

from our viewpoint...

Lifting travel ban premature right now

There’s pressure in Congress to lift the 40-year-old ban on travel to Cuba. Some argue that sanctions on Cuba haven’t worked: After all this time, Fidel Castro is still in power, still repressive and autocratic, still a Communist. Others argue that American visitors can take the lesson of freedom to Cuba, open up a dialog and change the Cuban people’s hearts. Still others, several Kansas congressmen among them, argue that we need to lift the embargo on Cuba so we can sell the Cubans more stuff, especially Kansas wheat. And then there are those who just want a good cigar. It won’t happen this year, because the Cuban vote is too strong in Florida, and every vote in Florida will count next fall. But the pressure will keep up. Have the trade embargo or the travel ban, in place since the 1960s, worked? It depends on whether you think the glass is half empty or half full.

Sure, Castro remains in control of Cuba. There’s little we can do to unseat a dictator short of sending troops to his island. President Kennedy tried that, but pulled his punches and failed. Certainly sanctions, trade embargoes and the like have never succeeded in ousting a government. But Castro has lost his communist friends and supporters and is increasingly isolated. His days on earth are numbered, and it would be a surprise if his soulless brand of communism hangs on long after he is gone. Opening up Cuba to American travel would result in a boom in tourism that might shore his regime up for a few years.

Castro is still a communist dictator, one of the last four or five in the world, depending on how you count. Over the years since he came to power, totalitarian rules have all but disappeared from Latin American. Where once military dictators and one-party cliques rules most of Central and South America, today there is only Castro.

Democracy may be struggling in many countries, but it has a foothold everywhere. Except in Cuba.

Having invested so many years and so much effort in isolating Castro, why should we give up now?

His economic policies have left his island nation in ruin. His leftist ranks have left him without friends in most of the world.

The United States has no beef with the Cuban people, but the enmity between governments is great.

Some day, Castro will be gone. Some day, his repressive communist government will fall. Some day, fine Cuban rum and noble Cuban cigars may flow north to eager Yankee hands. Wheat and tourists will flow south.

But until that day, why give aid and comfort to a man who is our sworn enemy?

No, it’s not yet time to lift the embargo or the travel ban. Let’s just wait. — *Steve Haynes*

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Reminiscing about all those good times

I don’t know about you, but I’ve been reminiscing with relatives, my sister and my cousin.

We talked about our deceased parents, our siblings, how we’ve changed through the years, our children. We cousins have never been close through the years, but have managed to stay in touch occasionally.

Sadly enough, it has usually been at funerals.

We all have our memories, things that have entrenched themselves in our minds. We think we remember people and events exactly as they were.

It’s always interesting to hear someone else tell how he/she remembers the same event.

This cousin’s family and mine lived briefly in the same town when I was a little girl. Their family was bigger than ours; the children were closer in age than ours.

My uncle was a tinkerer/inventor. To accommodate his children in a small house, he made bunk beds for them.

I guess most kids fantasize about having a



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ladder to climb to sleep; at least, I did. However their bunk beds were different than the usual tiered beds. My uncle had welded two iron bedsteads together, and they weren’t single beds either. They were double beds!

That was really something, I thought. I remember that I would sometimes stay all night at their house. To accommodate all the kids, we would sleep cross-wise on the bed. What a neat time that was!

My uncle’s family lived in a basement house built fairly often in the Midwest to protect against tornadoes, I guess. Also less inexpensive to build, I suppose. Their house was so different from ours, and I suppose that was part of the fascination for we kids, too.

The changing scene in the French Quarter

It was wonderful to walk the streets of the French Quarter in New Orleans last week, but it was disappointing to see the decline in the amount of jazz being played in the area.

The city has changed quite a bit since I first saw it over 30 years ago while covering a story for the Navy about ship building. Back then, both Pete Fountain and Al Hirt had clubs on Bourbon Street, and we watched great jazz shows in both places, as well as a number of others along the street.

When I next saw the city in the late 1970s both Fountain and Hirt were performing off Bourbon street, and a new lineup of jazz performers was in the clubs. There were some blues clubs and a smattering of a sort of jazz/rock beginning to show up.

The third time was about 19 years ago, and Fountain was playing at the Hilton while Hirt was out of town. Pat O’Brien’s was going strong, as were several of the jazz clubs, and it was an active time.

This time there were hardly any jazz sounds in the area, but Preservation Hall was going strong and looked the same as it had when I first saw it. Pat O’Brien’s was still going strong, and we had a good meal at O’Brien’s Courtyard, which is attached to the main club. Most of the music was loud rock.

Many of the clubs now feature rock and some are featuring Cajun Zydeco music. The streets were crowded every night, and got more crowded as the week went on. The Mardi Gras necklaces, usually seen only during the parades in February, are now being sold everywhere, and people are throwing them from the second floor balconys. Adult entertainment clubs are having some of their girls throw the necklaces down to the passing throng to entice them into their show.

When I was first on Bourbon Street, one club had a girl on a swing which would come through a curtain in the front and she would



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wiggle her legs for the passing crowds. Over the years, the swing has changed. Today there is a maniquin set of legs that come through a special curtain, and they do not wiggle like they did when it was a real girl.

New Orleans is known for the art in the French Quarter, and the number of galleries and artists has grown over the years. This is a city that is different in the daylight, more buisness-like while the sun is up. Some of the clubs on Bourbon Street operate nearly 24 hours at a time, but it is much quieter during the day.

The Cafe du Monde does a constant business in the morning selling coffee and beignets. There are several options for coffee. The beignet is a square piece of dough, fried and covered with powdered sugar. They are served

in orders of three.

The French Market has expanded beyond the normal fruits and vegetables to include a large flea market which sells a wide variety of items including many of the colorful masks and souvenirs of New Orleans. The pecan pralines are sold singly or by the dozen, along with many special Cajun and Creole spices. The seafood is somewhat limited, but the crawfish, clams and shrimp taste good in jambalaya and etouffee. One restaurant now has a great shrimp and clam pizza. We did not see a lot of lobster on the menus, but it was sort of out of our price range anyway.

One of the pleasant things we did was take a trip up the Mississippi on the Natchez paddlewheeler, which included a great lunch and jazz music by the Dixieland Stompers quartet. It was a great way to get a look at a part of the Port of New Orleans, which handles over 400 million tons of freight each year.

I wanted to see the site of the 1812 Battle of New Orleans which made President Andrew Jackson famous, but found it is reached through a trip on the Cajun Queen paddlewheeler. Will have to put that on the agenda for a future trip.

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