



# WEEKLY UPDATE

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE DNC COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT

December 19, 2014

## President on U.S.-Cuba Relations

This week, the President announced that the United States is changing its relationship with the people of Cuba. The President emphasized that although the United States and Cuba have a complicated history, it is time to end our outdated approach and begin to normalize relations between the two countries.

President Obama also addressed the promise he made to the American people when he first took office to re-examine the United States' policy towards Cuba. His statement followed the release of a US intelligence agent along with US citizen and USAID sub-contractor Alan Gross who was wrongfully imprisoned in Cuba for five years.



View the President's statement [here](#).

The new policies will have four major components: re-establish diplomatic relations, adjust regulations to more effectively empower the Cuban people, facilitate an expansion of travel to Cuba, and authorize expanded sales and exports of certain goods and services from the United States to Cuba.

This shift in policy towards Cuba comes at a time of renewed leadership in the Americas. President Obama also stated that Cuba will be joining the other nations of the hemisphere at the Summit of the Americas next April.

Addressing the people of Cuba, President Obama said "To the Cuban people, America extends a hand of friendship. Some of you have looked to us as a source of hope, and we will continue to shine a light of freedom...Today, I am being honest with you. We can never erase the history between us, but we believe that you should be empowered to live with dignity and self-determination. Cubans have a saying about daily life: 'No es facil' – it's not easy. Today, the United States wants to be a partner in making the lives of ordinary Cubans a little bit easier, more free, more prosperous." The new policies implemented are to ensure that more resources are able to reach the Cuban people and increased commerce will help American businesses.

President Obama also mentioned the vital role that Pope Francis played in bringing the United States and Cuba together as well as showing the importance of pursuing the world as it should be. President Obama said that he looks forward to engaging Congress in an honest and serious debate about lifting the embargo on Cuba. By creating a more open environment, the President wishes that Cuba will take their own steps to "...provide more access to the Internet for its citizens, and to continue increasing engagement with international institutions like the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross that promote universal values."

By taking this historic step, we are renewing our leadership in the Americas and moving forward to reach a better future for both the American people and for the Cuban people.

## **GOP Leaders vs. the American People: Cuba Edition**

This week, the President announced groundbreaking developments regarding the United States' relations with Cuba that will benefit the Cuban and American people and their pursuit of prosperity and economic opportunity.

Before the President even announced the new policy – [Republicans jumped to criticize](#) the to-be-announced policy. This shouldn't come as a shock to any considering their knee-jerk opposition to anything proposed by this President.

However, while the President laid out a thoughtful rationale for the shift in US foreign policy (changes supported by a majority of the American people), Republicans continue to embrace the Cold War-era policy that most Americans are anxious to move beyond.

### **Jeb Bush**

Doesn't believe the United States should negotiate with Cuba and supports continuing the 50 year old Cuba embargo that has shown few results.

### **Marco Rubio**

Called the announcement "inexplicable" before he decided to chide Pope Francis (which should go over well with the 88% of American Catholics who approve of the Pope), and spoke out forcefully against negotiating for the release of Alan Gross and relaxing relations.

### **Mike Pence**

Pence previously spoke out against **any** negotiations with the Cuban government – like those that just earned the freedom of Alan Gross.

### **Paul Ryan**

Ryan was against the Cuban embargo before he was for it – evolving to a position that is at odds with the American people.

### **Scott Walker**

Walker called President Obama's updating of relations with Cuba a "bad idea" – again at odds with the majority of Americans.

### **Ted Cruz**

Cruz said the President's announcement on Cuba "will be remembered as a tragic mistake."

### **Bobby Jindal**

Jindal said, "Congress should do everything it can to stop the President's plan."

The American people simply disagree.

- [In every Gallup poll since 1999](#), Americans have wanted to normalize relations with Cuba.
- [77%](#) of the country believes we should work with Cuba to address issues important to both nations.
- [62%](#) of Americans support allowing more American companies to do business in Cuba.
- [More than 60%](#) of Americans support removing restrictions on travel to Cuba.

And this includes Cubans themselves...

- [90%](#) of young Cubans in the Miami Dade area support diplomatic relations with Cuba.
- Support for allowing unrestricted travel to Cuba has grown to 69% among Cubans in South Florida.
- And 2012 exit polling shows that President Obama won Florida Cuban voters — even while campaigning on a promise to review US foreign policy towards Cuba.

While Republicans continue to live in the past, President Obama is looking to the future to create more opportunity for Americans and Cubans alike.

### [More Good News on the Economy](#)

There is no denying it. Each week we continue to see signs of our strengthening and improving economy. Two weeks ago the November jobs report beat expectations with the country adding 321,000 jobs, the highest single month of job creation in nearly three years. And this week, we're seeing even more news on our improving economy:

- The Labor Department announced that the number of Americans requesting unemployment benefits has dropped, and [according to the AP](#), this is **"a sign of solid job security and growing confidence among employers."**
  - Additionally, the average number of unemployment benefit applications has fallen 13% this year, which is a sign that the job market is improving.
- [According to the Bloomberg Consumer Comfort Index](#), consumer confidence rose last week to a **seven-year high** as the economy continues to improve and gas prices fall.
- And [on Tuesday, the U.S. Energy Information Administration announced](#) that the **average American household is expected to spend \$550 less on gasoline** in 2015, and gas prices are on track to reach their lowest level in 11 years.

With the hard work of the American people and the President's policies in place, Democrats will continue to fight for common sense proposals to help grow our economy in 2015 and beyond.

### [Christie promises 'new era' of transparency... How'd that turn out?](#)



Watch "Christie Promises New Era of Transparency in 2010" [here](#).

Nearly five years ago, Chris Christie became governor promising "a new era of accountability and transparency" in New Jersey.

Well, how'd that turn out? Read the New York Times article below.

#### ***[NYT: New Jersey Paying Fees to a Financial Firm That Employs Christie's Wife](#)***

By Kate Zernike // Dec. 17, 2014

New Jersey has paid about \$470,000 in management fees to a financial firm that employs the wife of Gov. [Chris Christie](#) in the years she has been working there, a vestige of an investment the state's pension fund made before the governor took office.

The fees were reported on Wednesday by the [International Business Times](#), which filed a public records request seeking the information.

New Jersey's [State Investment Council](#), which oversees investments of state pension funds, invested \$150 million in a hedge fund run by the firm [Angelo Gordon & Company](#) in 2006, under the administration of Gov. Jon S. Corzine, a Democrat.

In October 2011, nearly two years after Mr. Christie, a Republican, took office, state investment officials sent a letter to the company requesting that the state's capital in the fund, known as A. G. Garden Partners, be returned by the end of the year.

But the state continues to have \$6.8 million in what officials called "illiquid" assets in the fund. State officials said they could not identify the assets, but a spokesman for Mr. Christie said that they "could not be sold without a significant loss to New Jersey taxpayers." In general, assets are illiquid if they could be sold only at a fire-sale price or if legal agreements preclude terminating the investment before a certain date.

The fund has slowly returned the state's investment. The state had \$11.1 million invested in October 2012, and \$9.3 million last year.

The state does not disclose its partnership agreements, but the spokesman for the governor said that under the rules of the original agreement, the money from the fund was to be returned as Angelo Gordon sold off investments. That agreement gave the fund "investment discretion" to sell off assets and said that the company was "entitled to receive management fees and performance-based compensation" for assets it was working to sell.

The state paid \$1.8 million in management fees to Angelo Gordon in 2007, the first full year it invested in the firm, and as much as \$2.5 million in 2011, according to records provided to the International Business Times.

Those fees declined with the size of the investment; New Jersey paid \$255,470 in management fees to Angelo Gordon in 2012, \$132,347 last year and \$82,819 through September of this year.

Mr. Christie's wife, Mary Pat Christie, formerly a bond trader with Cantor Fitzgerald, began working at Angelo Gordon in September 2012, as a managing director for strategic planning and marketing, focusing on bank debt and distressed funds. A specific breakdown of how much the state paid Angelo Gordon from the time she arrived in 2012 through the end of that year was not available. Mrs. Christie earned \$475,854 at Angelo Gordon in 2013, according to the couple's tax filings.

In 2010, Mr. Christie named a longtime adviser and private equity investor, Robert Grady, as head of the State Investment Council. Mr. Grady steered more of the state's pension money into hedge funds and other investments, which can have higher returns but also charge higher fees than traditional pension investments.

In September, the state's largest union, the A.F.L.-C.I.O., filed an [ethics complaint](#) against Mr. Grady, accusing him of bringing politics into the pension investments, after reports by the International Business Times and [Pando Daily](#) that executives of some of those firms had donated to state and national Republican groups that helped Mr. Christie.

Mr. Grady, who has commuted from Wyoming to serve on the council, stepped down in November, but continues to play a prominent role as a political adviser to Mr. Christie as the governor considers a run for president.

The acting chairman of the investment council, Thomas Byrne, said on Wednesday that he did not know what the illiquid assets were, but that it is standard to pay fees so long as money is invested.

"We're a limited partner in this investment and we simply don't have any power to tell the general partner how quickly to liquidate an illiquid investment," said Mr. Byrne, a Democrat.

## **DNC Chair Rep. Wasserman Schultz's Statement Celebrating the Beginning of Chanukah**

**Washington, DC** – Tuesday night marked the beginning of Chanukah. In recognition of that occasion, DNC Chair Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz released the following statement:

"Tonight, my family will join Jewish families across the country and around the world in beginning the celebration of Chanukah. As we gather with family and loved ones, we remember the great miracle that occurred more than two thousand years ago, and appreciate the little miracles that occur in our lives every day. Each candle we light reminds us that acts of justice and righteousness can prevail even in the darkest times of trouble and adversity.

"This is a time of year in which Americans come together with those closest to them to celebrate in their respective faiths and traditions. We take time to count our blessings from the previous year, express our gratitude for those we love, and embark on new beginnings in the year ahead. We are mindful of those less fortunate, and rededicate ourselves to building an America in which all families can enjoy our nation's opportunities and successes.

"From my family to yours, I wish you a blessed holiday season and a happy new year."

### **In the States**

- On Tuesday, Indiana Democratic Party Chair John Zody requested that Governor Mike Pence update the people of Indiana on matters such as the creation of the Governor's Management and Performance Hub in the Statehouse, the implications of the Tax Competitiveness and Simplification Conference, and the issues within the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. Chairman Zody released the following statement: "Almost every week recently, Hoosiers have seen news coming out of the Statehouse about a new ethics or management problem with Republicans legislators or the Pence Administration. The governor continues to say little about it while he tells the *Washington Post* what he thinks the next GOP Presidential nominee should look like." Read the full press release [here](#).
- On Wednesday, Iowa Democratic Party Chair Scott Brennan released the following statement in response to Governor Bobby Jindal's trip to Iowa tonight: "I hope Governor Jindal isn't expecting a warm welcome in Polk County today. Between massive budget shortfalls, high poverty levels, and low-income rates, Jindal has already proven himself to be a failed Governor and poor leader. Simply put: Iowans don't need and can't afford his Louisiana way of governing." Read the full press release [here](#).
- On Wednesday, New Hampshire Democratic Party Chair Ray Buckley released the following statement in response to Bill O'Brien moving to set up a shadow organization that will put forth its own radical anti-middle class agenda: "With the 'kinder, gentler' Bill O'Brien hoax now a distant memory, O'Brien's latest power grab shows once again that he will always put his own interests first, no matter who gets hurt." Read the full press release [here](#).
- On Thursday, Michigan Democratic Party Chair Lon Johnson renewed previous calls for an independent audit into Snyder's housing agency, MDOT, MDHS, and the Treasure Department, in response to a Snyder Administration audit indicting the directors of those departments for failing to exercise their duties on the MSHDA board. Michigan Democratic Party Chair Lon Johnson released the following statement: "It's troubling that a weeks-long internal audit would barely uncover any details about out of control abuse of public funds on luxury hotels, gourmet food, international flights by Scott Woosley and other unnamed top officials at Snyder's housing agency." Read the full press release [here](#).
- This week, in response to Jeb Bush's announcement that he will actively explore a run for president, Florida Democratic Party Chair Allison Tant released the following statement: "Seriously? If Jeb Bush hasn't been exploring running for president for months, what has he been doing? This latest tease to the media has more to do with keeping his name in the headlines than actually hearing about the challenges Americans are facing." Read the full press release [here](#).