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6313 – Cuban Crisis and Florida

Guest: Rep. William C. Cramer (R-FL)

Morphew: Introduction...what part of Florida do you represent?

Cramer: West coast, St. Pete, Tampa, Clearwater area.

Morphew: What has been the reaction in that area to the Cuban crisis?

Cramer: Well, our people are very concerned. People all over Florida, there are about 10,000 refugees in the Tampa area which I used to represent. There are 150,000 in the state of Florida, and the people are very concerned because after all we're 90 miles from a communist bastion in the Caribbean.

Morphew: What has been your reaction and the reaction of your people to steps that have been taken so far by the administration?

Cramer: Well, I've said many times there obviously hasn't been adequate action taken. The administration hasn't been firm enough in its position. The administration hasn't come up with a long-range plan program as to what we're gonna do and how we're gonna do it. And I'm confident the Organization of American States, other free nations throughout the world would back us up a hundred percent if we let 'em know what we're going to do. Now, we've got to make the first firm decision that we believe in to restate and to decide to fully implement the Monroe Doctrine and I introduced a resolution to accomplish that. That decision having been made, then you get into the means of implementation. The trade ban that was imposed is full of holes. It only prevents one ship that goes to Cuba from not coming to our ports even though the same company may own a dozen other ships, they can keep doing business in the United States ports. We should close our ports to any company or any country that does business with Cuba. Now, that's

an example of softness as it relates to getting rid of Castro and communism in this hemisphere.

Morphew: In other words, you believe not enough action has been taken and that what has been taken perhaps partially was to let the public think that more was being done than actually was.

Cramer: I think there was a lot of window dressing. I don't think there's any question but what the quarantine was put into effect at a very propitious time for obvious reasons, largely because public pressure was demanding that action be taken and unfortunately, another example is that the quarantine was lifted before it accomplished its true and worthwhile objective of on-site inspections to guarantee that missiles were removed and ??? 28s removed from Cuba. So that was withdrawn prematurely. The invasion at the Bay of Pigs, of course, was one of the biggest fiascoes in the history of this country and failed because of the lack of air coverage. And these indecisions, and when the decisions are made they're not firm enough for awhile, that people throughout this hemisphere are concerned. As a matter of fact we dropped the ball at Costa Rica. Before the meeting ever took place it was announced by the State Department and by the president that we were not going to take a hard position on Cuba at the Costa Rican conference. And my gosh, if there's any place in this hemisphere where we had an opportunity to map out a long range plan, firm program to do away with subversion from Cuba, to eventually do away with communism in Cuba, it was at the Costa Rican conference cause most of those countries have been invaded at one time or another by Castro's brigands in 1961. They wanted a firm position.

Morphew: It would seem then that up until recently, one excuse for not doing anything about Cuba has been that the rest of the western hemisphere wouldn't support the action but now it's become necessary for the administration to announce in advance that it doesn't want the other nations to do anything.

Cramer: In effect, to kind of hold them off, to keep them from doing themselves or jointly what should be done. For instance, there was no effort made, there were no plans made, there was no protest made to Mexico, for instance, about the fact that through Mexico City the Cuban embassy, even United States citizens, let alone Latin American citizens, according to McCone's testimony, CIA director before the Selden subcommittee, a thousand to fifteen hundred Latin Americans. And I put in the record the other day that United States citizens as well, some 73 in a four-month period in 1962, had gone to Cuba against the United States laws, against international law, in a manner that's against international law, in a clandestine fashion, through the Cubana Airlines and the Cuban Embassy and obviously many of them to participate in subversive activities. Otherwise, Castro wouldn't have given 'em permission to go then.

Morphew: And yet hasn't our government been opposed to the closing off of Cuba?

Cramer: Well, I can only say that it hasn't been closed, and I'm confident it could be if they tried. Now, I sent a letter to the president and to the Secretary of State recently

asking that they issue a strong protest to the Mexican government about this open door subversive channel through Mexico City and ask that it be closed, strong protest. I suggested we encourage other Latin American countries to join with us, that a resolution through the Organization of American States be passed. As a matter of fact, I've also suggested we should withhold Alliance for Progress funds for Mexico as long as they continue to hold this door wide open to subversion.

Morphew: You and others who have been critical of the handling of the Cuban situation have been criticized for trying to make Cuba a political football...in your opinion, is it a political football or is it a legitimate issue?

Cramer: Well, I'm a firm believer that all issues are subject to and should be public discussion. There's no issue of greater consequence happening in the world today than the continued military build up and the subversive activities emanating from Cuba in this hemisphere and if that's not subject to discussion then what in the world would be? And I think that the more it's discussed the more hope we have of a firm policy resulting.

Morphew: you indicated earlier that you felt that to some extent the public pressure earlier was somewhat responsible for what was done earlier about Cuba.

Cramer: I think that's true and I feel that unless those of us who are deeply concerned about it, and I think every member of Congress is concerned, perhaps to different degrees, and who can help the administration, for instance, by making constructive suggestions, by bringing out factual information that perhaps the administration isn't aware of or is not taking effective action about, such as United States citizens going against the law to Cuba even at this time when it's a penalty of five years and \$5,000 or both for doing so. Now, that just doesn't make sense to me. So, those of us who are deeply concerned about this thing, and I think everybody from Florida certainly is as well as other places throughout the country, that we have a duty to speak out and I think the history has shown of this administration that if you don't speak out you don't get a firm position. And I could cite another example. Brazil's another example where they're now negotiating for over a hundred million dollars in loans and the State Department itself has said that Brazil is infiltrated with communists, the government, unions, and the student movement. That's the State Department testimony before the Congress and then a very few days later they said, well, we didn't really mean what we said, therefore, we're going ahead, as if they're trying to find an excuse for giving them the money instead of saying, here are conditions of your getting the money: you've got to stop recognizing Cuba, Castro, the communists in Cuba, you've got to stop doing business with the communists, we're not gonna loan you money to build trade with Russia. That's what they want the money for. These decisions have to be made. As a matter of fact, it's interesting to me at the Costa Rican conference, when the president was talking to a student group, one of the students got up and said this, now this is probably the best example of how foolish we even appear to the Latins in not requiring anti-Castro and anticommunist activity on the part of governments we loan money to through the aid program, here's what that student said, this is a Latin student in Costa Rica: "It is foolish for you Americans to give money to corrupt oligarchic controlled Latin American government without supervising the expenditure of every dollar. You're throwing money down the drain and in the end you'll

lose both the money and the country and you shouldn't make an exception of our own government even, however advanced it might be.

Morphew: So we're not buying friendship through lack of a decisive policy?

Cramer: I think we're kidding ourselves if we think we are, and I think we lost the initiative at Costa Rica which we had and which could have been evolved into a Organization of American States doctrine for action to get rid of Castro and communism in Cuba.

Morphew: You've been discussing economic pressures...have you formed any conclusions about applying military pressure to resolve the situation?

Cramer: Well, I think there are a lot of things we can do. There are economic sanctions. There's the trade ban. We should, I think, recognize a free non-communist government-in-exile so that they themselves can strengthen their own efforts to win back their country and give the insurgents within Cuba an opportunity to build their strength. I think that we ought to advise Russia and the communists to stop shipping war material into Cuba, to stop trans-shipping it to other countries, to stop their subversive activities in this hemisphere under penalty of a reinstated quarantine if it isn't done. These are actions that I think we're gonna have to take. And through the Organization of American States, I think we can also build the military strength within the whole region of these countries with military assistance so they themselves can combat communism within their countries and we can help surveillance protect their coasts against the drops of weapons and communist personnel. Now, these are all things that can be done, none of which are being done now.

Morphew: Would you describe our present policy of one of excessive timidity?

Cramer: Well, I'd make it a little stronger than that. I would say our present policy is one of weakness, indecision, of unwillingness to make the first hard decision that we are going to maintain and implement the Monroe Doctrine and then take the steps to do it.

Morphew: And the American people have a legitimate interest in seeing that this is being done?

Cramer: The security of our country, our very basic freedoms are at stake. There isn't any question about it.