

The President's Weekly Address February 20, 2016

Hi, everybody. This week, we made it official: I'm going to Cuba. When Michelle and I go to Havana next month, it will be the first visit of a U.S. President to Cuba in nearly 90 years. And it builds on the decision I made more than a year ago to begin a new chapter in our relationship with the people of Cuba.

You see, I believe that the best way to advance American interests and values and the best way to help the Cuban people improve their lives is through engagement: by normalizing relations between our governments and increasing the contacts between our peoples. I've always said that change won't come to Cuba overnight. But as Cuba opens up, it will mean more opportunity and resources for ordinary Cubans. And we're starting to see some progress.

Today, the American flag flies over our Embassy in Havana and our diplomats are interacting more broadly with the Cuban people. More Americans are visiting Cuba than at any time in the last 50 years—Cuban American families, American students, teachers, humanitarians, volunteers, faith communities—all forging new ties and friendships that are bringing our countries closer. And when direct flights and ferries resume, even more of our citizens will have the chance to travel and work together and know each other.

American companies are starting to do business in Cuba, helping to nurture private enterprise and giving Cuban entrepreneurs new opportunities. With new Wi-Fi hotspots, more Cubans are starting to go online and get information from the outside world. In both our countries, there's overwhelming support for this new relationship. And in Cuba today, for the first time in a half century, there is hope for a different future, especially among Cuba's young people who have such extraordinary talent and potential just waiting to be unleashed.

My visit will be an opportunity to keep moving forward. I'll meet with President Castro to discuss how we can continue normalizing relations, including making it easier to trade and easier for Cubans to access the Internet and start their own businesses. As I did when I met President Castro last year, I'll speak candidly about our serious differences with the Cuban Government, including on democracy and human rights. I'll reaffirm that the United States will continue to stand up for universal values like freedom of speech and assembly and religion.

I'll meet with members of Cuba's civil society, courageous men and women who give voice to the aspirations of the Cuban people. I'll meet with Cuban entrepreneurs to learn how we can help them start new ventures. And I'll speak directly to the Cuban people about the values we share and how I believe we can be partners as they work for the future they want.

We're still in the early days of our new relationship with the Cuban people. This transformation will take time. But I'm focused on the future, and I'm confident that my visit will advance the goals that guide us: promoting American interests and values and a better future for the Cuban people, a future of more freedom and more opportunity.

Thanks, everybody. And to the people of Cuba: *Nos vemos en La Habana.*

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 11:10 a.m. on February 19 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on February 20. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 19, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on February 20. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.