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EDITORIAL

Papa's legacy

Don't let Hemingway's Cuban house become the last victim of the Cold War

Novelist Ernest Hemingway is a national treasure - in Cuba. It's shameful the U.S. government can't get past 40 years of Cold War paranoia and help preserve the author's legacy there.

Finca Vigía ("Lookout Farm"), the villa where Hemingway lived, has been a must-see attraction for the world's tourists, including the rare Americans whose travel passes the Treasury Department's test for "humanitarian and educational" purposes. The place remained just as it was when Hemingway left for medical treatment in the States in 1960: notes, letters, manuscripts, the weight and blood pressure readings he scratched on the wall, three typewriters, bullfight posters, a half-bottle of Gordon's gin, 9,000 books all mixed up on the shelves, the way he preferred.

Cubans believe the man's spirit is around. *Finca Vigía* certainly satisfied Hemingway. He lived there 21 years, longer than in Key West. The deep-sea fishing was good. And the stories still came, showing a softer, more fatalistic side of the aging man: "The Old Man and the Sea," which won the Nobel prize, "Islands in the Stream," "A Moveable Feast."

For years Hemingway scholars warned that *Finca Vigía* was crumbling in the tropical heat, with roof leaks, termite damage and mold. Cubans did what they could, and now, according to Ruth Morris of the South Florida Sun-Sentinel, they have launched an emergency effort to dry out walls and brace up sagging beams. Room decor and memorabilia have been put in safekeeping.

The Boston-based Hemingway Preservation Foundation offered fund-raising help, but was denied a license because Treasury ruled restoration was not educational but would unlawfully promote Cuban tourism. The foundation has been allowed to send a team of experts to make a feasibility study and will apply again for funding permission next year.

The Cuban emergency effort is costing about \$340,000, but the government estimates the complete job will cost \$3 million.

"But in a resource-deprived economy, the work may not be done at the highest standards," Jenny Phillips, co-founder of the preservation foundation, told the Sun-Sentinel. "That is why we feel a sense of urgency and responsibility to get on board."

Cuba is a poor country, a condition some U.S. policymakers - goaded by the small but vocal anti-Castro Cuban community in Miami - are intent on preserving. "We should be focusing on rebuilding the shattered lives of poor Cubans, rather than fixing buildings for one of the world's richest dictators, Fidel Castro," said Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla.

Sadly, the representative appears not to be a student of literature or she would know that Hemingway won the Nobel prize for his grasp of the universal in human affairs.

Book lovers at the Treasury Department should find a way to let Hemingway fans help preserve this shrine to "Papa." It's not for Fidel. It's for all of us.