



— EXCLUSIVE —

U.S. AND CUBA: WHAT'S NEXT?



Is the honeymoon between Havana and Washington over? Cuban Ambassador José Ramón Cabañas Rodríguez, in his first-ever exclusive interview with any U.S. media outlet, talks about President Obama's historic détente with America's former Cold War adversary — and whether Donald Trump will put a chill on warming bilateral relations. / **PAGE 11**



SPECIAL REPORT

Trump, GOP Take Aim at Dismantling Obama's Legacy

As the 44th president packs up his belongings to start a new life, Barack Obama is not only leaving behind the cushy confines of the White House, he's also leaving behind a historic — yet highly vulnerable — legacy. The big question now is: How much of it will Donald Trump undo? In this comprehensive special report, we examine the signature achievements Obama has pushed through, from the Iran nuclear deal to Obamacare to the Asia pivot, and how much of them will fall prey to his Republican successor and a GOP-controlled Congress. / **PAGE 4**

Culture



Unorthodox Icelander Has First U.S. Survey

Prolific Icelandic performance artist Ragnar Kjartansson is enjoying the first U.S. survey of his unconventional work at the Hirshhorn. / **PAGE 28**

'Diplomacy by Design'

Design Event Showcases Power of Fashion

"Fashion is everywhere," said U.S. Protocol Chief Peter Selfridge, whose office co-hosted a first-ever "Diplomacy by Design" event with Elle magazine to showcase the universal power of fashion to transcend borders and politics. / **PAGE 17**



Diplomatic Spouses

Ghana Wife Serves by Volunteering

Douha Smith, wife of a long-time military officer who is now Ghana's ambassador to the U.S., has spent her life volunteering for various organizations, most recently serving as the re-elected president of the D.C.-based Spouses of African Ambassadors Association. / **PAGE 29**



Cuba Romance on Ice

Havana Basks in Renewed Ties with Washington, But Will Honeymoon Last?

BY LARRY LUXNER

This month marks two years since President Obama and his Cuban counterpart, Raúl Castro, surprised the world with their announcement — at noon on Dec. 17, 2014 — that Washington and Havana would restore full diplomatic ties after over 50 years of enmity.

But the budding friendship between these two former Cold War adversaries could come to a screeching halt if Donald Trump gets his way.

Just as he has threatened to gut Obamacare, pull the United States out of NAFTA, rip up the multilateral Iran nuclear agreement and end all U.S. efforts to combat climate change (see related stories on pages 4 and 10), the president-elect has also vowed to reverse his predecessor's rapprochement with Cuba and stop Americans from traveling there — as they've begun to do in large numbers since the relaxation of arcane U.S. laws dating from the early 1960s.

In September, Trump, at a campaign stop in Miami, outlined his Cuba policy, promising to roll back one of the president's signature foreign policy achievements.

"All of the concessions Barack Obama has granted the Castro regime were done through executive order, which means the next president can reverse them, and that I will do unless the Castro regime meets our demands," he told an adoring crowd of hardline Cuban exiles. "Not my demands. Our demands," he added, referring to long-standing U.S. calls for Cuba to release political prisoners and ensure religious freedom.

Would the billionaire real estate developer actually follow up on those threats?

We put that question to José Ramón Cabañas Rodríguez, who arrived in Washington in 2012 as chief of the Cuban Interests Section but officially became Cuba's "embajador" on Sept. 17, 2015, once relations had been upgraded.

"Technically speaking, any president, whoever it is, can reverse any executive action taken by the previous president," said Cabañas. "If we take one subject, let's say travel, companies are involved now that weren't involved before. Remember that a few years ago, when tourism arrivals were not even comparable, a few politicians from South Florida essentially tried to reverse the advances, but politically speaking, they couldn't deliver because the majority of South Florida's population now supports travel to Cuba."

Pushed further about what President Trump might do or not do come Jan.



PHOTO: LAWRENCE RUGGERI

“Some people think we're moving too slow, others think we're too fast. But for me, the core issue is the way we have been able to talk with respect.”

JOSÉ RAMÓN CABAÑAS RODRÍGUEZ

ambassador of Cuba to the United States

20, 2017, Cabañas declined to say.

"We are not in the business of speculating what could happen," he told *The Washington Diplomat* in our meeting, which took place barely a week after one of the most divisive, bitter presidential campaigns in U.S. history. "We've been through this process 12 times. We're used to it."

Curiously, not once in our hour-long conversation did Cabañas utter Donald Trump's name. It's clear that Cuba's ambassador to the United States didn't get where he is by speaking off the cuff or getting himself in trouble.

What's also clear is that Cabañas, in his first-ever exclusive interview with any U.S. media outlet, relishes his role as Cuba's envoy to the United States at a pivotal time in bilateral history. After all, the 55-year-old diplomat was born in 1961 — only two years after Fidel Castro's rise to power and the same year as the Bay of Pigs fiasco — so in some sense, Cabañas has waited his entire professional life for this moment.

"It was Dec. 17, 2014, when both President Obama and President Raúl

Castro made the announcement at 12 noon. They surprised everybody," he said. "We were a little bit surprised too, as we were not involved in the secret negotiations."

Those delicate talks, in which the Vatican played a key role, culminated in the release of Alan Gross — a Maryland resident and subcontractor for the U.S. government who had been imprisoned in Cuba for five years on subversion charges — in exchange for the return of three convicted Cuban spies serving long sentences in U.S. jails.

That paved the way to begin the long process of repairing relations between the two countries, which are separated in the Florida Strait by only 90 miles of ocean.

On May 29, 2015, the State Department finally took Cuba off its list of state sponsors of terrorism where it had been for 33 years, and on July 20 that year, Cabañas and his staff triumphantly raised the Cuban flag over their stately mission on 16th Street, which up until that point had officially been an annex of the Swiss Embassy.

Less than a month later, the Stars and Stripes went up over the six-story U.S. mission along Havana's Malecón waterfront at an emotional ceremony led by Secretary of State John Kerry.

HISTORIC RAPPROCHEMENT

Since then, there's been a flurry of developments, including Obama's historic trip to Havana — the first by a sitting president since Calvin Coolidge visited Cuba in 1928 — and a loosening of restrictions on commerce, trade and travel with the communist island. For example, the changes now allow Americans to use U.S.-issued credit and debit cards on the island and companies to invest in certain small businesses in Cuba and even ship building materials to private Cuban companies.

No longer are Cuban diplomats prevented from traveling more than 25 miles from Washington, D.C. (a similar restriction also applied to U.S. diplomats in Havana). Cabañas may now travel wherever he wants and meet anyone he wishes to meet.

"At the personal level, the most important change in the last two years is that we have been able to talk to the United States with respect and reciprocity," the ambassador said. "Before that, we were talking only with the State Department. Now we talk with the departments of energy, education, transportation, you name it. There were

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Cuba

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also restrictions on our movement. We had to not only notify the State Department of our travel plans but also ask for permission. And in my case, that permission was not always given. And during the Bush administration, permissions were not even requested; our diplomats stayed inside the Beltway all the time.”

Cabañas also noted the signing of 13 memoranda of understanding, including the establishment of direct flights between the two countries (also see “Cuba Opens Itself to American Travelers, But Change Won’t Come Overnight” in the October 2016 issue).

In fact, U.S. travel to Cuba is up 80 percent this year compared to 2015. The ease with which average Americans can now go online and book \$99 flights via JetBlue, Frontier and American from South Florida to nearly a dozen Cuban cities is a far cry from just a few years ago, when such travel was unthinkable and prohibitively expensive.

“And by the beginning of December, we will have direct flights to Havana,” Ca-

bañas noted.

And that’s not all, according to the ambassador.

“We will sign an MOU on law enforcement. It’s a conversation that encompasses 12 U.S. agencies and several Cuban institutions,” he said. “There are now three contracts for management of Cuban hotels, and we’re now waiting for a fourth license. There’s also an MOU on health care. What we can do in health is endless.

“Other countries have taken several years [to do] what we have done in a few months,” Cabañas said. “Some people think we’re moving too slow, others think we’re too fast. But for me, the core issue is the way we have been able to talk with respect.”

On that front, the U.S. took a symbolically important step Oct. 26 when — for the first time in 25 years — it abstained in the U.N. General Assembly’s annual ritual condemning the U.S. trade embargo, instead of casting its traditional “no” vote. Previous votes had always delivered lopsided victories for the Cuban side, with only a few countries — generally Israel and a handful of Pacific microstates — siding with the United States on the issue.

“This exercise takes place year after year. The fact the U.S. abstained this time is

an expression of the belief that the embargo is a failed policy,” said Cabañas, citing Cuban government estimates that the “blockade,” as it’s known in Cuba, has cost the island’s economy more than \$750 billion since its inception. “We believe that the executive power has the capacity to make changes, but some fundamental limits have to be removed by Congress.”

Indeed, despite the historic détente that Obama has orchestrated, the trade embargo remains firmly in place and, thanks to the Helms-Burton Act of 1996, can only be repealed by Congress.

America’s decades-old policy of economically isolating the island has failed to oust the communist regime from power and has been a source of worldwide derision. A growing number of Americans has also begun to question the usefulness of what many consider to be an outdated relic of the Cold War. But Congress is unlikely to lift the embargo any time soon. A core group of Republicans and Democrats, backed by influential anti-Castro voters in Florida, still strongly back the embargo and refuse to reward a regime that they say deprives Cuba’s 11 million people of democracy and freedom.

While there has been tepid progress in prying



PHOTO: LARRY LUXNER

Santiago Martínez, owner of the Hostal La Caridad guest house in downtown Santa Clara, is one of a growing number of Cuban entrepreneurs who have entered the private sector since President Raúl Castro began introducing economic reforms in 2009.

open the state-run economy, Cuba’s one-party system continues to dictate many aspects of life on the island. Political opposition is stifled or jailed. Independent media is muzzled, as is access to the internet. And despite high-quality universal health care and education, Cubans struggle to get by on meager salaries, state-run enterprises are woefully inefficient and staples like milk are still rationed.

Yet Cabañas blasted what he called the hypocrisy of successive U.S. presidents for punishing Cuba while enjoying close relations with monarchies and authoritarian governments — he wouldn’t single any out by name — that have far worse human rights records than his own.

“For years, the United States maintained perfectly good ties with many countries that don’t have elections, with countries lacking human rights. Some of these countries not only don’t have freedom of the press, they don’t have press at all, and you’re not concerned about that. When you talk about foreign policy, you have to be consistent.”

Tracey Eaton is a prominent Cuba expert who for years served as Havana bureau chief for the Dallas Morning News.

“If the U.S. and Cuba ever want to resolve their differences, they’ve got to communicate. They’ve got to get to know each other and try to understand their differences,” he said. “That’s why it’s important that Cuba have

diplomats in Washington, and that the U.S. have a presence in Havana. End that and relations will only get worse.”

Eaton told us that even under the Obama administration, the federal government — mainly through USAID — spends millions of taxpayer dollars each year to support the island’s internal political opposition, adding tension to the bilateral relationship.

“Donald Trump is an unknown quantity when it comes to Cuba. Maybe he’ll get that elusive better deal, one that both improves diplomatic relations and forces Cuba to improve human rights,” Eaton said. “Or maybe it will be a disaster and Trump will usher in a new era of hostility.”

FRAUGHT HISTORY

For Cabañas, the president-elect is only the latest U.S. politician to appear on the world stage since Fidel Castro, now 90, took power back in 1959 in the name of the Cuban revolution. Before then, Cuba spent much of the early 20th century as a “neo-colony” of the United States under a series of dictators, culminating with the corrupt Batista regime in the 1950s.

The armed rebellion led by Fidel and his brother Raúl along with Ernesto “Che” Guevara and other revolutionary heroes managed to overthrow Batista on Jan. 1, 1959 — just two and a half years before Cabañas was born in the coastal city of

Matanzas, about 100 kilometers east of Havana.

A 1983 graduate of Havana’s Raúl Roa García Higher Institute of International Relations, Cabañas joined Cuba’s Foreign Service the following year and was eventually posted to Canada. After running the Foreign Ministry’s Division of Cuban Residents Abroad and Consular Affairs for eight years, he was named Cuba’s ambassador to Austria, with accreditation to Croatia, Slovenia and the international organizations in Vienna.

Cabañas returned to Havana in 2005 as director of the Foreign Ministry’s Division for Document Management, and in 2009 he received a doctorate in political sciences from the University of Havana. That same year, he was named deputy minister of foreign affairs — a post he held until his transfer to Washington in 2012.

As a student of history, Cabañas has a deep sense of the complex relationship between Cuba and the United States — one with a painful history despite the two countries’ shared love of baseball and other cultural affinities.

“For all those years, we were not exactly a partner of the United States,” he said. “Our market was open to any product coming from the U.S., but we never had the capacity to play as an equal. In fact, our revolution wasn’t against the United States, but only to change the status quo in Cuba. Politicians talk a lot about human rights and communism, but even before Fidel visited the United States in April 1959 to explain the situation, people here were already plotting against him to defeat the revolution.”

“Back in 1959, you never found anyone talking about human rights. Even civil rights was a bad word at that time. It was simply because the Cuban revolutionary government was talking with its own voice, and not following commands coming from Washington,” Cabañas said.

“At some point, I have promised to publish a book about all the arguments for not having better relations with Cuba,” he told us. “In the early ’60s, we couldn’t have better relations because of our links with the Soviet Union. In the ’70s, it was the Cuban presence in Africa. We were put on the State Department terrorist list in 1982 without any evidence that we supported terrorism; it was simply because Ronald Reagan was paying back the CANF [Cuban American National Foundation] for the votes they had provided.”

In the ’80s, according to Cabañas, the U.S. government came up with new excuses why it could not have diplomatic ties with his

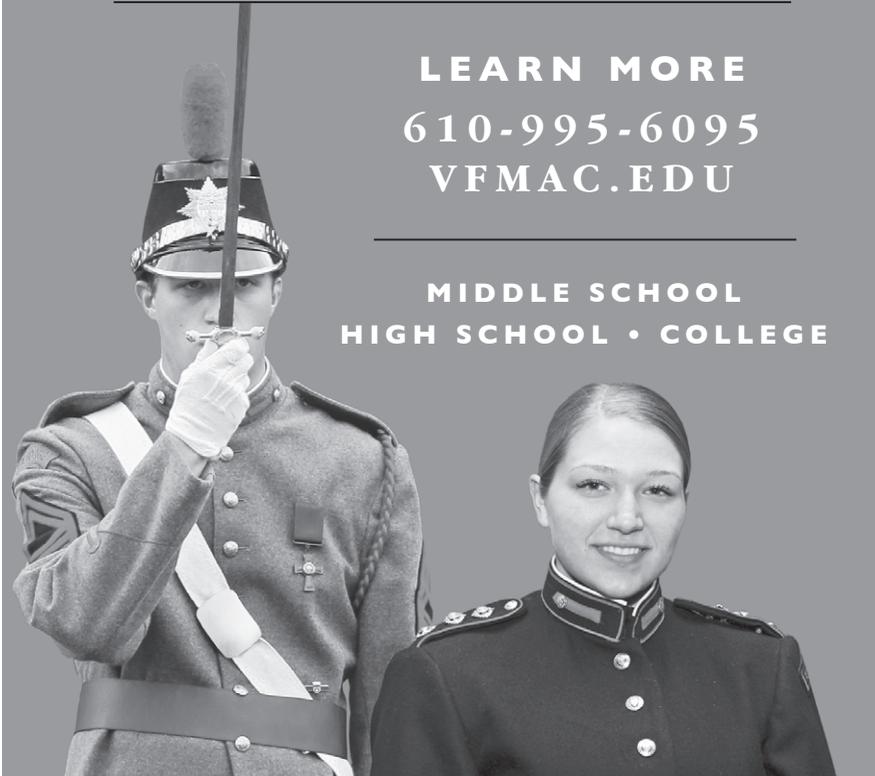


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country.

“Yes, Cuba supported the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, but today they’re in power. Cuba supported the FMLN in El Salvador, and they’re the ruling party today.”

Even after the Soviet Union collapsed, Cuba remained a communist bastion on America’s doorstep — and a thorn in Washington’s side. Fidel Castro, in fact, took great pride thumbing his nose at the Yankee government that he says tried and failed to assassinate him multiple times.

SHIFTING ATTITUDES

Today, however, times have changed in both Cuba and the U.S. (though Fidel, despite constant reports of his imminent death, is still kicking at age 90).

As home to the world’s largest Cuban exile community, South Florida was once the epicenter of violent opposition to the Castro regime. The 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion was hatched from Miami, as was the bombing of a Cuban jetliner off the coast of Barbados in 1976 that left 73 people dead.

Yet just as images of vintage American cars parked in front of Havana’s elegant Hotel Nacional don’t reflect the real Cuba, scenes of old men in guayaberas playing dominoes in Maximo Gomez Park or plotting the next revolution at the nearby Versailles Restaurant in Little Havana don’t reflect today’s Miami, says Cabañas, who’s been there several times.

“Miami is different than it was in the ’60s and ’70s. As head of the consular services, I visited Miami the same way I visited Madrid, and I’ve witnessed how Miami has changed,” he said. “I have many friends there from those years.”

Part of the reason for the change is that a new generation of Cuban-Americans, who were never exposed to Castro’s takeover of Cuba, are less averse to engagement with the

Cuba at a Glance

National Day Jan. 1, 1959 (Liberation Day)

Location Caribbean, island between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, 150 km south of Key West, Fla.

Capital Havana

Population 11.1 million (July 2016 estimate)

Ethnic groups White 64.1 percent, mestizo 26.6 percent, black 9.3 percent (2012 estimate)

GDP (purchasing power parity) \$128.5 billion (2014 estimate)

GDP per-capita (PPP) \$10,200 (2010 estimate)

regime than their elders are. Another reason is that people-to-people interactions are on the rise.

Some 300,000 Cuban-Americans visit the island annually, and roughly 70,000 Cubans have visited the United States.

“We have so much back and forth now, with cultural exchanges, university exchanges and people-to-people travel. Many Cuban-Americans are now legal advisors for companies trying to do business in Cuba,” Cabañas said. “We have to go by statistics. You have seen how Cuban-Americans vote, and what they think about the embargo and bilateral ties with Cuba. They’re pretty similar to what average Americans think. And among those 35 and younger, the numbers are even more pronounced. So if that’s what the majority thinks, why don’t politicians go along?”

One reason is that opposition to the Castro regime was traditionally a bipartisan cause, with Democrats such as Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey joining their GOP col-

GDP growth 1.3 percent (2014 estimate)

Unemployment 2.4 percent (2015 estimate)

Population below poverty line n/a

Industries Petroleum, nickel, cobalt, pharmaceuticals, tobacco, construction, steel, cement, agricultural machinery, sugar

National flag of Cuba



SOURCE: CIA WORLD FACTBOOK

great friends? It’s hard to have a friendship without understanding history, values and customs. There’s nothing like culture to help each country walk in the other’s shoes.”

PRACTICAL RELATIONSHIP

Cuba and the United States are unlikely to become the best of friends any time soon. Nevertheless, Cabañas said there are plenty of areas of practical cooperation that would benefit both sides.

He said ending the embargo would enable both nations to cooperate far more closely on issues like environmental protection, predicting hurricanes, avoiding oil spills in the Gulf of Mexico, even fighting terrorism.

And of course, U.S. multinationals are chomping at the bit to get into a market that’s essentially been closed off to them for 55 years.

“American companies feel they’re missing out. All ports in the southeastern U.S. are looking to Mariel as an opportunity,” said Cabañas, referring to the billion-dollar container terminal and industrial-free zone just west of Havana. “Mariel is not a dream; in roughly three years, we went from a plan to a reality. The Panamanians finished the expansion of their canal and now post-Panamax ships call at U.S. ports. All of them are eager to do business with Mariel and to invest in the economic zone surrounding Mariel. How would you explain to all those people that they cannot do business with us?”

Another industry that would thrive in a post-embargo Cuba is biotechnology.

Roswell Park Cancer Institute, based in Buffalo, N.Y., is partnering with Cuba’s Center of Molecular Immunology to develop a therapeutic lung cancer vaccine. Roswell Park is now awaiting FDA approval to conduct an

leagues — notably Florida Republicans like Sen. Marco Rubio, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart — to block any relaxation of the travel ban or the embargo itself.

But even among top-level U.S. officials, there’s been a marked turnaround in recent years.

Cuban-born Carlos Gutierrez, who as secretary of commerce during the Bush era was a proponent of tough sanctions against Cuba, did an about-face after Obama’s surprise announcement in 2014 and now advocates ending the embargo immediately and forging business ties with the same regime he once condemned.

“Many of us have been involved in trying to take U.S. businesses to Cuba,” said Gutierrez, chairman of the Meridian International Center Board of Trustees. “But now we need to lift our expectations and have not just a transactional relationship where we sit down and negotiate. Why don’t we shoot for being

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Obama

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president and a symbol of the country's enlightened democracy.

Obama's lofty promises to turn a new tide with the Arab world, however, did not pan out, as the turmoil of the Arab Spring upended regional dynamics and devastated nations such as Syria and Yemen. Obama's charisma and worldly upbringing weren't enough to overcome the historical grievances and geopolitical jockeying between Sunnis and Shiites. He also couldn't prevent a bellicose Russia, rising China or reckless North Korea from antagonizing their neighbors.

But the 44th president did mend fences with U.S. allies estranged by Bush's unilateral policies. His close ties with EU nations helped cobble together a coalition that slapped sanctions on Moscow, paved the way for a historic nuclear agreement with Iran and steady a faltering global economy.

The question now is: How much international goodwill does Trump need to realize his foreign policy vision? The Republican president-elect dismissed or outright insulted a multitude of leaders, many of whom only begrudgingly accepted his victory. Will their bitterness linger, or will by-gones be by-gones once Trump enters the White House?

Vanda Felbab-Brown of Brookings says it may be difficult to patch up the differences.

"During his campaign, he denigrated allies and questioned the usefulness of NATO ... rejoiced in humiliating neighbors like Mexico, repeatedly lashed out against China, suggested policies for the Middle East that ranged from uninformed (such as his promise to abort the U.S.-Iran nuclear deal), erratic, un-implementable (taking oil away from the Islamic State) to utterly unspecified (such as how to fight the Islamic State or what to do with Syria or Egypt)," she wrote.

"This is heavy baggage that Trump brings to the Oval Office. The credibility of the United States as a country committed to pluralism, multiculturalism, inclusiveness, opportunities for all and human rights — in other words, U.S. soft power — has already suffered a serious blow. Recovering that reputation for enlightened leadership will be hard for President Trump, given the xenophobia of his rhetoric on the way to the White House," she concluded.

Others say Trump's everyman appeal will resonate in far-flung corners of the globe struggling with inequality and globalization.

"While much of what he says doesn't make sense and he can easily contradict himself several times in one sentence, Trump talks in way that everyone with a reasonable command of English can understand. There is no need to get out a dictionary or try to follow complicated sentence structures. And because people comprehend what he is saying, they feel connected and taken seriously," wrote German journalist Ines Pohl for Deutsche Welle.

Some even interpret his inconsistency as a sign of honesty, she argued. "At first glance this doesn't seem to make sense. But precisely because Trump contradicts himself constantly and offers diverging views on one and the same topic, many people feel that he is simply being honest. In a campaign in which many statements are geared toward very specific voter groups, many people deem authenticity more important than sophisticated electoral concepts that often seem generic and starchy."



CREDIT: OFFICIAL WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY PETE SOUZA

President Obama signs an executive order, "Improving the Security of Consumer Financial Transactions," at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau on Oct. 17, 2014.

ROLLING BACK REGULATIONS, TAXES

In the wake of steadfast GOP opposition to most of his initiatives, Obama turned to his executive authority to enact a raft of economic regulations in his second term. As Binyamin Appelbaum and Michael D. Shear of the New York Times noted, the Obama administration in its first seven years finalized 560 major regulations — nearly 50 percent more than the George W. Bush administration did during the same period.

"An army of lawyers working under Mr. Obama's authority has sought to restructure the nation's health care and financial industries, limit pollution, bolster workplace protections and extend equal rights to minorities," they wrote Aug. 13, noting that little-known rules now allow women to buy emergency contraceptive pills without prescriptions, for example, and military veterans to design their own headstones. "Under Mr. Obama, the government has literally placed a higher value on human life."

At the same time, they wrote, "It has imposed billions of dollars in new costs on businesses and consumers" — while circumventing the legislative process.

The other flip side of relying on executive orders is that they can be overturned with the stroke of a pen.

"Anything enacted by executive order can be rescinded by executive order," Zachary Goldman, a former U.S. Treasury official now at New York University, told Reuters.

Trump has vowed to erase Obama-era regulations such as Dodd-Frank financial rules that ban banks from engaging in their own in-house trading for profits. He also has the full backing of a Republican-controlled Congress. Not only are lawmakers itching to overturn hundreds of regulations that they say stifle economic growth and innovation, they also hope to fulfill their long-sought dream of overhauling the tax code.

Obama touts an economic record that includes creating 15 million new private-sector jobs since 2010, saving the auto industry and cutting the unemployment rate to a historic low of 4.9 percent. But the national debt also doubled under his watch, corporate profits soared and a stubborn

inequality gap helped propel Trump to victory. With many Americans clamoring for change, they may be receptive to the type of sweeping tax cuts George W. Bush enacted during his presidency.

Trump has proposed condensing the current seven tax brackets into three and lowering the rate for the nation's highest earners to 33 percent. He also wants to eliminate the estate tax for wealthy families and cut the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 15 percent. While Trump is correct that America has the highest corporate tax rate in the industrialized world, he omits the fact that thanks to loopholes, the average rate for many large

corporations is more like 13 percent.

According to the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center, by 2025, about 51 percent of the benefits of Trump's tax plan would go to the wealthiest percentile of taxpayers, who would save \$317,000 on average each year, boosting their incomes by more than 14 percent. Meanwhile, a typical family would save nearly \$1,100 a year in taxes — an increase of 1.5 percent in income.

Paying for these tax cuts is another matter entirely. It's simple math: Either the national debt would have to go up or federal spending would have to be slashed. As Max Ehrenfreund of the Washington Post pointed out, "If the government borrowed all of the money to pay for Trump's tax plan, the deficits and the cost of interest would increase the national debt by \$7.2 trillion."

So despite the GOP majority in Congress, Trump (who famously refused to disclose his own tax returns as candidate and may have dodged taxes for nearly two decades) is likely to face blowback once the debate over tax reform begins in earnest.

It's also important to remember that even though Trump handily won the presidency with 290 electoral college votes, Clinton still garnered half the popular vote. In fact, as of press time, 1.7 million more Americans voted for her than for Trump (sparking a separate debate on the merits of the Electoral College). So while Trump holds an electoral mandate, it is far from an ironclad one. He must now contend with a deeply polarized nation that is split in two, with one side opposing Obama's legacy and the other opposing efforts to relegate it to the dustbin of history. **W**

Anna Gawel (@diplomatnews) is the managing editor of *The Washington Diplomat*.

Cuba

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early-stage clinical trial for patients with advanced lung cancer.

"After a diagnosis in Cuba, such patients live 10 to 12 years with a good quality of life. In the U.S., it's only five years. We are also trying to reach a deal with the U.S. to sell a product called Heberprot-P to fight diabetes," said Cabañas. "You have 100,000 amputations a year because of diabetes, but in Cuba, we have stopped 73 percent of those amputations. What politician would tell 100,000 patients that he wants to reverse this progress? How would he explain that to the families?"

Cabañas didn't mention Trump by name, but he didn't have to; it was obvious the ambassador was talking about the nation's 45th president and his threats to not only prevent



PHOTO: LARRY LUXNER

A tourist buys cigars at the duty-free shop of Santa Clara's Abel Santamaria International Airport. Under new rules, Americans may bring back unlimited quantities of Cuban rum and cigars, though the incoming Trump administration may reimpose the ban on such products, which had existed for more than 50 years under the U.S. trade embargo.

Congress from lifting the embargo but to undo all the progress achieved by the Obama administration in the last eight years.

"We are born optimists, even under the toughest circumstances," he said. "During an early 1990s visit to the U.S., an economics professor told me we were going downhill, that we had no future. My response to that respected professor was this: How do you measure Cuban pride,

or the way our young people smile or the way we dance? If we didn't have the embargo in place, imagine all the things we'd be able to do." **W**

Larry Luxner, news editor of *The Washington Diplomat*, was editor and publisher of the monthly *CubaNews* from 2002 to 2013 and a frequent visitor to the island. He went back to Cuba this past September for the first time in 12 years.