

# PRESS RELEASE

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## The Cuba Consortium Marks the 12/17 Anniversary

December 17, 2015

(Washington, D.C. / December 17, 2015) On the first anniversary of President Obama's announcement of progress toward normalization of relations with Cuba, the co-chairs of the Advisory Board of The Cuba Consortium have commented on the impact of the past year, as well as the future of U.S.-Cuba relations.

"December 17 really is a date worth observing, since one year ago so many of the advances we have seen in the intervening time would have been absolutely unthinkable," noted Senator Tom Daschle. "The one-year mark encourages us to give pause and thoughtfully assess the changes we have realized in relations, from reopening both embassies to slowly facilitating travel, telecommunications, and financial improvements between our two countries."

Although the normalization development was announced by both countries' presidents in December 2014, remediation between the two is far from complete. Many obstacles still exist, the most prevalent of which is the embargo imposed against Cuba by the United States. In October, the United States maintained its support of the embargo at the U.N. General Assembly, and any moves to lift the embargo will likely be stalled as the U.S. enters its presidential election cycle.

The Cuba Consortium was formed in July of this year in anticipation of the difficult path facing U.S.-Cuba relations. The group aims to convene policy makers, academic experts, political leaders, and heads of business, all of whom have interest in the normalization process. The Consortium will not lobby either government, but intends to examine the issues in order to sustain the conversation as Washington enters its hectic election year, to continually assess progress being made in the improvement of U.S.-Cuba relations, and to monitor the range of priorities – such as human rights – among interested parties and negotiators alike.

Scott L. Campbell, president of The Howard Baker Forum, asserted, "This is a momentous anniversary. While it is absolutely vital to analyze areas needing further improvement, it's also important to remember that without December 17, we would not have an embassy with which to engage in dialogue at all. We value the upcoming opportunity to hear from Ambassador Cabañas immensely; this will be the most direct source of feedback and engagement possible."

Ambassador Cabañas, who officially took on the role of Cuban Ambassador to the U.S. in September after serving as head of the Cuban Interests Section since 2012, is confirmed to speak at The Cuba Consortium's first conference on February 18, 2016. The conference will be held at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C.

Other confirmed speakers for the conference include Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South America and Cuba Alex Lee, former Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Tom Donohue, and American University professor and Cuba expert Dr. William LeoGrande.

The Cuba Consortium is a project of The Howard Baker Forum, which was founded by the late Senator Howard Baker to examine critical issues facing the United States. The Forum organizes a variety of programs and research projects to highlight current public policy challenges facing the nation.

