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## US businessman says talked shop with Raul Castro's grandson



US businessman Vic Mellor says Raul Castro's grandson has a vision for 'opening up Cuba' (ADALBERTO ROQUE)

**AFP**  
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A US businessman and Republican congressional candidate told AFP Friday he discussed business opportunities with the grandson of former Cuban president Raul Castro in Havana at a critical time for US-Cuba relations.

Vic Mellor, who is running for election in Rhode Island in November, said he

spoke with Raul Guillermo Rodriguez Castro on Thursday night, during a several-day trip to Cuba that concluded Friday.

AFP was unable to immediately confirm that Mellor met with Rodriguez Castro.

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Despite not holding an official government position, the colonel and head of his grandfather's personal security has been identified by US media as playing a key role in ongoing talks between Cuba and the United States.

"I got to meet with Raul (Rodriguez Castro), and his vision for opening up Cuba with business, I align with it, I think Cuba needs it, I think the world needs it," Mellor told AFP.

"I think that it is time to move forward, it's time for change, and Raul believes this also," the 57-year-old added.

Havana-Washington relations, on life support following the imposition of a US energy blockade on the island in January, worsened with the unsealing of criminal charges against former Cuban president Castro by a Florida court last week.

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There are fears that the indictment, which relates to an incident dating back to 1996, could serve as a pretext for a US toppling of the Cuban government, as President Donald Trump has openly mused about seizing the island.

According to Mellor, Rodriguez Castro "is in communications with the United States government."

"He understands that a cooperation business-wise with the United States is key to the prosperity of Cuba," said the US Marine Corps veteran, who claims to run a dozen medical and media businesses across the US.

"As soon as the sanctions come down, there are many businesses that want to

come into Cuba and help bring prosperity here," Mellor said.

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Under US embargo since 1962, recent waves of sanctions by Washington on top of January's energy blockade have deepened Cuba's pre-existing economic crisis.

The congressional candidate described Cubans as "very resilient."

"They smile all the time, even with all the sanctions and the blackouts and everything else that's going on," he said.

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