

4-17-94

THE WHITE HOUSE  
Office of the Press Secretary

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Internal Transcript

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT ON CUBA

THE PRESIDENT: I want to speak with you today about my Administration's plans to press forward with our efforts to promote a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba. A little more than a month ago, I took steps to stop the dangerous and illegal flow of Cubans attempting to enter the United States by sea. I want to report to you on the results of these steps and why I believe it was the right thing to do. But first, let me be clear, our commitment to a better future for the Cuban people remains as strong as ever.

Throughout our hemisphere, a powerful wave of democracy is bringing new respect for human rights, free elections and free markets. Thirty-four of the 35 countries in this region have embraced democratic change. Only one nation resists this trend: Cuba.

Cuba's system is at a dead end - politically, economically and spiritually. The Castro regime denies Cubans their most basic rights. They cannot choose their own leaders. At the same time, economic collapse threatens the well-being of every man, woman and child in Cuba.

The pressure of our embargo and the withdrawal of Soviet support have forced Cuba to adopt some economic measures of reform in the last two years. We haven't seen that before. But economic change remains slow, stubborn and painfully inadequate. The denial of basic rights and opportunities has driven tens of thousands of Cubans to desperation.

In the summer of 1994, thousands took to treacherous waters in unseaworthy rafts, seeking to reach our shores; an undetermined number actually lost their lives. In response, I ordered Cubans rescued at sea to be taken to safe haven at our naval base at Guantanamo and, for a time, in Panama. But this could not be a long-term solution. Last fall, I ordered that the young, the old and the infirm and their immediate families be admitted to our country. Thousands entered the United States in this way. Still, that left tens of thousands of young men at Guantanamo who were becoming increasingly frustrated and desperate. Senior United States military officials warned me that unrest and violence this summer were likely threatening both those in the camps and our own dedicated soldiers.

But to admit those remaining in Guantanamo without doing something to deter new rafters risked unleashing a new, massive exodus of Cubans - many of whom would perish seeking to reach the United States. To prevent that situation and to settle the migration issue, I took action. The Cuban rafters who were brought to Guantanamo last summer will be admitted to the United States, except those found to be inadmissible under U.S. law. Those Cubans rescued at sea while illegally trying to enter the United States will be taken back to Cuba. Under our generous program of legal immigration, 20,000 Cubans from Cuba will be allowed to enter and reside in the United States every year from now on. And we will continue to provide assistance to Florida to help resettle those Cuban migrants.

I know that many of you have questions about aspects of this policy. Yet, the simple truth is that there is no realistic alternative. We simply cannot admit all Cubans who seek to come here. We cannot let people risk their lives on open sea in unseaworthy rafts. And we cannot sentence thousands of young men to live in limbo at Guantanamo.

Our new policy is working. Since its beginning, on May 2nd, few Cubans have been intercepted at sea. We cannot know how many lives have been saved by the deterrent effect of this policy. But consider this: in May of last year, some 700 Cubans were picked up and many others were lost at sea. Our new policy can help to avoid uncontrolled migration and it's already saving lives.

At the same time, we are making every effort to protect those at risk in Cuba. We will not return rafters who we believe would suffer reprisals back in Cuba. The U.S. Interests Section in Havana is carefully monitoring those sent home, visiting each of them individually to ensure they are not harassed. And, thanks to our legal migration programs, over 15,000 Cubans have been approved to enter the United States since September 1994 as immigrants, parolees, and refugees - that is three times more than in any previous year.

In short, the actions we took address the serious humanitarian problem at Guantanamo, deter illegal and unsafe migration, protect political refugees and expand opportunities for legal admission from Cuba. They serve our national interests.

Regularizing Cuban migration also helps our efforts to promote a peaceful transition to democracy on the island. For too long, Castro has used the threat of uncontrolled migration to distract us from this fundamental objective. With the steps I have taken, we are now able to devote ourselves fully to our real, long-term goal.

Our policy is rooted in the Cuban Democracy Act, which I endorsed some three years ago and which subsequently was passed the Congress with bipartisan support. Consistent with the Act, the United States will maintain the economic embargo against the Cuban regime. This is an important way to promote change in Cuba, and it will remain in place until we see far-reaching political and economic reform. As provided in the Act, if Cuba takes steps in the direction of meaningful changes, we are prepared to respond with our own carefully calibrated response.

The Cuban Democracy Act also calls on us to support the Cuban people in their struggle for democracy and economic well-being. We believe that reach out today will nurture and strengthen the fledgling civil society that will be the backbone of tomorrow's democratic Cuba. We will continue to help Cuba's democratic opposition, and the churches, human rights organizations, and others seeking to exercise the political and economic rights that should belong to all Cubans.

Throughout the Americas, dictatorships have given way to democracy. They are following the path of reconciliation and forgiveness preached by Cuba's first Cardinal, Jaime Ortega, during his recent visit here to the United States. Cuba will follow this course of its neighbors. With the support of the American people and their representatives in Congress, we can move toward our common goal of a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba. I hope that it will be my privilege as President to welcome a free Cuba back into the community of democratic nations.

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THE WHITE HOUSE  
Office of Media Affairs

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 26, 1995

\*\* MEDIA ADVISORY \*\*

PRESIDENT CLINTON ADDRESSES CUBAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Washington, D.C. -- In a videotaped message to the Cuban American community, President Clinton will discuss his recent efforts to stem the dangerous migration of Cuban rafters across the Florida straits and reiterate his commitment to peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba.

The President's message will be released on Tuesday, June 27 at 11:00 a.m. EDT.

\*\*\*\* SATELLITE COORDINATES \*\*\*\*

TIME: 11:00 a.m. EDT Tuesday, 6/27

C Band

Galaxy 3

Transponder 2 vertical

Downlink frequency 3740 MHz

Audio 6.2/6.8

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