

Beat: Politics

Obama to travel to Cuba in March.

Obama.

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USPA NEWS - Pres. Barack Obama will make a historic visit to Cuba "in the coming weeks," the culmination of his efforts to end a half-century of tensions between Havana and Washington, a senior administration official said late Wednesday.

"We can confirm that tomorrow the administration will announce the president's travel to Latin America, including Cuba, in the coming weeks," the official said on condition of anonymity. ABC had first reported the news, saying that the trip would take place in late March.

The trip "the only one by a sitting U.S. president since 1928" was bound to draw sharp criticism from Republican candidates for the White House, who oppose Obama's efforts to move the relationship past the antagonisms of the Cold War.

At a CNN town hall, Anderson Cooper asked Republican senator and White House hopeful Marco Rubio whether he would go to Cuba. "Not if it's not a free Cuba," replied Rubio, one of two Cuban-Americans in the running for the GOP presidential nomination in 2016.

In an exclusive interview with Yahoo News in December, the president had said that he would only travel to Cuba if he could be certain to meet pro-democracy dissidents there.

"If I go on a visit, then part of the deal is that I get to talk to everybody," Obama said. "I've made very clear in my conversations directly with President [Raul] Castro that we would continue to reach out to those who want to broaden the scope for, you know, free expression inside of Cuba."

On Dec. 17, 2014, Obama and Raul Castro stunned the world by disclosing that they had held secret negotiations and were prepared to usher in a new era of U.S.-Cuba relations, starting with the resumption of full diplomatic ties. Embassies reopened in Havana and Washington, the United States removed Cuba from its list of state sponsors of terrorism, and the two sides took steps to increase travel and business opportunities.

The U.S. and Cuba: One Year Later

Obama has undertaken many changes using his executive powers, and he indicated in the interview that he would continue looking at ways to do so in 2016. But Obama needs Congress to roll back the centerpiece of America's Cold War-era pressure on Cuba and lift the U.S. trade embargo.

At the same time, the White House has been working on ways to make the policy "irreversible," should a Republican win the presidency in November.

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