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Bill Pushes to End 'Safe Haven' for American Fugitives in Cuba

Trenton, NJ -- Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ) today announced he is introducing the "No Safe Haven in Cuba Act," to return American fugitives from Cuba, including convicted cop killer Joanne Chesimard, also known as Assata Shakur.

"Right now, 90 miles off the United States coast, Federal fugitives, including convicted cop killer Joanne Chesimard, are immune from our system of justice. That is unacceptable," Rothman said. "We must make it clear that this nation will always hold those criminals accountable for their actions. That is why I am introducing the 'No Safe Haven in Cuba Act.'" Rothman's legislation will amend Section 206 of the Libertad Act of 1992 to state that the United States will not recognize a Cuban government as being democratic, unless it returns Joanne Chesimard, and all other American fugitives from justice in Cuba.

Chesimard was found guilty of first-degree murder for the 1973 slaying of New Jersey State Trooper Werner Foerster and was sentenced to life by a jury. In 1979, she escaped from the Reformatory for Women in Clinton, with the help of four men who took a guard and prison van driver hostage. After escaping, she fled to Cuba where she currently lives beyond the reach of U.S. law enforcement officials.

"I want Joanne Chesimard, and all fugitives from justice in Cuba to fear for the day that Cuba has a legitimate, democratically elected government," Rothman said. "Because on that day, U.S. Federal Marshals will land in Havana and return Joanne Chesimard to the United States to spend the rest of her life behind bars."

Rothman was joined at Tuesday's event by members of the New Jersey law enforcement and Cuban-American community. Colonel Carson Dunbar, Superintendent of the New Jersey State Police and Juan Gutierrez, Chairman, New Jersey Cuban-American National Foundation also called for Cuba to return American fugitives to the United States. According to the FBI, Cuba currently serves as a safe haven for at least 77 federal fugitives, including Frank Terpil, a former CIA agent who was an arms dealer and convicted on weapons charges and Victor Manual Gerena, an accused armed robber who is on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list.

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