

## **ICE BREAKS IN CUBA-U.S. AFFAIRS**

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

July 15, 2009 Wednesday, 4 State / Suncoast Edition

Copyright 2009 Times Publishing Company All Rights Reserved

**Section:** NATIONAL; Pg. 2A

**Length:** 494 words

**Byline:** DAVID ADAMS, Times Latin America Correspondent

**Highlight:** After a five-year suspension, talks resume on immigration, opening the door to more dialogue.

### **Body**

---

The United States and Cuba are back on talking terms.

After a five-year **break**, delegations from the two countries met in New York on Tuesday to resume immigration talks designed to "promote safe, legal and orderly migration between Cuba and the United States."

The twice-annual migration talks, **broken** off by the Bush administration in 2004, are seen by analysts as a possible steppingstone for improved relations.

Until they were suspended, the talks were the highest profile face-to-face encounters between the two governments. Direct contact with Cuba's government is a divisive issue in South Florida's Cuban exile community, though polls suggest strong support for easing migration to and from the island. The renewal of migration talks follows President Barack Obama's decision in April to authorize travel and money transfers to the island by Cuban-Americans.

"We applaud the talks," said Silvia Wilhelm, with the Miami-based Cuban American Commission for Family Rights. "They could very well evolve into all kinds of different issues that need to be addressed."

In a brief statement, the State Department hinted at broadening the dialogue. "Engaging in these talks underscores our interest in pursuing constructive discussions with the government of Cuba to advance U.S. interests on issues of mutual concern," it stated.

But hardliners say Washington should demand greater concessions from Havana before re-establishing a dialogue. "Once again, the Cuban regime is being rewarded with overtures from the U.S. government despite its ongoing atrocities against the Cuban people," said Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Miami.

The migration talks stem from agreements in 1994-95 that put an end to the dramatic "rafter crisis," which saw about 40,000 Cubans take to the Straits of Florida in homemade rafts.

Under the accords, the United States agreed to issue 20,000 visas to Cubans annually, through a family reunification program. Those who left illegally and were picked up at sea were repatriated by the U.S. Coast Guard.

The rafts were soon replaced by smugglers using Miami-based speedboats and charging \$10,000 a head. Several overloaded boats have been lost at sea, including one believed to have been carrying 42 people.

There has been constant friction over the accords. Cuba says U.S. policy encourages Cubans to attempt the dangerous voyage, while Washington blames the lack of freedoms in communist Cuba.

## ICE BREAKS IN CUBA-U.S. AFFAIRS

Despite long delays in processing visas, the program has begun to function smoothly thanks to improved cooperation by both sides. The U.S. Attorney's Office in Miami has cracked down severely on smugglers. The State Department last year also introduced measures to accelerate the issuing of visas.

This year the Coast Guard has seen a 70 percent drop in Cubans intercepted at sea. Between October last year and June 2009, only 577 were picked up, compared with 1,628 over the same period in the previous year.

David Adams can be reached at [dadams@sptimes.com](mailto:dadams@sptimes.com)

## Classification

---

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Subject:** HISPANIC AMERICANS (90%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (89%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (89%); ANTI-CASTRO CUBANS (76%); TALKS & MEETINGS (75%); IMMIGRATION (75%); STATE DEPARTMENTS & FOREIGN SERVICES (75%); PUBLIC POLICY (74%); AGREEMENTS (72%); INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (71%); FOREIGN POLICY (68%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2012 (66%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2008 (66%); FAMILY (64%); SMUGGLING (60%)

**Industry:** MARINE VESSELS (64%)

**Person:** ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN (79%); BARACK OBAMA (68%)

**Geographic:** MIAMI, FL, USA (93%); HAVANA, CUBA (57%); FLORIDA, USA (94%); NEW YORK, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (98%); CUBA (96%)

**Load-Date:** July 15, 2009