond liberalizing travel and allowing remittances by Cuban-Americans, because proclaiming the lifting of the blockade or the full normalization of bilateral relations could mean the impossibility for him to be re-elected. Besides, he reaffirmed that the anti-Cuban right wing still has enough power to corner him and prevent his re-election.

Finally, another lawmaker frankly expressed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the United States should not lose the opportunity of recognizing that its policy towards Cuba has been an absolute failure. He added that his government should apologize to Cuba for all these years of hostility and for the blockade policy, because only then will we be in the position to move on together towards the solution of the bilateral differendum. He pointed out that, from his position, he would do whatever is possible to eliminate the blockade.

During their visit to the Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering Center, one of them, expressing the feelings of the rest, described as excellent the results achieved by Cuba in the field of Biotechnology,

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and said that at this moment, the political atmosphere was favorable to build bridges of understanding and communication between the scientific communities of our respective countries. He recommended that we should be careful and patent everything, according to the international intellectual property standards, to prevent our being robbed of the efforts that led to such a wonderful work.

All of them expressed how greatly impressed they were during the visit to the center, where the minister of Science, Technology and the Environment, together with several scientific institutions directors, explained to them about the work carried out by our country in that field.

The main activity of April 4, a day that marked the 41st anniversary of the death of the human rights martyr, was the visit to the park in Cuba's capital named after Martin Luther King, where there is a black-veined dark green marble monolith, bearing the bronze embossed image of the great black combatant who was assassinated by the racist. Barbara Lee, Laura Richardson, Emanuel Cleaver II and Bobby Rush took the floor at the gathering. The four of them publicly emphasized the positive impact of the meetings they had held.

Yesterday Sunday, at 13:20 hours, Congresswoman Barbara Lee arrived at the Ebenezer Church of the Martin Luther King Centre, where she was welcomed by Raúl Suárez and other executives of Cuba's National Council of Churches. Also present there were Alarcón and other officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Before that, Barbara had visited two other churches in Vedado. She addressed the audience; she reiterated certain previous public statements and expressed her intention to make certain coordinations with the administration to promote a change of policy towards Cuba and the reactivation of the exchanges between the churches of both countries.

I have summarized as much as possible the exchanges that have taken place. I have been careful enough not to disclose the names of those who have made certain statements, because I do not know whether they are interested in going public.

I only wanted to offer some necessary elements for judgment so that our national public opinion could have as much information as possible on the sensitive subject of the relations between Cuba and the United States under Obama's presidency and the visit of the Black Caucus delegation to Cuba.

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