

STARTUP CUBA

Cubanos Con Biden's Mike Rivero and Daniela Ferrara Want Dialogue

Even after being labelled communists by their conservative counterparts, this new generation of liberal Cuban American activists still think dialogue is the way ahead, together.

February 1, 2021 | By Ken Deckinger

I recently had a chance, on an unusual 52-degree day in Miami's Wynwood district, to sit down for an 8am cafecito (or six) with Daniela Ferrara and Mike Rivero of Cubanos Con Biden — now Cubanos Pa'lante. Formed last year on May 19th (Cuban Independence Day), Cubanos Con Biden is a grassroots activist group originally set up to educate Cuban American voters about the Biden/Harris ticket. Now that the election is over, the group is focused on inserting itself into the policy conversation in Miami with their new movement, Cubanos Pa'lante — a discussion typically driven by conservatives in the Cuban American community.

Young, full of energy, and forward thinking, Ferrara and Rivero represent the newest generation of Cuban Americans. It's a generation that's not without respect for their elders, just in complete disagreement with their politics. Daniela, who came to Miami on a boat from Cuba when she was three years old, tells me that she recognizes that the initial Cuban exiles laid the groundwork for the opportunities she has now. She's beyond grateful. That still doesn't stop her and Mike from their on-the-ground organizing around the issues that they believe will prop up Cuban Americans going forward: climate change, healthcare, education and... engagement with Cuba.

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Surprising to most, when it comes to Cuba, this new generation of political activists, and their new vehicle Cubanos Pa'lante, want virtually the same thing as the old guard that came before them — a free and open country. Yet, they believe that the better path to get there is through engagement. “A lot of people like to talk about, ‘well you know, [Donald Trump]... has actually been a true hardliner when it comes to Cuba policy.’ But where are the results?” Daniela Ferrara says. “Did the Cuban people actually gain more democracy? Did they gain more freedom? Did they gain more human rights under the last four years of Donald Trump? No. On the contrary.” She and Rivero tell me that

more and more frequently, emotionally driven abuelos in Miami are starting to harbor this same frustration and in confidence, they tell their grandchildren that they feel the same way.

While Cuba engagement is important to them, it's vital to note that neither Cubanos Con Biden or Cubanos Pa'lante is solely focused on that issue. It's just one of a portfolio of topics that they highlight. In fact, despite healthcare concerns and economic pressures in front of the Cuban American community, closing the gap with their conservative counterparts is priority for them. They believe that that's how to tackle the big issues impacting their community. It's for this reason that at the end of the day, CCB believes conversation is needed and must happen as a first step.

Sitting down to talk with those who don't agree with them is more difficult than it sounds, though. During the 2020 election, the Trump campaign successfully leveraged the community's painful past to create fear and split the group in the name of securing votes. Liberal Cuban Americans were labelled communists and were painted as the enemy. It's a tough road ahead. "The moment you approach to have that conversation, you're labelled a communist and there's no conversation to be had," Mike Rivero tells me.

"Are you a communist?" I ask.

Laughter ensues. Then in lock-step with Rivero, Ferrara, who has clearly been through this before, doesn't miss a beat and points me to the slogan on the back of Mike's T-shirt that reads, "100% anti-comunista, 100% anti-fascista, 100% anti-racista, 100% con Biden."

"Conversation: the only way to heal the divide."



This article was originally published on StartupCuba.tv on February 1, 2021. The original site is no longer active. This PDF has been archived by Cubanos Pa'lante to preserve our organization's history.

Original URL: <https://startupcuba.tv/2021/02/01/cubanos-con-biden-cubanos-palante-mike-rivero-daniela-ferrara-pursue-dialogue-with-conservatives-as-the-way-forward/>