

First of all, thank you very much. Thank you for doing this here. I was telling the foreign minister, who I have met now – how long have I been here? Like eight months? I've seen you like 12 times. So we see each other – never in the States, but around the world.

I was explaining a little bit about the historic nature of this hotel. This is a very young city, relatively speaking, so this is an old hotel by our standards – not by Polish standards or European standards. But it's also a place that – and over the years – has hosted many events such as this, events geared towards the cause of freedom and liberty around the world. We come here to many different events that have been about freedom and liberty, but obviously especially about Cuba.

And I say about the age of the hotel because it's hard to believe, as you were walking through the examples of Lech Walesa and the Polish experience, that communism is still a scourge, that it's still – despite its failure everywhere it's been tried, despite not just its economic failure, but its social failure, its destructive influence that it has on every society it's ever touched – it still remains a presence in different pockets of the world, and for those of us who live in this community and who have been raised in this community, just 90 miles from our shores.

Now, this – I – what I'm about to say is not a criticism of anybody. I have never lived in an oppressive regime. I have never – I've met – some of you have, but many of us have never lived or have been the target of political oppression at the level that is faced in Cuba. And so I don't mean this as a criticism to anyone, but frankly, many times it is – the moment comes where it's just easier to leave. It's easier to leave the country. Sometimes you're forced to do so by force; other times you traveled abroad and are not allowed to return.

What has always struck me about Berta Soler and those who join her is that she has refused to leave. Again, this is not a criticism of those who have left, because it's perfectly understandable that we – there comes a moment where perhaps you can be more successful and more effective from the outside than you are from the inside.

But her refusal to leave, her refusal to continue to live under the conditions that she lives under, which are incredibly oppressive, that deny her the basic rights, including the right to go to church every Sunday, is a source of incredible admiration for all of us. It's something we should all deeply admire and appreciate.

She is, despite – I think those of us who are involved in the cause of freedom and liberty know exactly who she is and what she's been about. I think more people need to know about what she's done, about how inspirational she is. You said something in your comments that was exactly right: This was not a political person. Frankly, political activism in Cuba is not something that's encouraged or rewarded, unless you're active on behalf of the regime and their so-called fake revolution. Her willingness to step forward because she identified and saw oppression, she saw wrongdoing, and was willing not just to raise her voice to criticize it but to actually take action against it in a peaceful way has defined the rest of her life and imposed on her tremendous cost for those – and for those around her.

Now, I do think that part of today's credit needs to go to so many who have supported her in this endeavor, and we're so grateful for your support to her now. And not just the prize that comes with it, which will certainly be put to good use, but just saying the name and telling the story in front of these cameras, in front of this audience, and in a way hopefully being noticed by more is an incredible sign to so many that – of what she's done and how special it truly is.

Freedom is not actually a natural human instinct. If you think and you study history, almost the entirety of human history has been defined by oppression. Few people up until just a couple hundred years ago even had a choice on who governed them. So if you look at the course of human history, freedom – freedom as we understand it: the freedom of speech, the freedom of expression, the freedom of religion – all these freedoms that I think we take for granted on a daily basis in our own lives are really not the norm. They've been the exception.

Now, what it tells you is that it lives in the human spirit, but has not been a part of the human behavior. And it's only in the last 200 to 300 years this very sort of new notion of rights that come from your creator, from God; rights that – governments that

actually work for the people, not the people that work for the government; the right to actually be able to have a voice and choose who governs over you – all these are incredibly new concepts. And what is true about human nature is that they are constantly being challenged. Over and over again, all over the world, time and again, we see that even when you make progress in democracy and in freedom, they have to be sustained and they have to endure. Where we draw our inspiration to do that is from people like Berta Soler who have confronted it. Look, again, I'm not being critical of anybody, but it is easier to be critical of a regime, like many of us are, on social media and in press releases. It's a lot harder to actually confront it in person with real consequences in your daily life.

And so we're here today to honor what she's done and what she continues to do. In so many ways, this is not just a plaque. This is an award that will go towards being able to continue to carry that out. And we are so grateful and honored that you are willing to do that here in south Florida with so many in this community who know this issue so well, have lived it. In many cases, just looking around at some of the faces, there are people here today who have also faced down this regime, who have also faced down oppression in Cuba or in their homelands and are living testaments to that level of bravery and courage.

So thank you for scheduling this here, for making it possible for me to be a part of it. I'm honored to be a part of it. We're grateful. I want to say one more point, and it's important: Your government in Poland has been an extraordinary ally in the cause of liberty and freedom. There are other countries that were liberated from the yoke of tyranny and can be helpful from time to time, but there is none in the world that's been more helpful, more steadfast, and more aligned with us, including in Cuba, than the Government of Poland.

And so we are grateful. I don't want to get anybody in trouble. I don't want to get ahead of myself, but we had a conversation just a few months ago about some events going on in Cuba. And I had asked for a favor. I had asked the Polish Government to help us with a few things globally and internationally. And it happened instantly and immediately, and it shows you that of all the nations in the world who have overcome the tyranny of communism, the one that most certainly hasn't forgotten what it took to overcome

it and have raised their voice and taken action to be supportive of those who seek to overcome it is our allies and friends in Poland. So thank you. We're very grateful to all of you. And thank you all for being a part of this today. Thank you.