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Ex-Flynn aide turned GOP candidate meets Raul Castro's grandson in Cuba



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Key Points

Rhode Island GOP congressional candidate Vic Mellor is acting as a self-appointed envoy to Cuba.

Mellor met with Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, the grandson of former Cuban leader Raúl Castro.

The State Department confirmed Mellor is not authorized to act on behalf of the U.S. government.

Editor's note: This story has been updated to include comment from the Cuban-American National Chamber of Commerce.

Vic Mellor positioned himself first as a leading GOP congressional candidate in Rhode Island, and now he adds a new title: self-appointed envoy to Cuba.

The morning of June 6, Mellor was back at Boston Logan airport for another trip to Havana, at a time when the United States is trying to tighten economic strings to [choke Cuba's government into change](#), and the country faces a deepening humanitarian catastrophe.

Mellor made a surprise visit to Havana in late May to deliver humanitarian supplies, and found himself at two lengthy dinners with Raúl "Raulito" Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, the grandson of the [newly indicted Raúl Castro](#) and a top political advisor. Mellor, an entrepreneur, is hoping to unseat Rhode Island Democratic incumbent Rep. Seth Magaziner.

A State Department spokesperson said Mellor, "is not authorized to speak on behalf of the United States government and is not involved in anything the administration is doing."

Mellor, who was chief of staff to [Gen. Mike Flynn](#) under President Donald Trump, initially told USA TODAY he was traveling at the urging of businessmen and investors who recently created the [Cuban-American National Chamber of Commerce in Miami](#). The vision of the organization, made up mostly of business leaders and investors, is a "future Cuba that is free and democratic." Mellor said he has not spoken to the State Department, White House or other diplomatic officials for his trip.

"I'm not back-channeling and I'm not going to circumvent Marco Rubio," Mellor, 57, told USA TODAY on June 6. "[Rubio's] been doing an amazing job. A conversation isn't betrayal. We're having an open dialogue. I don't see how I could hurt anybody."

The Miami-based group, CANCC, denied it directed Mellor's visits, and sent him a terse letter after reading Mellor's comments in the press.

"I cannot in stronger terms emphasize the fact that the Cuban-American National Chamber of Commerce (CANCC) did not in any way endorse or urge Mr. Vic Mellor's trip to Cuba to meet with Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro," Rafael V. Sixto, the group's vice president, wrote in an email to USA TODAY on June 9. "While Mr. Mellor has been present at two reunions as a guest of some other person other than at the invitation of CANCC, he is not a member of our organization...."

Sixto provided a copy of a letter the group sent to Mellor's campaign, stressing it "strongly opposes any meeting with any member of the current Cuban regime by anyone associated with CANCC. The Board has not endorsed your trip nor does it endorse any future trips of this nature, so please kindly inform the press in the future that your trip is not in any way tied to your association with CANCC."

Mellor knows his visit with the Castro regime struck a sensitive nerve with those who want the country to move on from the family being in charge.

Mellor said he had two meetings in late May that spanned several hours. Rodríguez Castro, the influential 41-year-old known as "El Cangrejo," the crab, laid out his vision for the future. Various members of the Castro clan were sanctioned in the latest round of [designations announced by the Treasury Department June 4](#).

"He's confident. He wants the Cuban people to prosper," Mellor said. "He kept saying it was an update, Cuba needs to update its policies."

Mellor said Rodríguez Castro confirmed he has spoken twice with Rubio and met once with CIA Director John Ratcliffe in recent months. One of the face-to-face meetings with Rubio was in [St. Kitts in early March](#).

Throughout his campaign, Mellor has defended his record as a Marine veteran, ties to Flynn and his participation in the January 6, 2021 pro-Trump march that turned into a riot. He said he believes both the U.S. and Cuba want prosperity. He acknowledged that he has no experience in diplomacy and wasn't negotiating. He said he feels like he's watching history unfold on the island.

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