

## Reports say Trump will soon close openings to Cuba under Obama

By Tom Whitney

On May 29 the Daily Caller [website revealed](#) that “President Donald Trump is set to announce a rollback of former President Barack Obama’s policies toward Cuba.” The report attributed the information to John Kavulich of the U.S. – Cuba Trade and Economic Council. He in turn had learned of change in the wind from “an anti-embargo group.”

The Daily Caller suggests the Trump administration is responding to pressure from Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL), Sen. Bob Menendez, (D-NJ), and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), all Cuban – American legislators.

[Reuters](#), The New York Times, and other news outlets soon echoed the initial report. There is agreement that the administration will probably announce new Cuba policies during June, although delay is possible.

In a June 1 [front page story](#) the Times suggests that the Trump administration will be alleging Cuban human rights abuses to justify this return to the past. Trump wants to “fulfill a pledge, delivered during a speech in Miami in September, to a crucial constituency that disproportionately supported him.”

Citing anonymous sources within the administration, the Times reporter claims that the expected executive actions will be targeting “American companies and firms that have ties to the Cuban military.” The story mentions Robert L. Muse, a lawyer knowledgeable about Cuban affairs, as predicting that the impact would be considerable, inasmuch as the Cuban Army’s reach extends throughout the Cuban economy.

Muse opined that, “This is a return to the old playbook of creating ambiguity and uncertainty so that nobody knows what is permissible and what isn’t, and it would add another level of legal exposure to doing business in Cuba.”

The Trump administration may be on the verge also of reversing President Obama’s easing of restrictions on Americans traveling to Cuba. And, as the Times reports, “the president is weighing an increase in funding for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for programs that promote democracy in Cuba.” Cuba, of course, tags these as U.S. interference with hostile intent in Cuban affairs.

But oddly, “USAID programs in Cuba ... aren’t funded under the Trump administration’s proposed State Department budget for Fiscal Year 2018,” according to [the Miami Herald](#).

According to “people familiar with the discussion,” who informed the New York Times, a split over the future direction of Trump’s Cuba policies has emerged between “senior officials” and Trump’s “legislative affairs operation.” The divide surfaced at a meeting in May organized by the National Security Council. In that meeting, the first group pointed to

advantages under current regulations that stem from “cooperation in intelligence-sharing, drug interdiction, scientific research and a host of other areas.”

Responding to the prospect of barriers reappearing, Engage Cuba, an organization representing U. S. businesses that seek working relations with Cuba, issued a [wide-ranging report](#) that spelled out adverse economic effects from any revamping of U. S. policies. Summarizing, it said that, “a reversal of Cuba policies would [within four years] cost the U.S. economy \$6.6 billion and affect 12,295 American jobs.” And national security interests would be threatened.

In a [June 5 editorial](#) highly critical of Trump administration changes presumably on the way, the New York Times referred to Engage Cuba’s dire projections. The group’s analysis, however, assumes that “the entire U.S. regulatory regime” is going to return. But the Trump administration has given no indication that such will be the case.

Academician William M. LeoGrande, an expert on the history of Cuba – U. S. negotiations, [commented in](#) January on the possibility of a reversal of Obama policies. He pointed to a paradox: the Trump administration would be acquiescing to the demands of Cuban – American politicians. But in the recent presidential election, far fewer Cuban – Americans voted for Trump in 2016 than voted for Republican candidates before 2012. Crucially, opinion surveys show that most Cuban – Americans want normal U.S. – Cuban relations.

Anticipating the reversal of some or all of President Obama’s reforms, [Senator Patrick Leahy](#) (D-VT) recently noted “[h]ow sadly ironic and short-sighted it would be if, soon after singing the praises of the repressive leaders of Russia, Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, President Trump were to return to a failed 55-year-old policy of sanctions and ultimatums against tiny Cuba.”

The Latin American Working Group (LAWG) is a Washington-based organization advocating for human rights in Latin America before Congress and the White House. The LAWG on May 30 called for agitation to prevent the Trump administration from reinstating Bush-era Cuba policies.

The LAWG is asking for calls or emails to senators, representatives, and to the White House. Readers can contact the White House at 202-456-1111 or 202-456-1414, or send an email to the address [here](#). The LAWG has scripts available for use in communicating. They are accessible at the link [here](#).

Now is a good time also to push congresspersons to support legislative proposals already introduced which would remove travel restrictions or ease the economic blockade. Here are links leading to articles summarizing the content of such proposals:

<http://www.cubatrademagazine.com/inside-congressional-push-loosen-embargo/>

<https://www.engagecuba.org/legislation/>

<http://www.peoplesworld.org/article/congress-needs-pressure-from-working-people-to-end-cuba-blockade/>