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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON
September 29, 1994

To: Leon Panetta, Chief of Staff
Sandy Berger, Deputy Director, NSC

From: George Stephanopoulos, Senior Advisor to the
President

Sandy -- Can we do any of this? (I know we can't do it all).

Leon -- I think the President will want to know that they
want a meeting and are upset. Big supporters in campaign.

Let me know if you want me to deal with it.

*George - deal with
it!*

*all
G.S.*

G

*To: Leon
From: G.S.*

*Spoke to Sandy, Ruchi + Joan Baggett.
We are working on a small, private
meeting when POTUS goes to Miami.*

(GS)

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Leon Panetta, Chief of Staff, The White House

FROM: Jorge Perez, Jorge Bolanos, Willy Braceras,
Simon Ferro, Herminio San Roman

RE: Cuba Policy

DATE: September 16, 1994

To: Sandy Beyer
Leon Panetta

Fr: CS

Sandy -- Can we do any of this?
(I know we can't do all)
Leon... I think
the Panetta
will want
to know that they
want a meeting
are upset. By
Sugawara in
capam.

Let me know if
you want him
to deal with
it.

(C-1)

We understand that Haiti is the most important issue facing the Administration today and possibly the foreseeable future, so please forgive our urgent desire to communicate with you on Cuba policy.

We are part of the Democratic Cuban American "core group" in Dade County which has been supportive of President Clinton, both politically and financially, since the early days of his campaign for the Presidency. President Clinton always assured us that we would be a primary source of advise and counsel on Cuba policy and would be made a part of the decision-making process.

Unfortunately, none of us was able to attend the meeting with the President on August 5 because we were either not invited or we were called we such short notice that it was physically impossible to secure transportation. Since then our serious involvement in the process has rarely been sought.

Still, we feel a great sense of loyalty and commitment to the President and refuse to sit idle while mistakes continue to be made and opportunities lost. Please accept this memorandum in the spirit in which it is delivered, and in the hope that it can make a positive contribution to this process.

Notwithstanding the high approval rating the Administration enjoyed several months ago in the Cuban American community we believe the support is fading fast. There are several reasons for this:

1. The focus has shifted from the initial direct political confrontation with Castro to the plight of the rafters in Guantanamo and elsewhere.

* The media, especially T.V. and radio, is highlighting the human suffering and frustration at the camps. In fact, they are regularly referred to as "concentration camps". There is no positive activity or response by the Administration to counterbalance or lend perspective to the stories.

* Local political factions and rivals are attacking the policy for political advantage. Many local leaders and personalities, including radio talk show hosts, elected officials and civic leaders who have been excluded from the process and feel they have nothing to lose by opposing it.

Recommendations

* Accelerate improvement of the living conditions in Guantanamo. De-emphasize the military nature and characteristics of the base.

* Name a Cuban American ombudsman with a bilingual staff and generate immediate positive actions/improvements. Start bringing some people out of the camp. Bring some sick people out, release some or all kids. Without violating the integrity of the accord find an excuse to produce some positive result every week. Most importantly, try to find ways not to continue placing people in the camp! Find reasonable, documentable exceptions to the accord. The more people inside the camps the bigger our problem becomes!

* Start to inventory and document the people at the base. Have them start filling forms and questionnaires with personal information. Make them feel they are part of a "process".

* Allow periodic visits by balanced delegations of responsible Cuban American community leaders.

* Expand the list of community leaders and organizations with access to the White House and begin to invite a balanced and broader range of people to D.C. Pay special attention to local elected leaders.

2. There is persistent and growing distrust of the President relating to his future intentions with Castro.

* Castro gave in too easily on the immigration agreement. There is fear of secret side agreements and conspiracies to reverse the current policy after the November elections or after the December Summit of the Americas in Miami.

* Notwithstanding the high level of support the Cuban American community in Miami had given the Administration's Cuba policy prior to this crisis, the President was prevented from capitalizing on this and never created the personal rapport with the community that Presidents Reagan and Bush enjoyed.

* During the last two years the Administration has failed to "empower" a sufficiently large number of Cuban Americans who are respected and trusted in the community to serve as bridges to the President.

Recommendations

* The President should immediately grant a 30 minute interview to

the two local spanish T.V. stations. He would have a face-to-face "fireside chat" with the Cuban American community. He would explain his policy, play up the harsh measures imposed on Castro and express his concern and sympathy over the Cubans in Guantanamo. He would promise the Cuban American community that he will not forget those Cubans and will do everything in his power to deliver them to a free and democratic Cuba. He will look the community in the eye and say there were no side deals and that he will not sell us out!

* Empower more of the President's friends and trusted allies! The community expects this because it creates local accountability.

3. The Administration is working within an information vacuum with regards to the Cuban American community's opinions and feelings on Cuba policy.

* A material shift in support or passive acquiescence for the President's policy within the Cuban American community would severely weaken the policy and could negatively impact Governor Chiles' re-election. I heard this on Cuban radio yesterday: "The best way to show our rejection of the President's policy is to vote against all Democrats in November, especially Governor Chiles, who provoked it". Since the first White House meeting with the President Governor Chiles appears to have disengaged from the process.

* No credible polling organization has surveyed Cuban Americans on the policy.

Recommendations

* Do a good benchmark poll and even some focus groups. What are the President's strengths? Weaknesses? What options would the community accept? How should we "talk" to the community? We may be surprised to learn we have more flexibility than we think.

* Governor Chiles must "re-engage" in the process in a positive way. He cannot sit back and allow events to overtake him.

4. Continued Administration pandering to the Cuban American National Foundation is costing the President vital support among its Democratic Cuban friends and other potential supporters, especially among CANF detractors in Congress.

* The CANF failed to endorse the US-Cuba accord, publicly stating that it neither supported nor rejected the accord.

* The CANF makes daily public statements criticizing the indefinite status of the Cubans in Guantanamo and positioning itself as their champion vis-a-vis the Administration.

* Several days ago Pepe Hernandez, CANF President, bluntly told Richard Nuccio that the Administration could no longer take continued CANF support for granted.

* A material reason that Armando Perez Roura, of Radio Mambi, is so harshly critical of the President is because of his continuing feud with Jorge Mas and the CANF and his perception that the CANF is driving the Administration's Cuba policy. Perez Roura's civic organization, Unidad Cubana, has been shut out of the informational and political loop, as have other viable grassroots groups. Unidad Cubana has sponsored the two largest Cuban American public demonstrations in Dade County in the last years.

Recommendations

* Don't ignore the CANF, but stop pandering to it. Include it in the process but don't allow them to set the agenda or scratch people off lists. The Administration and its friends set the agenda. That is the way it was done under Reagan and Bush and its what the community expects. Empowering your detractors and ignoring your friends creates more confusion and bewilderment in the community and provokes greater distrust of the President.

* If the CANF threatens to turn against the President call its bluff. They have worked too hard to break into the loop to jump ship now. The CANF respects power, authority and those who know how to use it. They will play hardball with the President until you stop them.

Conclusion

We feel extremely frustrated and disappointed over the way the Cuba policy is being developed and implemented. We have very little "ownership" over it and it has become increasingly difficult to justify our continued support of a process which relegates the President's core supporters to the sidelines and his detractors to the forefront. With all due respect, we are not interested in invitations to window-dressing events such as next Tuesday's Hispanic Heritage Day if we are to be excluded from true substantive interaction with the Administration. We therefore decline to attend. We deserve and respectfully request a private meeting with President Clinton as soon as possible to re-enforce our relationship, voice our concerns, offer our humble advise and, hopefully, be reintegrated into the decision-making process.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

cc: Hon. Bill Clinton, President
Hon. Al Gore, Vice President
Hon. Lawton Chiles, Governor
Hon. Buddy MacKay, Lt. Governor
A. Lake, NSC
G. Stephanopolous, WH
J. Baggett, WH
Hon. David Whilhelm, DNC
T. Coelho, DNC
Hon. Terrie Brady, FDP