

I No Cigars Since Raul Castro seems to be transitioning to a more permanent position of power, the administration has begun talking about Cuba policy again. One would think we would be able to survey the results of the last 45 years and come to logical conclusions. Changing course never seems to be an option, however, no matter how futile or counterproductive our past actions have been. The Cuban embargo began officially in 1962 as a means to put pressure on the communist dictatorship to change its ways. After 45 years, the Cuban economy has struggled, but Cuba's dictatorship is no closer to stepping to the beat of our drum. Any ailments have consistently and successfully been blamed on US Capitalism instead of Cuban Communism. They have substituted trade with others for trade with the US, and are "awash" with development funds from abroad. Our isolationist policies with regards to Cuba, meanwhile, have hardly won the hearts and minds of Cubans or Cuban-Americans, many of whom are isolated from families because this political animosity. In the name of helping Cubans, the US administration is calling for "multibillions" of taxpayer dollars in foreign aid and subsidies for internet access, education and business development for Cubans under the condition that the Cuban government demonstrates certain changes. In the same breath, they claim lifting the embargo would only help the dictatorship. This is exactly backwards. Free trade is the best thing for people in both Cuba and the US. Government subsidies would enrich those in power in Cuba at the expense of already overtaxed Americans! The irony of supposed Capitalist, free-marketeers inducing Communists to freedom with government hand-outs should not be missed. We call for a free and private press in Cuba while our attempts to propagandize Cubans through the US government run Radio/TV Marti has wasted \$600 million in American taxpayer dollars. It's time to stop talking solely in terms of what's best for the Cuban people. How about the wishes of the American people, who are consistently in favor of diplomacy with Cuba? Let's stop the hysterics about the freedom of Cubans – which is not our government's responsibility – and consider freedom of the American people, which is. Americans want the freedom to travel and trade with their Cuban neighbors, as they are free to travel and trade with Vietnam and China. Those Americans who do not wish to interact with a country whose model of governance they oppose are free to boycott. The point being – it is Americans who live in a free country, and as free people we should choose who to buy from or where to travel, not our government. Our current administration is perceived as irrelevant, at best, in Cuba and the message is falling on deaf ears there. If the administration really wanted to extend the hand of friendship, they would allow the American people the freedom to act as their own ambassadors through trade and travel. Considering the lack of success government has had in engendering friendship with Cuba, it is time for government to get out of the way and let the people reach out.