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Incoming to EBB

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Date
1/30/97

Status
EBB Confidential Action

Author / Source
Berger, SAndy

Short Description
CNN Request for License to Open Havana Bureau

Description
Advise before going to POTUS on NSC recommendation that Treasury Department grant pending license applications for U.S. news organizations to establish bureaus in Cuba for one year on the condition that they be allowed to operate free from restrictions by the Cuban government. (State and Treasury support).

EBB Comments

File 1
Cuba

File 2

File 3

CLOSE HOLD

Document No. 203268

WHITE HOUSE STAFFING MEMORANDUM

DATE: 1/30 ACTION/CONCURRENCE/COMMENT DUE BY: 1/31

SUBJECT: CMV Bureau in Cuba

	ACTION	FYI		ACTION	FYI
VICE PRESIDENT	☒	☐	McCURRY	☒	☐
BOWLES	☒	☐	McGINTY	☐	☐
McLARTY	☒	☐	NASH	☐	☐
PODESTA	☒	☐	QUINN	☐	☐
MATHEWS	☒	☐	RASCO	☐	☐
RAINES	☐	☐	REED	☐	☐
BAER	☐	☐	SOSNIK	☒	☐
	☐	☐	LEWIS	☐	☐
EMANUEL	☒	☐	YELLEN	☐	☐
GIBBONS	☐	☐	STREETT	☐	☐
HALE	☐	☐	SPERLING	☐	☐
HERMAN	☐	☐	HAWLEY	☐	☐
HIGGINS	☐	☐	WILLIAMS	☐	☐
HILLEY	☐	☐	RADD	☐	☐
KLAIN	☐	☐		☐	☐
BERGER	☐	☐		☐	☐
LINDSEY	☐	☐		☐	☐

REMARKS:

Please advise

RESPONSE:

CLOSE HOLD

Staff Secretary
Ext. 6-2702

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

203268

January 30, 1997

97 JAN 30 PM 4:25

ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: SAMUEL BERGER 

SUBJECT: CNN Request for License to Open Havana Bureau

Purpose

To decide whether to approve a request by the Cable News Network (CNN) for a license to open a news bureau in Cuba.

Background

CNN renewed its application for a Department of the Treasury license to open a bureau in Havana in November upon receipt of Cuban government permission to open an office. A half dozen U.S. news media -- including the Miami Herald, AP and two other major TV networks -- have license requests pending, but only CNN has received Cuban approval.

The Helms-Burton Act contains provisions authorizing the "exchange of news bureaus" with Cuba under certain conditions, including that the GOC must allow Radio Marti to open offices in Cuba. However, we retain authority under other laws to approve requests like CNN's whether or not the GOC permits a Marti bureau. The Cuban Democracy Act and U.S. policy prior to the Helms-Burton legislation (notably in your statement on October 6, 1995) clearly set the free flow of information between our countries, including through the establishment of U.S. news bureaus in Cuba, as a priority.

Since CNN renewed its application, we have sought ways to promote the establishment of other news bureaus in Havana, thereby reducing the GOC's ability to pick and choose which media can open bureaus. Many in the Cuban-American community see CNN and Ted Turner as too friendly with Fidel Castro and, like publisher David Lawrence, believe that the Miami Herald should be in the first group approved.

cc: Vice President
Chief of Staff
Mack McLarty

Options

There are four options:

- 1) To approve CNN's request alone.
- 2) To approve all pending applications -- a largely symbolic gesture for news organizations other than CNN because the GOC so far has only agreed to the one request.
- 3) To withhold approval until the GOC authorizes bureaus from a more representative sampling of U.S. media.
- 4) To delay the application until the GOC gives approval for Radio and TV Marti to open offices -- unlikely to happen as long as the current regime remains in power.

Option 1 has no supporters (not even CNN) because the USG would essentially be "holding back" other applicants and confirming the GOC's right to pick and choose. Option 4 would likely preclude any American news service from setting up in Cuba, and goes beyond what even most of the Cuban-American community believes we should require. Option 3 sets a more attainable objective, the entry of several American news organizations, but in the short-to medium-term the effect is also likely to preclude the opening of any. We favor Option 2, with certain conditionality. The State and Treasury Departments concur.

Under this scenario, we would grant all pending license applications for Cuba bureaus on the understanding that the bureaus be permitted to conduct their newsgathering activities free from GOC restrictions and harassment. We would continue to press Cuba to allow additional bureaus. As a matter of normal procedure, OFAC will issue the license for a one-year period. We would make clear in issuing the licenses that Cuba's willingness to allow other American media similar access over the next year will be a factor in considering their renewal next year.

This approach would be consistent with our policy of promoting the free flow of information to and from Cuba. It would also help keep international attention focussed on the human rights situation and need for democratization on the island. While we would have preferred that the GOC allow more than one bureau to open at this time, CNN's reputation and worldwide reach have been important factors in this recommendation.

CNN officials have told us that they have a Cuban commitment that they can operate freely in the country. CNN may not like the statement that Cuban willingness to allow in other American media will be a factor in considering the renewal of its license a year hence, but CNN itself has expressed support for such an opening,

and they have been informally told by mid-level Cuban officials that it will take place.

Public and Congressional Reaction

This approach also appears likely to gain the widest support. Most interested U.S. media, including the Miami Herald (which has withdrawn its reservations), the American Society of Newspaper Editors, and the Committee to Protect Journalists advocate approval for all pending requests. (Many would likely back a First Amendment court challenge to a possible USG denial, which CNN quietly threatened at one point.) Representative Lee Hamilton and eight other Democrats wrote to Secretary Christopher urging approval. Members of your Cuba "Core Group" will support it with the license conditionality we propose.

Other Cuban-American and Republican leaders -- including Senator Jesse Helms -- have indicated that they do not oppose the decision but will not openly support it. Representative Bob Menendez is reluctantly prepared to go along; he does not share the position of Representatives Diaz-Balart and Ros-Lehtinen that CNN or any other news organization should not be allowed in Cuba until Radio and TV Marti can establish bureaus there. Jorge Mas Canosa's Cuban-American National Foundation has indicated that it will not oppose the decision.

We propose informing CNN and making the decision public on February 3, so as not to conflict with other Cuba-related activities surrounding the anniversary of the birth of Jose Marti during this week.

RECOMMENDATION

That you authorize the Treasury Department to grant pending license applications for U.S. news organizations to establish bureaus in Cuba for one year on the condition that they be allowed to operate free from restrictions by the Cuban government. (State and Treasury support.)

Approve _____

Disapprove _____