

FOCAL SUMMARY OF NEWS ITEMS REPORTED ON CUBA January-December 2004

This resource is a compilation of news items on Cuba listed in FOCAL's monthly Chronicle on Cuba throughout 2004

US-CUBA RELATIONS

DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITIES AND STATEMENTS

[See also, Terrorism/ United States (accusations)]

Miscellaneous

January 1: US Secretary of State Colin Powell wrote in The New York Times that the United States was "working for the advent of a free Cuba." "This struggle will not be confined to the Middle East. We are working for the advent of a free Cuba, and toward democratic reform in other countries whose people are denied liberty", Powell wrote. (*Khaleej Times Online*, 1/1/04)

January 3: The State Department has expelled a Cuban diplomat, accusing him of associating with criminal elements, US officials said. The expulsion of Roberto Socorro Garcia, a third secretary at the Cuban mission in Washington, was carried out last month without announcement. Officials at the Cuban mission did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment. Cuba has announced no retaliatory measures in response to the expulsion, said the US officials, asking not to be identified. (*AP*, 3/1/04)

January 8: Cuba's top diplomat for North America defended a diplomat recently expelled from the United States and rejected US officials' accusations that he had associated with criminal elements. The expulsion of Roberto Socorro Garcia, a third secretary at the Cuban mission in Washington, was carried out last month without announcement. US officials said last week that Socorro was expelled for associating with criminal elements but didn't elaborate further. But one news report said he had been linked to drug trafficking. "The Foreign Ministry totally rejects and categorically denies that comrade Roberto Socorro Garcia has associated with people or activities related to drug trafficking in the United States," Rafael Dausa Cespedes, the ministry's director for North America, said in a statement published in the Communist Party newspaper Granma and other Cuban media. (*AP*, 8/1/04)

January 8: Echoing comments made earlier this week by his deputy for Latin America, Secretary of State Colin Powell said that Cuba has tried to destabilize the region throughout the nearly two decades he has been serving in senior government posts. "I've been in senior national security positions for - on and off - over the last 17 years, and for that whole period of time, Cuba has been trying to do everything it could to destabilize parts of the region," he said at a press conference. "That has been his history. That has been his tradition for all these many years," Powell said, referring to Cuban leader Fidel Castro, who last week marked the 45th anniversary of his successful revolution. "Fortunately," the secretary said, Cuba's ostensible attempts at fomenting trouble "turned out to be massive failures for the most part." (*EFE*, 8/1/04)

January 9: During a press briefing, US National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, said that Cuba is "an anachronism in the hemisphere". "Cuba can't focus on its own people because it is an oppressive, nondemocratic state that is an anachronism in the Western Hemisphere. It belongs to another era". "It's a sad thing that the proud people of Cuba are the only ones who

have, at this point, no hope for a democratic future", she added. (*White House Press Release*, 9/1/04)

January 15: Most Latin American countries have no policies geared toward promoting democracy in Cuba and are just waiting for Castro to die, said Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger Noriega. According to Noriega, the US feels that it is important not to wait, but to take action to expedite a democratic transition in Cuba. (*La Jornada*, 16/1/04)

January 20: The Cuban foreign minister has strongly denied allegations by US officials that a Cuban envoy in Washington associated with criminal elements and was involved in narcotics trafficking. The foreign ministry in Havana called the allegations against Roberto Socorro Garcia, who was expelled by the United States, a "gross lie" and a "manipulation of reality." "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs totally rejects and categorically rebuts that Roberto Socorro Garcia has been associated with people or activities connected with drug trafficking in the United States or has engaged in actions that are harmful to the U.S. government or that violate his diplomatic status," the ministry said in a statement. (*The Washington Post*, 20/1/4)

January 21: In Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque's opinion, US President George W. Bush's recent State of the Union Address was just "electoral rhetoric." Voicing his hopes that the US president will not go beyond words, he said that if Washington toughens its policy toward Havana, or should it choose to invade, Cuba would resist. (*Notimex*, 21/1/04)

January 28: The Bush administration has eliminated cultural exchange licenses that allowed just about any American to travel to Cuba, which has been subject to a U.S. trade embargo for more than four decades since Fidel Castro seized power. These so-called "people-to-people" licenses, introduced in 1999 by the Clinton administration, were intended to let Cubans and Americans learn about each other through educational trips. But federal officials now say the exchanges had become little more than thinly veiled tourism and eliminated the program. The last licenses expired on December 31 and some travel agencies are scrambling to find a legal alternative. (*AP*, 28/1/04)

February 25: The State Department issued its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. The report found that human rights abuses in Cuba "worsened dramatically" as the regime of Fidel Castro continued to commit numerous serious abuses and denied Cuba's citizens the right to change their government. The report pointed to the sentencing of 75 dissidents to lengthy prison terms for exercising their fundamental rights as evidence of the government's poor performance. The report was also critical of the Castro regime for ignoring petitions, which contained thousands of signatures, calling for a national referendum on political and economic reforms. (*EFE*, 26/2/04)

March 2: While a number of positive developments are occurring in the Western Hemisphere, the region also faces many challenges in such countries as Haiti, Colombia, Venezuela, and Cuba, says Roger Noriega, the State Department's assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs. In a testimony before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Noriega offered an analysis of the most important events affecting the nations of the hemisphere. For communist Cuba, Noriega said US policy is to encourage a rapid, peaceful transition to democracy characterized by strong support for human rights and an open-market economy. The United States will support Cuba's "embattled civil society and increase our efforts to break the information blockade" imposed on the island by the regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, said Noriega. In addition, he said the United States will provide a "voice to Cuba's independent journalists and human rights activists." (*AP*, 3/3/04)

March 5: Cuba's Ambassador to the United Nations, Orlando Requeijo, has strongly criticized Washington's double-standard on terrorism -- "condemning terrorism in some cases and tolerating or justifying it in others." Speaking at a public hearing of the UN Security Council Anti-

Terrorism Committee, Orlando Requeijo pointed to the total impunity enjoyed by those in Miami who, with the complicity of US authorities, openly raise funds for terrorist acts, open bank accounts with that objective, recruit terrorists and provide them with refuge. In contrast, the island's UN ambassador cited the case of the Cuban Five, arrested in 1998 and sentenced to harsh prison terms by a biased Miami court in 2001 for the "crime" of uncovering terrorist plots against Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 5/3/04)

March 11: USAID administrator Andrew Natsios declared that his country would continue financing oppositionist groups within the island. In a conference at the University of Miami, the Agency for International Development official admitted that the agency has already paid \$28 million for projects in Cuba, with \$7 million earmarked for 2004 "to help unify humanitarian, civic and religious groups with a government-in-transition that respond to the interests of the United States." The government of the United States, he said, is ready to give whatever assistance is necessary. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/3/04)

March 17: Washington has barred 300 Cubans involved in last year's crackdown against dissidents from the United States, State Department officials said, but the move was dismissed by critics as an empty election-year gesture. State Department officials told the press the policy targeted judges, prosecutors, witnesses and police who participated in a three-week roundup of scores of dissidents that began March 18, 2003. "None of these 300 people are ever coming to the United States, period," said a State Department official, who asked not to be named. "It shows those who participate in the abuse of human rights should know the United States will remember it for a long time." (*Reuters*, 18/3/04)

March 22: The White House's top adviser on Latin American affairs said that countries of the region need to acknowledge the "total absence of freedom" in Cuba, urging his hosts to vote to condemn the island nation in the UN Human Rights Commission. "Unfortunately, it's been 40 years now that (Cuba) hasn't had any press freedoms in the least. It's important that Latin American nations recognize the total absence of freedoms in that country," Otto Reich, a special envoy of President George W. Bush, said at a press conference. The Cuban-born Reich met with Paraguay's foreign minister, Leila Rachid, to discuss the human rights situation on the communist island. (*EFE*, 22/3/04)

April 6: For complete normalization of Cuba-US relations Washington must recognize Cuba as an independent country, and permitting its citizens to visit would be a significant step in the right direction, the President of the Cuban Parliament Ricardo Alarcon told US press in Havana. Speaking to an editorial board of the Associated Press Managing Editors, led by its vice president Stuart Wilk (Dallas Morning News), Alarcon discussed how such people-to-people visits would offset the military threat the US administration represents for the Caribbean country. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/4/04)

April 16: The United States says its representatives at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights and other participants in the meeting currently under way in Geneva have been subjected to "acts of intimidation, threat and aggression" by members of the Cuban delegation. Ambassador Richard Williamson, the US representative to the commission, described three incidents in which members of his delegation were directly threatened by members of the Cuban delegation. In a statement to the commission April 16, Richardson recounted how a US delegate was warned by a Cuban diplomat that he would "pay a high toll" for what he was doing at the commission. Williamson also cited the attack against the representative of an American nongovernmental organization that took place outside the commission meeting hall just after the body adopted a resolution criticizing Cuba's human rights record. Ambassador Kevin Moley, the US permanent representative to the United Nations in Geneva, witnessed the attack on human rights activist Frank Calzon and described the assault as unprovoked and "full of malice." (*US State Department Press Release*, 16/4/04)

May 12: In its 2004 Report, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom states that, "as a result of the recent government crackdown on democracy activists, religious freedom conditions in Cuba may decline further as part of a generally deteriorating situation". "The Commission will continue to monitor conditions of freedom of religion or belief in Cuba to determine if they rise to a level warranting designation as a "country of particular concern," it adds. (*US Commission on IRF Press Release, 12/5/04*)

May 14: Fidel Castro launched an immense anti-American protest with denunciations and ridicule of President Bush, saying the US leader was fraudulently elected and trying to impose "world tyranny." The Cuban leader led a sea of Cubans past the US diplomatic mission in Havana on the oceanfront Malecón Boulevard in a demonstration organized by the communist government against new US measures aimed at squeezing the island's economy and pushing out Castro. The crowd chanted "Free Cuba! Fascist Bush!" Castro said the march was "an act of indignant protest and a denunciation of the brutal, merciless and cruel measures" announced by Bush to tighten the 44-year US embargo on the island. Speaking directly about Bush, he said "everything that is said in your world about human rights is a lie." He said: "These words do not seek to offend or insult you" but given that President Bush "is committed to threaten and attack" Cuba and "destroy its independence and economy," he said it was his duty to remind President Bush of some basic facts, mainly: "you lack the moral authority". (*CNN, EFE, 14/5/04*)

May 18: Cuba's foreign minister accused the US government of trying to provoke a mass exodus of Cubans to the United States by tightening its economic embargo against the island. Felipe Perez Roque said US President George W. Bush's administration was encouraging Cubans to leave the communist-run island by adopting new measures designed to "increase pressure, provoke more suffering and destabilize the country." Under existing law, the United States can interpret a massive influx of Cubans to its shores as an act of war, Perez Roque told a news conference. "We believe the objective of these measures is to instigate a migration crisis," Perez Roque said. But he stopped short of saying the US government would use a potential crisis as a pretext to invade the island. (*AP, 19/5/04*)

May 22: The Cuban government plans to raise prices to replenish its coffers with much-needed funds and is using recent measures announced by Washington as an "excuse" to do so, the head of the US diplomatic mission in Havana said. Fidel Castro "knew exactly when the (US) recommendations were going to come out and he had everything prepared. It was an excuse to raise prices and take money from the population as quickly as possible and direct it toward other uses," James Cason said in an interview. "They are spending a lot of money on repressive forces and the army," the head of the US Interests Section in Havana said. The US diplomat was referring to a decision by the Cuban government to raise the prices of basic products sold at dollar-only stores by up to 30 percent. (*EFE, 22/5/04*)

June 14: The 2004 Trafficking in Persons report, issued by the US Department of State, rated 10 nations in the Tier 3 category (the least favorable rating): Bangladesh, Burma, Cuba, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Guyana, North Korea, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Venezuela. (*Washington File, 14/6/04*)

July 16: President Bush accused Fidel Castro of taking advantage of US goodwill in the past to foster child prostitution in Cuba, turning the island nation into what the president called a "major destination" for visitors seeking sex. In Florida, US President George W. Bush addressed a meeting organized by the Justice Department, its first conference on human trafficking, including sexual servitude. He used the occasion to criticize Cuba and its leader, Fidel Castro. "The regime in Havana, already one of the worst violators of human rights in the world, is adding to its crimes," Mr. Bush said. "The dictator welcomes sex tourism." Cuba has "replaced Southeast Asia as a destination for pedophiles and sex tourists," the president said, quoting from a recent study by Johns Hopkins University. His administration, Mr. Bush said, "has put a strategy in place to hasten the day when no Cuban child is exploited to finance a failed revolution and every Cuban will live in freedom." While pledging that he would give no quarter to countries and individuals

who engage in trafficking, Mr. Bush laced his remarks with references to his administration's policy of compassion for victims. (*The New York Times*, *The Miami Herald*, 17/7/04)

July 26: Fidel Castro vigorously denied recent charges by President Bush that he encourages sex-tourism in Cuba to attract US dollars to the impoverished island. Castro also became personal with Bush, bringing up old reports about his American nemesis' alleged past drinking habits. Speaking at the island's annual Revolution Day celebration in the central city of Santa Clara, Castro said the sex tourism allegations show that what the White House considers to be true about Cuba is ``that which the president makes up in his head, whether it corresponds to reality or not." Fidel Castro also said an attack on the island would be a "colossal mistake." (*AP*, *EFE*, 26/7/04)

July 27: US officials have refused to back down from President Bush's charge that Cuba promotes sex tourism - something Fidel Castro denies. State Department spokesman Adam Ereli says the issue of prostitution in Cuba is well documented. He referred to a 2002 human rights report that said Cuba had replaced Southeast Asia as one of the world's top sex tourism destinations. (*VOA*, 27/7/04)

July 30: Cuban Parliament chairman, Ricardo Alarcon, warned of an election fraud in the making in the United States and supported the proposal to send in international observers to Florida State in particular. Alarcon told Granma International that, "the United Nations and Carter Center, that send out so many observer missions through out the world, must send observers to Florida to verify the elections "in the country that provoked the greatest scandal of the century at the last elections." Alarcon commented on some groups in Florida that already adopted measures "fearing they will do the same again" in a state where Jeb Bush, brother of the President, runs the arrangements for the up coming elections. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/7/04)

August 17: In a rare display of amity toward communist Cuba, the United States offered its longtime foe 50,000 dollars in disaster assistance and urged US-based humanitarian groups to send aid to the island after it was badly hit by Hurricane Charley. "The United States regrets the damage caused by Hurricane Charley and expresses its solidarity with the Cuban people, stated deputy State Department spokesman Adam Ereli. "The Cuban people can count on America's support in these difficult times," he said in a statement. "We are working to assist the Cuban people with the humanitarian crisis they now face." (*AFP*, 17/8/04)

August 23: Cuba rejected the US government's offer of \$50,000 in post-hurricane aid, calling the gesture hypocritical, and the amount humiliating. "This cynical and hypocritical offer by the government of the United States to ease Hurricane Charley's effects ignores the damage caused over more than four decades by the economic war of successive [American] administrations against our country," Cuba's Foreign Ministry said in a statement published in the Cuban official media. The offer was announced by the US State Department in Washington on August 13, the same day Hurricane Charley battered western Cuba on its way to Florida. (*AP*, 23/8/04)

September 4: Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon stated that Cuba did not expect the US to change its policy toward Havana, irrespective of the candidate who wins the November elections in the North American country. Alarcon said that the relaxation of travel prohibitions on Cuban immigrants was the only predictable change if Democrat candidate John Kerry won and kept his promise. According to the Parliament president, Kerry speaks about keeping the blockade and pressures, the same position but probably with a less aggressive rhetoric than President George W Bush: essentially the same policy. When Democrats opposed the travel bans on Cuban-Americans, they made clear they supported the document containing the Bush policy, Alarcon stressed. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/9/04)

September 9: Fidel Castro said he will not accept any humanitarian aid for victims of Hurricane Ivan from any country that has imposed economic sanctions on the island, insisting the only acceptable humanitarian aid is the lifting of the US embargo. "We will not accept assistance from

those that have imposed economic sanctions on our country; they can spare themselves the hypocrisy of offering aid to Cuba," Castro said. "We won't accept any humanitarian assistance other than the lifting of the US economic embargo," said the leader, who spoke close to four hours on state-run television. (*EFE*, 10/9/04)

September 13: With Hurricane Ivan just hours away from passing over or near the western tip of Cuba, Fidel Castro repeated his stand that he wouldn't accept any assistance from the US. Castro said Cuba wouldn't accept a penny from the US or any country that has imposed economic sanctions against his country. "Not only from the US, but from other countries whose names I don't want to mention", Castro said. Castro said the US could save itself the hypocrisy of trying to help Cuba in this situation. (*CNN, La Jornada*, 14/9/04)

September 15: The Department of State released the sixth Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, which examines the "status of religious freedom around the world." In the case of Cuba, the reports signals that, the "Ministry of Interior continues to control and monitor religious activities and to use surveillance, infiltration and harassment against religious groups, clergy and laypersons." (*Washington Files*, 15/9/04)

September 24: The Cuban government has little hope for a change in US policy towards the island after the upcoming presidential elections in the United States. But in other sectors of Cuban society, there are some who believe that even a second term under George W. Bush would be different. "I support John Kerry, the Democratic candidate for president in the November elections, because I believe that anyone would be better than Bush," Cuban dissident Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, a former rebel commander who is now asking to be allowed to continue his activism legally in Cuba, said in an interview with IPS. Nevertheless, a change in Washington's stance could come under either Bush or Kerry, he added. "There is a majority in both the Senate and the House of Representatives that is in favour of a new U.S policy towards Cuba, a policy that isn't controlled by an elite minority of the Cuban exile community," he explained. (*IPS*, 24/9/04)

October 4: Asked on a flight to Brazil about Latin American complaints that the United States views regional problems through the lens of Cuba, Secretary of State, Colin Powell, answered that, "We don't see everything through the lens of Fidel Castro." "Fidel Castro is a problem for the Cuban people. I don't view him as that much of a problem for the rest of the hemisphere. Certainly not the way he was when I was [President Reagan's] national-security adviser — 15 years ago — when he really was." (*Knight Ridder*, 5/10/04)

October 7: Seeking to contain a minor political storm over recent remarks on Cuban leader Fidel Castro, Secretary of State Colin Powell said that Castro has "never stopped being a troublemaker" in Latin America and that the region will be better off when he's gone. Powell spoke with the press one day after Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry seized on earlier remarks in which the secretary of state suggested that Castro was a problem for Cubans but not for the rest of the Western Hemisphere. But he staunchly defended his record on dealing with Castro and suggested his remarks had been twisted. His point, he said, was that Castro's Cuba doesn't present the sort of regional threat it did when Castro had the military and political backing of the Soviet Union. "We're in a political environment," said Powell, who seemed dismayed at the brouhaha. "Castro is an anachronism. He is causing his own people to suffer greatly. He is a troublemaker in the rest of the region. He is a troublemaker in Venezuela. He's a troublemaker in Colombia. He's never stopped being a troublemaker. But he is not the kind of threat he was when we had the Soviet Union backing him up about 15 to 20 years ago." Powell said he chaired a presidential commission that studied ways to ease the transition to democracy in Cuba and repeatedly has pushed for international condemnation of Castro's human-rights record. (*Knight Ridder*, 8/10/04)

October 12: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón has denounced the so-called "democratic system" in the United States. During an international workshop on democracy and

the role of local and national governments, Cuba's top legislator noted that millions of eligible voters in the US don't even exercise the basic right to cast their ballot. Ricardo Alarcón told participants at the workshop that only half of those eligible to vote in the United States even bother to register and, of that total, only 50 percent go to the trouble of voting. He contrasted this with Cuba's electoral experience where, he says, more than 90 percent turn out to vote and also take part in nominating candidates. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/10/04)

October 21: Washington has declined to wish Fidel Castro a speedy recovery, with some officials joking that they preferred to hear of a "different kind of fall". The US state department appeared to be in no mood to show sympathy for a Communist revolutionary who has defied Washington's power for more than four decades and who has reportedly survived hundreds of assassination attempts. Asked if the state department wished him a speedy recovery, spokesman Richard Boucher simply replied: "No". "The situation of Mr Castro is little concern to us but, unfortunately, of enormous importance to the people of Cuba, who have suffered very long under his rule," he said. One unnamed state department official quoted by a news agency in Washington quipped: "We've been looking forward to Castro's fall for years but this isn't what we had in mind." (*BBC*, 22/10/04)

October 23: Cuba considered ridiculous the statements of the US Department of State spokesman, Richard Boucher, about the health of Fidel Castro after his accidental fall in a public act. Granma newspaper rejected statements by Richard Boucher, the State Department's spokesman, and what it called his lack of sensibility and scruples for a human life, and denounced that "ignorant and chatty politicians are common in Washington's policy". (*Prensa Latina*, 23/10/04)

October 26: The State Department said Cuba's move to ban the circulation of dollars underscores the weakness of Fidel Castro's communist government. At a news briefing in Washington, State Department Deputy spokesman Adam Ereli described the dollars-for-pesos exchange requirement "draconian," and said it shows that Mr. Castro is "cynically trying to preserve a bankrupt regime" at his peoples' expense. "We see it is a confiscatory measure that demonstrates that President Bush's policy is working," he noted. "It's squeezing the regime, and causing them to take extreme measures that underscore its own inherent weaknesses." (*VOA*, 26/10/04)

November 1: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón has said that US President George W. Bush has gone too far in recent anti-Cuba declarations in Florida. Alarcón spoke with reporters at an activity organized by US businesspeople to celebrate the 80th birthday of Ramón Castro, Fidel Castro's older brother. The island's top legislator said that Bush's recent statements that he will 'free Cuba' went a bit too far -- kind of like "tightening the screw so much that it strips the threads." Ricardo Alarcón noted that Bush made his declarations in Miami, "before an audience that wanted to hear exactly that." (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 2/11/04)

November 2: The head of the US legation in Havana, James Cason, held a reception at his residence to watch early election returns and organized a mock ballot for the Cubans attending. Local opponents of the island's Communist regime voted for US president and immersed themselves in the electoral process, wearing buttons with the names of their favorite candidates and following election results on American television. Among those attending the reception were, Vladimiro Roca, of the Todos Unidos movement, and Marta Beatriz Roque, recently released from jail. (*EFE*, 3/11/04)

November 3: Cuba's state television said that George W. Bush won the US presidential election by manipulating voters' fears of future terrorist attacks. On the island's nightly televised "Round Table" discussion program, host Randy Alonso said Bush's win was due to a successful strategy "to cultivate fear among (U.S.) citizens" and "present himself as the great leader of the fight against terrorism." With Bush's victory, Alonso said Cubans should expect little change in the US

hard line policy toward the communist-run island. "Nothing has changed for us," he said. "And for the Americans, four more years of darkness could be ahead." (*AP*, 3/11/04)

November 4: Public opinion in Cuba with regards to what a second administration for President George W. Bush could mean for the Caribbean island nation ranges from extreme pessimism to indifference and even a slight glimmer of optimism. Although they do not hope for miracles, some analysts predict that a new Bush administration will take a more moderate stance towards Cuba. However, the government of Fidel Castro does not believe there is any chance of a change for the better. While Cubans on the street could be heard expressing disappointment or resignation, *Granma*, the official newspaper of the ruling Communist Party, made no editorial comment on the results of the US elections. Academics and representatives of moderate dissident groups, meanwhile, do not rule out the possibility of a slight easing of tension between the two countries, now that Bush has safely won four more years in the White House. (*IPS*, 4/11/04)

November 9: Fidel Castro's tumble to the ground last month and an increasingly difficult economy have prompted many Cubans to begin contemplating the island's future, the top American diplomat in Havana said. "All over the island people are discussing the future, of what they want it to be," James Cason, chief of the US Interests Section, told a gathering of Cuban Americans and Cuba-watchers in Coral Gables. "The lonely voices in the opposition are getting less lonely by the day." "Cubans are increasingly losing patience with Castro," Cason said. "In the weeks since Castro's well-publicized fall, more and more regime supporters are now saying it is time for Castro to step down." "Most Cubans on the island today have known nothing but communism -- 70 percent were born after the revolution," Cason added. "Simply plunking down a genuine electoral system won't be sufficient in the future. It will take at least a generation to acquire the habits of democracy on the island." (*The Miami Herald*, 10/11/04)

November 30: The US State Department spokesman, Richard Boucher, did not recognize the role of the Spanish diplomacy in the release of Cuban journalist Raul Rivero. Asked during a press daily briefing about the mediation of Spain and the European Union with the Cuban government, Boucher answered that, he couldn't describe the Cuban decision "as being the result of any specific nation or upcoming meeting or anything like that". "I don't know if the Cubans will say that's why they did it, or this is why they did it or not, and whether they'll be speaking the truth anyway". Boucher added that, "the Europeans have been, in recent years, partly because of our work with them, a bit more insistent on human rights aspects in Cuba and raising these issues". (*El Mundo*, 30/11/04)

December 3: President George W. Bush will be committed during his second term to the "liberation of Cuba" by extending moral and political support to the Cuban people, a top State Department official said. Roger Noriega, who heads the department's Latin American bureau, also said once Fidel Castro is no longer in power, the United States is ready to support broad economic and political changes in Cuba "to ensure that vestiges of the regime don't hold on." Noriega noted Washington has a blueprint for providing social, economic and other types of assistance to Cuba in the post-Castro era. (*Canadian Press*, 3/12/04)

December 3: Spain's push for a more flexible EU policy toward Cuba is "wrong-headed," the top US diplomat for Latin America said. "Making concessions to a regime of that nature is really a wrong-headed policy," Roger Noriega said. "Foreign Minister (Felipe) Perez Roque said months ago that Spain would come crawling on its knees to Havana. I laughed when I read that. And my guess is that Perez Roque is doing the laughing now," Noriega said. (*EUBusiness*, 3/12/04)

December 9: The Head of the Cuban Communist Party's Ideology Office concluded the 6th National Festival of Written Press by calling on Cuban journalists to take a firm stance against what he called "the moral decadence and arrogance" of the United States government. Rolando Alfonso Borges warned that the swing to the right witnessed in President George W. Bush' administration and the escalation of the media war against perceived enemies of the US made military aggression against Cuba increasingly possible. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/12/04)

December 10: The top American diplomat in Cuba said the end is near for Fidel Castro and his government and that even Castro's supporters are preparing for a transition to democracy. US Interests Section Chief James Cason spoke at his official residence where dissidents gathered for a time capsule ceremony marking International Human Rights Day. Castro's government "is on its last legs," Cason said as dissidents filled the capsule with messages spelling out their dreams for a different kind of Cuba. "Even regime supporters are discreetly preparing for the inevitable democratic transition" on the communist-run island, the American official said. (*AP*, 10/12/04)

December 15: Cuba's most senior US diplomat says he has been warned by the government of serious consequences unless he takes down Christmas decorations in Havana. James Cason says he will not remove the display at the American interests section, which includes a reference to 75 dissidents jailed last year. Cuba has twice told US diplomats to remove all decorations immediately. The display at the US interests section includes a huge white Santa Claus, an image of galloping reindeer and a flashing sign wishing Cubans a Happy Christmas. A large figure 75, is picked out in neon, inside a large circle. James Cason, head of the interests section, says the decorations will remain in place until the end of the holidays and that any action taken by Cuba against US personnel or the US mission in Havana will not affect his government's determination to draw attention to human rights. "Our intent, in the spirit of Christmas, was to call attention to the plight of these 75," Cason told reporters. "We're prepared to pay whatever price for the things we believe in." (*BBC, AP*, 15/12/04)

December 15: The president of the Cuban National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcón, was complaining about the Christmas decorations in the garden of the US Interests Office in Havana, among them the number "75," alluding to the group of peaceful dissidents jailed in spring of 2003. "It was a horrible thing done by this gentleman (Interests Office chief James Cason), who was desperate to provoke (us). I don't think this deserves comment," Alarcón said in brief statements to foreign correspondents at the premiere of a film about five Cuban spies serving long sentences in the United States. (*EFE*, 15/12/04)

December 17: Cuba put up several huge billboards near the US mission with pictures of abused Iraqi prisoners and American soldiers pointing a rifle at children, in response to a US Christmas display in support of imprisoned Cuban dissident. Two billboards with photos of hooded and bloodied inmates at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison, a swastika and the word "fascists" in bold red letters were erected across the street from the US diplomatic mission, where the display of Christmas lights includes the number 75, in reference to 75 pro-democracy activists imprisoned for lengthy terms last year. Another billboard faces the back of the building, with large photos of US soldiers searching and pointing a rifle at children, presumably in Iraq. A US diplomat called the billboards fanatical. (*EFE, Reuters*, 7/12/04)

December 17: US Secretary of State Colin Powell chided Cuba for displaying Nazi swastikas and pictures of Iraqi prisoner abuse to counter US Christmas decorations in Havana that paid tribute to jailed Cuban dissidents. "I don't think that is very wise on their part," Powell said in the latest volley in the holiday season row that has erupted in the Cuban capital. Powell, speaking in an interview with the press, refused to back down on the US decorations, which he called a gesture of solidarity with political prisoners in Cuba. "And the Cuban government's response is to put forward and show the world a swastika?" he said, according to a State Department transcript. "I don't think that is very wise on their part, and we will continue to stick by our troops down there, our diplomats down there and our Christmas display, with the "75." (*AP*, 17/12/04)

December 17: US officials were critical after Cuba used Nazi swastikas and pictures of Iraqi prisoner abuse to counter US Christmas decorations in Havana. "Any government that puts up swastikas ought to answer its own questions about why it does that," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said. (*The Globe and Mail*, 17/12/04)

December 20: Five thousand Cuban students rallied outside the US diplomatic mission in Havana, denouncing US policy toward their country, Iraq and elsewhere. Communist youth, university, and high school leaders blasted "US imperialism" at the evening rally between anti-war and nationalist songs, as two powerful members of the Communist Party Political Bureau, Vice President Carlos Lage Dávila and National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón, looked on. "The new fascism of the United States continues harassing our revolution (...) As long as the provocations continue, we will do what is needed to fight them," said the leader of Havana University students, Carlos Lage Codorniú. The event, celebrating the 82nd anniversary of the University Students Federation, was held in front of the US mission, on Havana's busy sea-side drive, to protest a Christmas display that has angered local authorities. The rally was broadcast live by the state-controlled media. (*Reuters*, 20/12/04)

December 22: Cuban art students and cartoonists painted an American eagle cartoon on the asphalt of Havana's coastal highway so cars can drive over it as they pass the US diplomatic mission, the latest salvo in a spat over pro-dissident Christmas decorations hung by the Americans. Police closed off two blocks of the highway as the students drew the colorful cartoon of an aggressive-looking eagle with an enormous "B" on its chest. "This character represents the blockade and will be squashed by all the cars and people who pass by here," said Ernesto Padrón, a well-known cartoonist who worked on the painting. The government has used the figure in a televised campaign to criticize four decades of sanctions. A two-storey high cartoon depicted the top US diplomat in Cuba, James Cason, as a huge Father Christmas - whose sack contains bombs, not presents. (*Sun Sentinel*, *BBC*, *Reuters*, 22/12/04)

December 22: Cuba's Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez Roque, said in Havana that his country is ready to respond in kind to the latest US provocations by resorting to options that "will become public at the appropriate time." Speaking to the press at Havana's Convention Center, Perez Roque said that his country is endowed with "an arsenal of ideas" to counter what he deemed subversive actions by the US Interests Section in Havana. (*Prensa Latina*, *BBC Mundo Latino*, 23/12/04)

December 24: The US mission in Cuba stepped up its Christmas symbols battle with the Cuban government by sending holiday postcards with the number 75 representing dissidents held prisoner by the communist-led island. The card is decorated with a shackled peace dove behind bars and a padlock with the number 75 for the dissidents who were rounded up in a government crackdown on the opposition last year. "Peace on earth, goodwill toward all," says the postcard sent to foreign diplomats and journalists. The card is signed by the chief of the US special interests section, James Cason, and his wife Carmen. (*AFP*, 24/12/04)

December 28: Hundreds of Cuban children have rejected, through drawings and writings on the road surface, the latest acts by the US Interest Section (SINA) in Havana against the island, Juventud Rebelde daily informed. Gathered in front of the SINA, the children made paintings about peace and human understanding. "We cannot just stand here doing nothing over the US provocative acts," some of the children said. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/12/04)

Venezuela-Cuba relations

[See also, Economy/ Foreign investments and trade/ Latin America, and Energy/Oil and other resources; and Foreign Affairs/ Latin America]

January 2: The Bush administration is becoming increasingly concerned about what it sees as a joint effort by Cuba and Venezuela to nurture anti-American sentiment in Latin America with money, political indoctrination and training. Roger Noriega, Secretary of State Colin Powell's top aide for Latin America, said that the 77-year-old Castro, in his "final days," appears to be "nostalgic for destabilizing elected governments. From the point of view of his democratic neighbors, Castro's actions are increasingly provocative." U.S. officials say Castro has dispatched thousands of doctors, teachers and sports trainers to Venezuela who supplement

their professional duties by carrying out political tasks. Cuban agents are said to be providing security for high-ranking Venezuelan officials. Cuban officials acknowledge that Cubans are active in Venezuela but insist their mission is strictly humanitarian. (AP, 5/1/04)

January 5: Venezuela's neighbors are bothered by close ties between the Venezuelan and Cuban governments and their potential dangers to democracy, the State Department said. Department spokesman Adam Ereli also said Cuba remains an antidemocratic force in the region but stopped just short of implicating Venezuela in antidemocratic activities. (AP, 5/1/03)

January 9: Cuba rejected US accusations that it was seeking to destabilize democratic governments in Latin America with the help of Venezuela's populist president Hugo Chavez. A front-page editorial in the Communist Party newspaper Granma defended the presence of 12,000 Cuban doctors, teachers, sports trainers and social workers supporting Chavez's social programs in oil-rich Venezuela. "Since when has promoting education and culture been seen as destabilizing nations?" the editorial, probably penned by Fidel Castro himself, said. Poverty, unemployment, hunger, unpayable foreign debts and International Monetary Fund demands were to blame for social upheaval in Latin America, not Cuba, it said. (Reuters, 9/1/04)

January 31: The US State Department's top official for Latin America said the negotiations for the 34-nation Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), would not be derailed by governments that don't fully support the trade bloc. Roger Noriega, assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, was asked at a business conference whether Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro can influence other Latin American nations to lessen their support for the President George W Bush-backed free trade area. "I don't think any one country constitutes a roadblock on the FTAA," Noriega said. "We'll just go around them." (The Globe and Mail, 31/1/04)

February 3: An editorial published on the front-page of this morning's edition of Granma refutes a recent Wall Street Journal article as part of Washington's cynical campaigns against Havana and Caracas. The Granma editorial refers to an article that appeared in the Wall Street Journal on February 1st, charging that Cuba and Venezuela are a threat to "democracy and human rights" in Latin America. The article accuses the government of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez of propping up the Cuban Revolution with crude oil sold to the island at preferential prices. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/2/04)

February 17: US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, Peter DeShazo, said he expects that the presence of Cubans in Venezuela is restricted to health and education. "There are Cubans in Venezuela" invited by President Hugo Chávez, said DeShazo in a TV program taped at the headquarters of the Voice of America (VOA). (AFP, 17/2/04)

October 9: The State Department is accusing Cuba of training Colombian rebels and says it is troubled by a large presence of Cuban personnel in Venezuela, whose president, Hugo Chavez, is a close ally of Fidel Castro. The department's view was outlined in response to a press question about Secretary of State Colin Powell's comments in an agency interview that Castro is "causing his own people to suffer greatly" and has become a troublemaker in the neighboring South American countries. Elaborating on Powell's remarks, a State Department official said in an authorized comment that the United States continues to be concerned by Cuba's support for terrorist organizations in Colombia. It said the two largest leftist guerrilla organizations there, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the National Liberation Army, continue to maintain a presence and receive training in Cuba. Both are on the State Department's list of international terrorist organizations. The official, who could not be identified under State Department ground rules, said in the written response that the United States worries that the large Cuban presence in Venezuela might harm Venezuela's democracy. (AP, 9/10/04)

October 28: US Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry, urged Venezuelan President, Hugo Chávez, to stop supporting the regime of Fidel Castro. "President Chávez should stop anti-democratic forces in the region", said George W. Bush's rival in a harsh statement released in

Madison, Wisconsin. "In supporting Castro's repressive regime, (Chávez) has jeopardized regional security and progress toward democracy", said the candidate. (AFP, 28/10/04)

December 15: The US State Department said it was "troubled" by Venezuela's economic pact with Cuba. "We are troubled that a country with a democratic tradition like Venezuela would want to strengthen its ties to the only undemocratic regime and closed economy in the hemisphere," spokesman Richard Boucher said. The comments came after Venezuela and Cuba signed an economic integration agreement and Caracas adopted internal measures similar to Cuba's. (UPI, 15/12/04)

ELECTORAL CANDIDATES

March 12: High government officials said in Miami that the objectives of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, created by President George W. Bush, do not include developing projects for political transition in the island. According to Otto Reich, Special Presidential Envoy for the Western Hemisphere, the Commission was created to ensure that different branches of the US government are ready to provide assistance to the Cuban people, should they request it, once the dictatorship is gone. (El Nuevo Herald, 12/3/04)

April 18: Democratic candidate John Kerry has not announced any major new plans or initiatives that he would implement if elected to speed up a Democratic transition in Cuba. Kerry spokesman Mark Kornblau said Kerry is not planning any Cuba policy announcements during his visit to Florida, but plans to roll out a Cuba initiative in the future. "You can stick with the failed policies or try to find a better approach, and that's what John Kerry will do," Kornblau said. "We are tired," said Republican Hialeah Councilman Esteban Bovo, who wrote a warning letter to Bush last year that was signed by dozens of local Republican leaders. "We've listened to enough rhetoric from politicians looking for votes. We know Castro is evil, that he is a dictator, that he violates human rights. We need to know what they are going to do about it." (The Miami Herald, 18/4/04)

April 18: Democratic candidate, Senator John Kerry, denied having suggested that the US embargo against Cuba should be lifted. During the TV Program "Meet the Press", Kerry said that in 20 years he has been in the Senate has never been in favor of ending the embargo. Kerry said that he has noticed a change in the Cuban American community in Florida, and he is in favor of promoting travels by US citizens to the island, as well as sending remittances by Cuban Americans to their relatives in Cuba. (Radio Martí, 19/4/04)

May 5: John Kerry reiterated his support for easing travel restrictions to Cuba, a stance that puts him sharply at odds with President Bush. Kerry's remarks, made in his first national Hispanic TV interview, came as he faces criticism for what some Democrats say is a dearth of Hispanics and other minorities in his campaign's inner circle and a lackluster effort to woo Hispanics, a key voting bloc in several battleground states, including Florida. But softening the travel ban to Cuba could fare poorly with Cuban Americans, who have called for even greater barriers against Fidel Castro. In the interview, taped in California where Kerry marked the Mexican holiday Cinco de Mayo, Univisión network anchor Jorge Ramos said Kerry supports the economic embargo against Castro, but backs increased travel as a means of hastening democracy. (The Miami Herald, 6/5/04)

May 30: John Kerry's campaign team is denying that the Massachusetts senator is not committed to a policy towards Cuba. Kerry's campaign spokesman, Mark Kornblau, stated that the democratic candidate supports the embargo, but that he is interested in lifting travel restrictions in order to encourage changes towards democracy in Cuba. "George Bush has created a positive gap for any candidate when failing to show a coherent policy", Kornblau said. "In several occasions, John Kerry has formulated a clear anti Castro policy, that also explains how it will encourage democracy through person to person exchanges and the revival of Cuban civil society", he added. But, Bush's campaign team has said that the president may show a record of how Kerry has changed his position in relation with Cuba: he supported the 1996 Law that

strengthened sanctions against the island, even when he voted against it in its final phase. "The information we are receiving indicates that people are satisfied with Bush's consistent policy against Castro", Bush's spokesman, Reed Dickens, said. (*AP*, 30/6/04)

June 6: Denouncing President Bush's crackdown on Fidel Castro as election-year politicking that "punishes and isolates the Cuban people," John Kerry said he would encourage "principled travel" to the island and lift the cap on gifts to its people. In his first detailed remarks on Cuba policy since clinching the Democratic presidential nomination, the Massachusetts senator sought to carve out a middle ground in what has been a dicey subject for him. He embraced the US trade embargo against Cuba and support for dissidents, but criticized Bush's restriction of travel and cash gifts to Cubans on the island as a "cynical and misguided ploy for a few Florida votes." Kerry said in a telephone interview that Bush's new hard-line policy restricting travelers to a single visit every three years "punishes and isolates the Cuban people and harms the Cuban Americans with relatives on the island while leaving Castro unharmed." "Selective engagement, not isolation, is the best way for the American people to send real, not just rhetorical, hope for a better future to the Cuban people," he said. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/6/04)

July 7: In a dialogue between journalist Andres Oppenheimer and senator John Kerry, broadcast by the TV program "Oppenheimer introduces", the US Democratic presidential candidate was tough on Fidel Castro. Oppenheimer asked Kerry how he would manage to make that Lula, Kirchner, and all Latin American presidents close to Castro, be exerting more pressures on the Cuban dictator in order to open the island to democracy. "One of the reasons is that we [the US] have not been completely committed to that goal", Kerry answered. "The US hasn't shown the same commitment it demonstrated [towards Latin America] when the Alliance for Progress took place, nor when former president Bill Clinton organized the Americas Summit (...)" "I don't like the Castro government, and I say it clear". "Behind that romantic façade, built by some journalists and others, there is a man that kills those who oppose him". "I unconditionally support Cuban dissidents". "I want to give democracy and change in the island full power; and I think that if we extend our hands to those Latin American leaders in a respectful, considered and committed way, we will be able to get back their commitment and respect", Kerry added. (*El Tiempo*, 8/7/04)

August 2: John Kerry and John Edwards are aiming to pick up some votes from the Cuban-American community after recent polls suggested that a portion of the traditionally Republican voting bloc may be up for grabs. Edwards, the Democratic vice presidential candidate, spent private time with some members of Miami's Cuban-American community. Democrats say President Bush's get-tough policy on Cuba has backfired. Designed to choke off Fidel Castro's government, the tight restrictions and limits on remittances have angered Cuban-Americans with family back on the island. (*Fox News*, 5/8/04)

August 26: Seeking to dispel any concerns that Cuban-American voters will stray from his side, President Bush pledged to push for democracy in Cuba before a Miami crowd chomping at the bit for a mention of the island. "The people of Cuba should be free from the tyrant. And I believe that enforcing the embargo is a necessary part of that strategy," Bush said. "My opponent has a different approach." It was Bush's second visit to Florida in two weeks, indicating how close the race is likely to be in the state. President Bush accused Senator John F. Kerry of abetting Fidel Castro's repression of Cuban dissidents. Bush charged that Kerry had once "even criticized some of the dissidents" and "said their efforts to promote democracy were counterproductive." Bush did not mention that Kerry had also said, in that interview, that he does not want to hurt the dissidents. As boos filled the partly empty Miami Arena, Bush added, "And he said they had brought down the hammer on themselves." Bush mocked Kerry for voting in favor of two versions of the Helms-Burton act of 1996, which tightened sanctions against Cuba, and then opposing the measure on final passage. "In other words, he voted for it before he voted against it," Bush said, repeating Kerry's explanation for his votes on an \$87 billion budget bill to fund military operations in Iraq. For good measure, Bush repeated the line in Spanish: "Voto si, y despues voto no." (*The Washington Post*, *The Miami Herald*, 28/8/04)

August 30: President Bush's controversial crackdown on travel to Cuba is applauded in the approved 2004 Republican party platform, underscoring the campaign's belief it will help motivate Cuban-American voters. The document, which presents the party's overall principles, praises Bush's most controversial measures -- cutting back travel to the island from once a year to once every three years, as well as limiting gift parcels to immediate family members. The platform says the Bush panel that devised the measures "provided a plan for agile, effective and decisive assistance to the people of Cuba." The Republican platform also declares that "Republicans understand that the Castro regime will not change by its own choice." And the document backs more money for Bush's plan to launch regular airborne broadcasts to Cuba and democracy-building efforts on the island. (*The Miami Herald*, (30/8/04)

October 6: Seeking to gain inroads within the critical bloc of Cuban American voters, Senator John Kerry immediately pounced on remarks made by Secretary of State Colin Powell that suggested Fidel Castro is a problem for Cuba, not "the rest of the hemisphere." Kerry, whose campaign hopes to siphon even a sliver of the reliably Republican voting bloc from President Bush, rapidly assailed the remarks, calling it "shocking that the Bush administration is telling the world that Fidel Castro no longer poses a problem for this hemisphere". "Fidel Castro is a tyrant who brutally oppresses the Cuban people," Kerry said in a statement. "Castro's Cuba is the last bastion of communism in our region and a major obstacle to the triumph of democracy in this hemisphere." (*The Miami Herald*, 7/10/04)

October 7: Vice president Dick Cheney continued his post-debate campaign swing with a townhall meeting in Miami, The enthusiastic audience at the Radisson Mart Plaza Hotel and Convention Center saved its loudest applause for Cheney's promise that Bush would veto any legislation that attempts to water down his new Cuba policy, which restricts travel to the island to once every three years. In response to a question from the audience, Cheney noted that there is "an effort in Congress" to prevent the White House from carrying out the travel restrictions. Despite threats of a veto, the US House voted two weeks ago to prevent funding to carry out the new restrictions. "The president has made it very clear any bill that interferes with his Cuba policies will be vetoed," Cheney said as some in the audience rose to their feet. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/10/04)

October 10: Senator John Kerry sought to court important South Florida voting constituencies in a campaign swing, assailing President Bush's crackdown on Cuba travel. Kerry met with The Miami Herald's editorial board for a wide-ranging interview in which he assailed Bush's policies in the Middle East and the Western Hemisphere. He accused the administration of ignoring Latin America and Haiti and said that as president, he would work with US allies that do business in Cuba to bring pressure on Fidel Castro. "Our ability to remove Castro is going to depend on earning the respect of other nations, and making them to get tough," Kerry said. "Every other country, the Germans, the French, others, have been buying property in Cuba, playing games. There's no concentrated focus on [Castro's] repressive anti-human rights behavior, and there should be. But because the US has isolated itself, in a way, we've lost the legitimate pressure that ought to be brought on him." Kerry argued that Bush's travel restrictions will punish families while isolating dissidents on the island. "It's counterproductive to the kind of exchange of information we need," Kerry said. "To shut it off is to empower Castro, and frankly I think that's a huge mistake." (*The Miami Herald*, 11/10/04)

October 13: A triumph of the Democrat candidate John Kerry in US presidential elections would not affect Cuba, Ricardo Alarcón said. The president of Cuba's National Assembly added that Kerry's policy towards the island is "more of the same". "We have to see what Kerry thinks and what he will do." "Right now, everything he has said is more of the same", Alarcón added. (*EFE*, 13/10/04)

October 18: The Democrats don't expect their presidential candidate, Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, to win the Cuban American vote in the November 2 election. But because the group is so large, just making inroads would translate into a handy boost in a battleground state

that was decided by only a few hundred votes four years ago. President Bush will overwhelmingly win the support of the Cuban American community," said Al Cardenas, a lawyer and former state chairman of the Republican Party. "Democrats have no choice but to come and fight for every vote. If this were anywhere else but Florida, they would have written off our community a long time ago." (*Reuters*, 18/10/04)

October 25: A 30-second Bush ad, in Spanish, depicts Kerry as sympathetic toward the Cuban dictator and targets Florida's Cuban-Americans - a community that had been strongly Republican but has splintered over economic hardships it claims the Bush administration has put on family and friends in Cuba. The spot whacks Kerry for voting against the 1996 Helms-Burton Act to beef up sanctions on Cuba, and charges he and the "liberals in Congress (...) don't understand what a dictator is." But Kerry spokesman Phil Singer said Kerry opposed one provision that would have led to frivolous lawsuits. The Bush administration has opposed the same provision. "So now they are taking issue with a provision that they want removed from the law," Singer said. (*Washington Bureau*, 25/10/04)

October 31: President Bush campaigned from one end of battleground Florida to the other, criticizing Cuba's Fidel Castro in a pitch to the state's Cuban-Americans and urging Republican supporters in Miami to help give him a second term. "We will not rest - we will not rest, we will keep the pressure on until the Cuban people enjoy the same freedoms in Havana they receive here in America," Bush said to cries of "Viva Bush!" Then, in a direct reference to Castro, Bush said, "I strongly believe the people of Cuba should be free from the tyrant." (*AP*, 31/10/04)

EMBARGO, TRAVEL BAN, REMITTANCES AND RADIO AND TV TRANSMISSIONS

[See also, Exile Community/ Relations with the Bush administration]

Congress

January 27: The two Cuban-Americans in the Senate race, Republican Mel Martinez of Orlando and Miami-Dade Mayor Alex Penelas support Fidel Castro's removal, but not by force. "I am totally for a regime change in Cuba, but we must do it by peaceful means unless it's apparent that Castro is a more obvious threat than he appears to be today," said Martinez, who came to the US from Cuba at 15 to live with foster parents until his family was able to rejoin him. "The notion of taking a collective military action in Cuba without any specific evidence of imminent threats to America I would not support," said Penelas, who also spoke Spanish on two occasions to differentiate himself from his Democratic opponents. (*AP*, 27/1/04)

January 27: The National Foreign Trade Council (NFTC) applauds the introduction of the bi-partisan US-Cuba Trademark Protection Act (S. 2002) in the United States Senate. This bi-partisan bill will help US companies protect trademarks registered in Cuba and prevent Cuba from becoming a haven for counterfeiting and trademark encroachment. "We commend Senators Baucus and Craig for introducing this comprehensive legislation aimed at protecting the more than 5,000 American trademarks registered in Cuba. Currently, these trademarks are vulnerable to counterfeiting and infringement, thanks to a five-year-old special-interest law known as Section 211," said Bill Reinsch, president of NFTC. The bi-partisan bill was recently introduced by Senator Max Baucus (Democrat) and Senator Larry Craig (Republican). Similar bi-partisan legislation in the House, H.R. 2494, has more than doubled its sponsorship to 19 members since its introduction in the summer of 2003. (*US Newswire*, 27/1/04)

February 20: House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (Republican-Texas) delivered an impassioned speech denouncing Fidel Castro's terrorist regime and honoring thousands of victims of communist violence and oppression at el Memorial Cubano in Miami, Florida. "Humanity has known it by many names -- Nazism, fascism, Communism, terrorism. But it is one and the same evil, inhuman ideology -- no matter what language it speaks, or what uniform it wears," DeLay

said. "The war on terror is a war against evil, and it is therefore a war against Fidel Castro," DeLay said. "Freedom and terrorism cannot coexist, and evil will not stand. And if it will not stand in Baghdad, Kabul, Tehran, or Ramallah, then it will not stand in Havana." DeLay joined Florida congressmen Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, and Mario Diaz-Balart, along with members of the Cuban Memorial Project, an assembly of various organizations, groups, and individuals from the Cuban exile community, to denounce Fidel Castro's regime. (*US Newswire*, 20/2/04)

March 16: A recent Journal-World series on the US crackdown on travel to Cuba is being brought to the attention of Congress. Representative Dennis Moore (Democrat-Kansas), is sending copies of the newspaper's "Trading With the Enemy?" series to all 434 of his colleagues in the US House of Representatives. A spokeswoman said the distribution was intended to stimulate renewed debate on the travel and trade embargo with Cuba. "Congressman Moore has long been a supporter of opening markets in Cuba, because he believes it will help our farmers and companies be more competitive globally," said spokeswoman Christie Appelhanz. (*The Lawrence Journal*, 16/3/04)

April 4: A core group of GOP lawmakers in Tallahassee apparently believes Florida needs its own anti-terrorism foreign policy. And they are supporting HB 1193, the "Commerce with Terrorist States Act." The bill would levy a surcharge on direct flights from Florida airports to countries on the State Department's terrorist nations list, including Iran and Libya. It would also require university and other groups making such a trip to file detailed itineraries 50 days before departure. There are no such flights from Florida to countries like North Korea or Libya, so this bill applies only to Cuba. (*Sun Sentinel*, 4/4/04)

May 20: US lawmakers introduced a bill that would subject the four-decade-old US trade embargo against Cuba to an annual review by Congress. The bipartisan measure, the latest effort to chip away at the embargo, comes as President George W. Bush prepares to make it harder for Cuban Americans to travel to the communist-run nation and send money to relatives there. "These new restrictions are simply the latest in a long series that have been implemented without congressional consultation," said Senator Max Baucus, a Montana Democrat sponsoring the bill. Introduced on the day when Cuban Americans celebrate the country's independence from Spain more than a century ago, the measure is based on the annual review process that Congress set up last year for sanctions against Myanmar. Baucus was accompanied by Representative C.L. "Butch" Otter, an Idaho Republican, Representative William Delahunt, a Massachusetts Democrat, and Representative Jeff Flake, an Arizona Republican. (*Reuters*, 20/5/04)

July 7: The House dealt an election-season setback to President Bush by voting to overturn restrictions his administration has issued on the gift parcels that Americans can send to family members in Cuba. The 221-194 vote was won by a coalition in which Democrats were joined by nearly four dozen farm-state and free-trade Republicans to rebuff the president. The debate was an emotional one, as the debates over Cuba policy often are. "It's hard to think of an economic sanction that does more harm to the welfare of families in Cuba, or does more to make the US seem mean-spirited toward families who already have the misfortune to live under communism," said Representative Jeff Flake, Republican-Arizona, one of the sponsors. Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Republican-Florida, a Cuban-American, said the proposal was "dishonest" and "condescending," adding, "It seeks to undermine an entire policy President Bush has just implemented (...) to hasten the Democratic transition in Cuba." (*AP*, 8/7/04)

July 8: Despite a telephone call from the White House asking him not to do so, Representative Jeff Flake, Republican-Arizona, still persuaded his House colleagues to vote to overturn President Bush's new policies restricting the sending of gift parcels to Cuba. "The administration did ask Mr. Flake to withdraw the amendment," Flake spokesman Matthew Specht said. That telephone request came from the White House's Office of Legislative Affairs just before the House's 221-194 approval of Flake's measure, a vote won with a coalition of Democrats and 46 farm-state and free-trade Republicans. (*Republic Washington Bureau*, 9/7/04)

July 9: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón said that the US House of Representatives delivered a setback to the George W. Bush administration by voting against restrictions on gift packages that Cuban-Americans can send to family members on the island. Cuba's top legislator told reporters that the 221 to 194 vote demonstrates that a majority in the US Congress are opposed to Bush's measures against Cuba. Alarcón spoke at the opening of a photo exhibit by US and Cuban artists, inspired by the tragic images of the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York City. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 9/7/04)

September 15: Opponents of US restrictions on travel to Cuba suffered a defeat when an amendment that would have denied funding for enforcement was withdrawn from a House of Representatives bill, the first such setback in five years. Representative Jeff Flake (Republican-Arizona), the sponsor of the initiative, blamed election-year politics for his decision to withdraw the amendment. "Unfortunately, the timing of this legislation this year does not lend itself to a reasoned and thoughtful debate about our policy toward Cuba," he said. A similar amendment passed the House and Senate last year, but was later dropped in a conference committee under a veto threat from the White House. (*The Miami Herald*, 15/9/04)

September 21: In a rebuke against President Bush, the House voted to reverse a new administration policy that limits travel by Cuban-Americans to visit their families in Cuba. With Florida members sharply divided, the US House voted 225 to 174 remove new travel restrictions. Proponents from Florida and other states said the new rules separate families and cut off a lifeline of support during an especially traumatic time in the aftermath of hurricane damage. The 225-174 vote is not expected to survive the legislative process; the Senate version of the bill is still in committee and even if both chambers keep the amendment on the final transportation appropriations bill, Republican leaders said they believe Bush would veto it. But the vote was viewed as a slap at Bush as he battles to keep his historic domination of the Cuban-American vote in Florida. (*Boston News, Sun Sentinel*, 22/9/04)

September 28: In a rare intervention in the American legislative process, the Cuban government is lobbying against legislation pending before Congress, saying lawmakers must act to repeal controversial trademark legislation and expressing its opposition to the so-called Bacardi bill, according to a document provided to the press. In a letter to Senate Judiciary Committee members, Dagoberto Rodríguez Barrera, chief of the Cuban Interest Section in Washington, D.C., said Cuba opposes the bill. Rodríguez Barrera said his country's courts have protected the thousands of US trademarks currently registered in Cuba, adding that Cuba has waited with considerable patience on effective US action to cure Section 211's violations" of the Inter-American Convention and the TRIPS agreement. Many US companies fear that Fidel Castro would initiate legal retaliation against their trademarks. National Foreign Trade Council (NFTC) President Bill Reinsch said he believes Cuba is waiting to see what Congress does" but would retaliate if Section 211 were not appealed outright. (*The Hill*, 28/9/04)

December 12: After years of fighting defensive maneuvers to keep US sanctions on Cuba intact, changes in Congress and the White House have emboldened pro-embargo legislators to consider more aggressive policies against the island. The addition of Florida's Mel Martinez to the Senate, the strengthening of the Republican majority in Congress and Condoleezza Rice's nomination as secretary of state have shifted the balance of power in favor of the pro-embargo camp, analysts and congressional officials say. "We're going to get together and form a coalition with other members of like mind to have a proactive stance," said Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Republican-Florida). Ros-Lehtinen, Martinez and Representatives Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart, brothers and Miami Republicans, have created a congressional bloc, tentatively named the Cuba Democracy Group, to counter the bipartisan Cuba Working Group, which favors more trade with the island. Much of the Cuba Democracy Group's efforts will target freshmen legislators who might be unfamiliar with Cuban issues. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/12/04)

Statements and actions by US and Cuban government

February 16: The Treasury Department announced that it would "take a hard look" at restricting "remittance" rules that allow Cuban Americans to send as much as \$1,200 a year to relatives on the island. The government wants to be sure that the money really is "going to where it's supposed to," Treasury Secretary John Snow said during a news conference announcing a crackdown on Cuban-owned companies conducting illegal business in the United States. A spokeswoman for the Treasury Department said that details of how remittance rules would be changed are still to be determined. The move to restrict remittances, spokeswoman Tara Bradshaw said, stems from President Bush's speech in October that condemned Fidel Castro for recent crackdowns on dissidents. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/2/04)

February 19: A crackdown by the Bush administration on US travel to Cuba has reduced the number of non-Cuban Americans visiting the island to a trickle, travel agents and Cuban officials said. At Havana's Hemingway Marina, it is hard to find a yacht or big-game fishing boat with a US flag these days. "The Commerce Department began asking for export licenses for the vessels," said the marina's commodore, Jose Miguel Diaz. "The yachters didn't want trouble." Havana was packed with American tourists in November and December, including museum curators and retired academics, who rushed to get a glimpse of the communist-run nation before permits for cultural and educational visits ended. (*Reuters*, 19/2/04)

February 20: The United States Department of Commerce revoked the license of Send a Piano to Havana, a non profit organization that has donated pianos to Cuban music schools since 1995. The project had sent 237 refurbished pianos to date with the latest shipment of 27 instruments arriving in Havana earlier this month. The Cuban representative of the US charity, Armando Gómez recently established the Newton Hunt School of Tuning and Instrument Repair in the Cuban National School Of Music. The project is named after a New Jersey piano tuner who died last year bequeathing the entire contents of his workshop to the Havana school. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/2/04)

February 26: President George W. Bush stepped up restrictions on boats traveling between US ports and Cuba, citing "the disturbance or threatened disturbance of the international relations of the United States caused by actions taken by the Cuban government." Bush signed a presidential proclamation authorizing Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge to take the necessary measures to keep tabs on boats bound for Cuba and increase inspections of vessels in US. The president also asked local and state authorities to collaborate with the federal government to prevent "the unauthorized departure of vessels intending to enter Cuban territorial waters." The measure strengthens enforcement of the US embargo against Cuba. [See also, Exile Community] (*EFE*, 26/2/04)

February 26: US President George Bush signed an order that expands the government's authority to inspect US vessels sailing to Cuba, further tightening the embargo in a move critics say aims to appease Cuban-American voters during a hotly contested election year. Stating that US boaters could be endangered by the Cuban military's "potential use of excessive force," Bush directed Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge to develop new rules to prevent unauthorized vessels from entering Cuban waters. US authorities would be authorized to inspect any vessel in US waters, place guards on ships and take possession under some circumstances. (*Sun Sentinel*, 27/2/04)

March 10: The US government has prevented a group of 70 medical professors, doctors and other scientists from attending an international symposium on coma and death taking place in Cuba, according to some of the doctors involved. They affirmed that the ban, which they were informed of just a few days before the event, is the latest move by the Bush administration to limit their collaboration with persons in countries like Cuba that are considered hostile by the United States, The New York Times reported. (*Granma International*, 11/3/04)

March 28: With the support of several Hispanic lawmakers from Miami-Dade County, the Florida Legislature is considering tightening rules on travel to Cuba -- slapping extra fees on charter airlines that fly to the island and requiring state universities organizing educational Cuba trips to submit detailed itineraries well in advance. Representative David Rivera, a Miami Republican and chief sponsor of the measures, said the proposed fees on charter flights would help pay for improved security at Florida airports and seaports, while the school reporting requirements would crack down on tourist excursions masquerading as academic trips. Such tourist trips have been criticized by exile groups as helping prop up the regime of Fidel Castro. (*The Miami Herald*, 28/3/04)

March 30: A federal judge in Manhattan said American trademark law protects Cuba's premium Cohiba brand of cigars and ordered a New York company to quit selling stogies under that name. Cohibas were originally created in Cuba as the personal cigars of Fidel Castro and were later given as gifts to visiting heads of state and other dignitaries. In 1982, Cuba began selling them internationally - but not in the United States, which has a trade embargo banning all goods from the communist island. A decade later, the magazine *Cigar Aficionado*, in its premier issue, anointed Cohibas as one of the world's great cigars - and that's when a New York company called General Cigar started marketing a high-end stogie under the Cohiba label. (*New York Post*, 30/3/04)

April 20: A retired couple from Strafford is facing \$55,000 US in fines for trips to Cuba they made while writing a travel book for bicyclists. Wally and Barbara Smith travelled to Cuba four times - once for a vacation, and the next three to do research for *Bicycling Cuba*, a book that came out in November 2002. In doing so, they violated US sanctions that prohibit most US citizens from spending money in Cuba. Now the Smiths could pay a \$55,000 fine, although they plan to contest that at hearings in Washington. Meanwhile, they're at work on another cycling book - this one about eastern Canada. (*Canadian Press*, 20/4/04)

May 3: Even if the United States tightens its economic stranglehold on Cuba, the blockade is doomed to failure because the Island advances and even is able to help other nations, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque asserted. Alluding to President George W. Bush's "program for democratic transition in Cuba" in his talk with the more than 600 delegates from 50 countries at a solidarity with Cuba meeting, Perez Roque stressed the determination of the Cuban people to resist any new aggression, including military. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/5/04)

June 8: Havana accused Washington of trying to bring the island nation "to its knees" by tightening the economic embargo with measures announced last month. A communique published in the government-run press abounded in negative characterizations of the US government and policies, including "fascists," "criminal," "perverse" and "cynical." "The extreme right wing of the administration (of US President George W. Bush) is taking clear steps aimed at blocking income for our country from tourism and other services and to reducing to zero the possibility that Cuban residents in the United States can send remittances to their relatives in Cuba," the communique added. (*EFE*, 8/6/04)

June 9: A lawyer was sentenced to more than three years in federal prison for smuggling thousands of fine Cuban cigars into the US and selling them for a fat profit. Richard "Mick" Connors, 54, was also fined \$60,000 and placed on three years' probation. Connors was convicted in 2002 of smuggling, trading with the enemy, conspiracy and lying to a passport officer. (*CNN*, 9/6/04)

June 16: The US government published in the Federal Register regulations that further tighten the embargo against Cuba. The Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control said in the Federal Register that the new regulations would take effect on June 30. The tough new rules allow Cuban-Americans to visit immediate relatives on the island only once every three years, instead of once per year. Visits can last no longer than 14 days, according to the published regulations. US citizens who are not Cuban-Americans are banned from visiting the island, just

90 miles (150 km) from Florida, with a few exceptions like journalists and legislators. And authorized visitors can now take only \$300 in cash to Cuba, down from \$3,000. The rules also limit to 44 pounds (27.5 kilograms) the amount of baggage travelers can carry to the island and reduce the daily spending limit from \$167 to \$50. (*CNN*, 16/6/04)

July 7: The US Treasury Department has denied a license to a delegation of American designers to travel to Cuba to attend the 7th Design Meeting Havana 2004. Kristina Goodrich, President of the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA), sent a message to participants of some 10 nations who are on hand for the event expressing her regret for missing the opportunity of exchanging with her colleagues. (*AIN*, 7/7/04)

July 19: Two separate groups of American activists returned without incident to US soil after deliberately defying new rules increasing travel restrictions to Cuba. About 90 members of the Venceremos Brigade reentered the country on foot in groups of 15, carrying banners and pulling suitcases behind them. Meanwhile, in Texas, about 100 volunteers with Pastors for Peace crossed the US-Mexican border over the Hidalgo International Bridge without any incident or arrests. Officials with the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, a division of the US Department of Homeland Security, said both groups reentered the country without incident. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/7/04)

August 10: The US Department of the Treasury took further action against Fidel Castro's regime by identifying Melfi Marine, a shipping company controlled by the Cuban government, as a Specially Designated National (SDN) of Cuba. "With this step, we continue to restrict the Cuban government's access to capital by identifying and isolating companies controlled by Castro," said Juan Carlos Zarate, Treasury's Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing. "The Castro government uses money to enrich itself and perpetuate its totalitarian regime at the expense of the Cuban people." Melfi Marine was incorporated in Panama in 1981 and is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Cimex, identified by the Treasury Department in February 2004 as a SDN of Cuba. (*Office of Public Affairs*, 10/8/04)

October 6: The United States Treasury Department has tightened its prohibitions against US citizens importing or consuming Cuban cigars. The department's Office of Foreign Assets Control has announced in a notice posted on the Internet that even Americans licensed to bring back up to \$100 worth of Cuban goods will no longer be allowed to include tobacco products in what they carry. Previously, those licensed were exempted from what was otherwise a total import ban on Cuban tobacco products. The notice also clarifies that Americans are barred from not only purchasing Cuban goods in foreign countries, but also from consuming them in those countries. (*VOA*, 6/10/04)

October 15: In Havana, the 2nd Forum on Cuban Civil Society concluded its debates and reflection on "The People Versus the Blockade". Intellectuals, religious believers, historians and attorneys discussed the effects of Washington's embargo in the fields of education, culture and sports, as well as harm caused to the island's economy, trade and finances. Cuba will demand UN Secretary General to distribute a document released by Cuban civil society organizations on the aggressive policy of the United States against the island, Minister of Foreign Relations, Felipe Perez Roque, announced at the closing ceremony. Perez Roque said he would instruct Cuba's permanent mission to the UN that the declaration approved at this meeting circulates as an official document of the UN General Assembly. (*AIN, Radio Habana Cuba*, 15/10/04)

October 18: For 12 years, the US government has financed a station aimed at bringing news and information to the Cuban people. There is only one problem. Almost no one on the island has ever seen it. Cuban officials have jammed its signal since the broadcasts began in 1990, saying it is an act of aggression and a violation of Cuba's sovereignty. After years of failure, the Bush administration launched a new effort in late August to break through the jam by beaming the TV signal from a US military plane flying off the southern coast of Florida. The results are uncertain. Critics say TV Marti is a \$10 million-a-year boondoggle that should be shut down. The C-130

broadcast is the latest attempt by the US to penetrate Cuban jamming after failing to reach large numbers of Cubans through satellite transmission and a transmitter fixed on a helium-filled balloon tethered 10,000 feet above the Florida Keys. "You can't repeal the laws of physics," said Philip Peters, a former State Department official and Cuba expert at the Lexington Institute. "It's always going to be easier for Cuba to jam the broadcasts than for the US to get them through." (*Chicago Tribune*, 18/10/04)

October 23: Parliament speaker Ricardo Alarcon blasted Washington's four-decade trade embargo against Cuba as "genocide" as thousands gathered to draw attention to the upcoming UN vote to condemn the sanctions. Alarcon noted that 70 per cent of Cuba's 11.2 million citizens were born after the United States imposed trade sanctions on the Caribbean country in the early 1960s in an effort to undermine Fidel Castro's communist government. "It's a policy of genocide (...) aimed at causing suffering and hunger," Alarcon said of the sanctions. The rally was the first major political gathering in Cuba since Castro, 78, tripped and fell after a graduation ceremony speech in the central city of Santa Clara. (*AP*, 25/10/04)

October 23: Some 10,000 people in the Cerro district of Havana demanded the lifting of the US economic embargo on Cuba imposed for more than 40 years. The demonstration demanded the lifting of the US embargo on Cuba and denounced that it violates the principles of International Law and the human rights of the Cuban people. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/10/04)

October 25: The US Department of the Treasury identified the electronic money transfer business, SERCUBA, as a national of Cuba. "As we have seen, the Castro regime uses a variety of schemes and businesses located not only in Cuba, but also in countries around the world to feed its military and security infrastructure – instead of the Cuban people. Today, we are financially isolating SERCUBA to make it more difficult for the Cuban regime to obtain the hard currency it uses to oppress its own people and to prop up its government," said Juan Carlos Zárate, Treasury's Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crime. SERCUBA provides a means by which US persons can forward remittances to Cuban nationals via a third country or through SERCUBA's own website. SERCUBA has a call center in Havana and sixteen offices located in Cuba, along with two offices abroad – one in Italy and one in Spain. The entity is organized under Cuban laws and is supported by Cimex, a Specially Designated National of Cuba. (*Press Release. US Department of the Treasury*, 25/10/04)

October 29: A judge dismissed charges against organizers of a sailboat race from Key West to Cuba who were accused of violating federal laws against trading with enemy nations. Peter Goldsmith and Michele Geslin had been charged with two counts of providing unlicensed travel services to Cuba. If convicted of both counts, they could have faced 15-year prison sentences. "The defendants certainly feel vindicated," said attorney Mario Cano, who represents Goldsmith. Carlos B. Castillo, spokesman for the US Attorney's office, said his office was reviewing the decision. (*AP*, 29/10/04)

November 2: The US Treasury Department has ordered federal charges dropped against three members of a Methodist church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin who were accused of spending US dollars during a visit to Cuba. At a news conference called by the Wisconsin Coalition to Normalize Relations with Cuba, attorney Art Heitzer said that Washington will end nearly six years of threats and legal prosecution of the Methodist 3, as they became known in Milwaukee, without requiring any fines or other penalties. They were among six members of Milwaukee's oldest Methodist Church, Central United Methodist, who visited their sister church in Havana to help celebrate its 100th anniversary. Earlier this year, they were charged with spending between 40 and 70 dollars each, resulting in government demands for penalties totaling \$22,500. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 2/11/04)

December 4: Michael and Angela McCarthy a Port Huron, Michigan, couple is driving to Washington to find out how much the US government will fine them for their illegal trip to Cuba. In April 2001, when the couple crossed the border from Ontario into Michigan, an officer asked them

where they'd been, and they answered truthfully -- Cuba -- and mentioned they had brought back a couple of cigars. Administrative Law Judge Irwin Schroeder could make them pay up to \$110,000 after considering their case during a hearing. The McCarthy case is one of about 20 now before judges of the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Asset Control, according to the Center for International Policy, which advocates ending travel restrictions to Cuba. Many more cases get settled before they ever reach a judge. (*AP*, 4/12/04)

December 8: The US Treasury Department announced that it had identified as Cuban-owned and operated a travel agency offering US citizens special rates on trips to the island and helping them evade Washington's travel ban to Havana. The company, Tour & Marketing International LTD, helps US citizens travel to Cuba via third countries. A communique from Treasury's assistant secretary of its financial crimes and terrorist financing division, Juan Carlos Zarate, said the agency "generates resources that the Cuban regime uses to oppress its people" and helps people violate US economic sanctions against the island's Communist government. Tour & Marketing International has five offices in Cuba, one in Spain, one in England and another in the British Virgin Islands. The firm's main officials are Cubans living on the island. (*EFE*, 8/12/04)

December 16: The United States has eased sanctions against Cuba, Iran and Sudan to facilitate literary and scientific exchanges. A new rule, released by the Treasury Department, enables American persons to freely engage in most ordinary publishing activities with individuals and groups in the three countries. Restrictions on "certain interactions" with the local governments in the area of publishing will be maintained, but the department did not specify in its statement how broad they will be. (*ABC*, 16/12/04)

Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba

January 16: A top US official and several public health experts warned of the urgent need to plan for chaos, shortages and a potential migrant crisis in a post-Castro Cuba. "There's a real possibility of a complex emergency" including "a high risk of chaotic migration," Andrew Natsios, Agency for International Development administrator, told a conference on the future of Cuba. The Bush administration's top officials on Cuba policy said an interagency commission studying how to hasten a transition to a free Cuba and get assistance to the island will report to President Bush by May 1. "There is growing urgency for this kind of planning," Assistant Secretary of State Roger Noriega said. Otto Reich, special White House envoy, said the swift delivery of aid "would help the Cuban people see that the future is better than the past." (*The Miami Herald*, 17/1/04)

February 9: The Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba (CAFC), established by President Bush on October 10, 2003, and chaired by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, welcomes public input for working groups to assist in identifying and encouraging measures to help the Cuban people to bring and end to the dictatorship, and develop a plan for agile and decisive assistance to a post-dictatorship Cuba. The core agencies responsible for day-to-day operations of the Commission include, the State Department, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Treasury Department, the Commerce Department, the Department of Homeland Security, the National Security Council, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Secretary Powell designated Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger F. Noriega to direct day-to-day Commission activities. (*Department of State, Press Release*, 9/2/04)

March 12: High government officials said in Miami that the objectives of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, created by President George W. Bush, do not include developing projects for political transition in the island. According to Otto Reich, Special Presidential Envoy for the Western Hemisphere, the Commission was created to ensure that different branches of the US government are ready to provide assistance to the Cuban people, should they request it, once the dictatorship is gone. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 12/3/04)

April 23: The Bush administration is considering making significant cuts in the amount of money Americans are allowed to send to family and others in Cuba, according to sources familiar with

the discussions of the president's Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. One proposal under review would temporarily freeze all remittances -- possibly for six months -- after which the administration would reinstate them at much lower levels than currently allowed. (*Sun Sentinel*, 23/4/04)

May 1: Cuba's socialist system would overcome any new US initiatives aimed at hastening political change on the island, Fidel Castro told a sea of flag-waving Cubans in a two-hour May Day speech. Referring to a report by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, expected to be presented to the US President, Castro said his enemies across the Florida Straits are "once again making themselves hoarse, shouting threats of upcoming measures to affect our economy and destabilize our country." "To those who persist in their efforts to destroy the revolution I simply say, in the name of the crowd gathered here (...) long live socialism!" he said. (*Knight Ridder Newspapers*, 1/5/04)

May 3: Secretary of State Colin Powell presented recommendations to President Bush to end communist rule in Cuba. His recommendations to Bush on Cuba were in a 500-page report that included a chapter on how to end the Castro government. The remaining four chapters covered ways the United States can help a post-Castro government committed to democracy. Bush "will decide which recommendations will be implemented and when," Boucher said. He refused to provide details of the study. (*AP*, 3/5/04)

May 5: The new measures against Cuba prepared by the United States are doomed, assured Cuba. It said it has the solidarity of Latin America on her side. Asked at a press conference on the announced project to promote a political transition in Cuba prepared by the George W. Bush administration, Cuban foreign minister Felipe Perez Roque said the US plan violates international law. He warned that the report of the Commission appointed by Bush is an escalation in the aggressive policy against the island and expressed hope that Latin American governments do not support the plans contained in that document, with a goal of strengthening the economic blockade against Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/5/04)

May 7: Cuba has denounced that the brutal economic and political measures US President George W. Bush announced against the island are inspired by cruelty and hate. In a joint communiqué of the Cuban Government and the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, published in Granma daily on Friday, local authorities said the Bush dispositions "reiterated the hate and aggression" against the Cuban people shown in his traditional and cynical interfering attacks. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/5/04)

May 6: Democrats quickly denounced the new measures by the Bush administration tightening the 40-year-old U.S. financial squeeze on Cuba. Democrats and some Republicans were quick to dismiss the effort, either because they believe the policy of financial pressure has failed after four decades or because the announcement was made during a close presidential campaign. Representative Bob Menendez (Democrat-New Jersey), accused Bush of "playing election-year politics with the lives of the Cuban people." Representative Jeff Flake (Republican-Arizona), is a leading proponent of congressional efforts to lift ever-tighter restrictions on travel to Cuba, a proposal that won majorities in the House and Senate last year. He said trying to use a C-130 aircraft to defeat Cuban jamming of US government broadcasts is laudable but insufficient. "If we're really serious about letting Cubans hear a voice other than Castro's, why not let Americans travel there?" Flake asked in a written statement. "After all, Castro can't scramble a firsthand conversation." (*The Washington Post*, 7/5/04)

May 6: A group of US senators have sent President George W. Bush a letter rejecting the latest measures recommended by the Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba, as they will further harm the Cuban people. The letter was signed by Senators Max Baucus (Democrat-Montana), Mike Enzi (Republican-Wyoming), Larry Craig (Republican-Indiana), Christopher Dodd (Democrat-Connecticut), and Byron Dorgan (Democrat-North Dakota). In comments after hearing Bush's endorsement of the measures on Thursday, Senator Baucus insisted that "at a time when

the United States faces very real terrorist threats in the Middle East and elsewhere, the Administration's absurd and increasingly bizarre obsession with Cuba is more than just a shame, it's a dangerous diversion from reality". (*Prensa Latina*, 7/5/04)

May 7: Former political prisoner Vladimiro Roca was unconvinced that further limiting the flow of dollars to Cuba would do much to change Castro's hold on power. Given that the Cuban regime is the only employer on the island and doesn't allow opponents to get jobs, "any gesture from any government in support of democracy in Cuba is welcome," he said. The problem is, I wonder whether the new US measures will have enough of an impact to offset the public relations harm they will cause. "I am a practical person. If in more than 40 years [the embargo] hasn't brought results, it won't bring them now," said Roca, whose father was one of the founders of the Cuban Communist Party. (*Sun Sentinel, The Miami Herald*, 7/5/04)

May 7: Cuban dissident Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo commented that it is not up to the White House to plan political change in Cuba, because that task is up to Cubans, including the single-party administration of Fidel Castro and the domestic opposition. In the opinion of the former rebel commander and political prisoner, Castro, who has been in power for 45 years, "would be the appropriate person to make that peaceful transition (towards democracy)". A transition in which "we do not have to worry about a debacle happening here and about the matter being left up in the air without any planning", added the former political prisoner. He felt that, otherwise: "We could have uncontrollable chaos in which we may lose control over weapons in Cuba. A total anarchy. We lose control over mass exodus and, in that anarchy, we run the risk of losing the country completely." According to Gutierrez Menoyo, a scenario such as that "could bring difficulties to the United States. The loss of control over mass exodus would also destabilize the Caribbean, at the gates of the south" for the USA. "When we had realized what was happening, the sole alternative left would be a UN intervention," said the opposition leader, who spent 22 years in prison for taking up arms against the Castro government. (*Notimex*, 7/5/04)

May 7: The Cuban-American Alliance Education Fund, based in Washington, offered a press conference condemning US President George W. Bush's cruel measures against Cuba. During the press conference, the Cuban-American solidarity group said that the Bush administration is attempting to get the financial and political support of the right wing sector in South Florida for the November presidential elections. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/5/04)

May 8: According to its president, Marcelino Miyares, the National Executive Secretariat of the Christian Democratic Party of Cuba (PDC) unanimously agreed that the new US initiatives allegedly aimed at speeding up democratic transition on the island are just "more of the same" policy that defines the Cuban issue as part of the US-Cuba differendum, instead of a problem that concerns Cubans alone. (*PDC Press Release*, 8/5/04)

May 10: A group of Cuban dissidents has sharply criticised the US for measures aimed at speeding up the end of Fidel Castro's communist rule. Leading dissident Oswaldo Paya said it was up to Cubans, not the US, to bring about change in the country. "It is not appropriate or acceptable for any forces outside Cuba to try to design the Cuban transition process," said Mr Paya, winner of the European Parliament's Andrei Sakharov human rights prize, in a separate statement. Two other Cuban dissidents handed in a protest letter at the US diplomatic mission in Havana. One of the authors, Manuel Cuesta, said the US had "no right to set the pace of a transition in Cuba". The other, fellow dissident Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo, said: "This is a total interference that does not benefit the building of democracy in Cuba." He said his letter to US Secretary of State Colin Powell said the US plan was tantamount to incitement to armed conflict. Elizardo Sanchez, head of the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation, said in an interview from Havana that "it's hard [for the United States] to deal with a totalitarian government: If you normalize relations, it takes advantage of it, and if you impose sanctions, it takes advantage as well. Sometimes, the best thing is to do nothing." (*BBC News, The Miami Herald*, 11/5/04)

May 12: During a press conference, Cuban Ambassador to the UN, Orlando Requeijo, said that the Cuban delegation to the UN delivered a letter to Secretary General, Kofi Annan, about the US decision of toughening measures against the island. The Cuban ambassador said that he hopes the letter is distributed among all delegations to the UN as an official document, and that a resolution be adopted in its support by the General Assembly. (*Notimex*, 12/5/04)

May 15: The Spanish joint parliamentary group requested the Socialist government of Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero to come out openly against the new plan of aggression of the United States against Cuba. They called on the government to criticise this aggression in the European Union and to promote favorable relations with Cuba based on dialogue, improvement of all forms of relations and to contribute to the will of the Cuban people to decide their future freely and in peace. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/5/04)

May 6: President Bush, declaring "we are working for the day of freedom in Cuba," took steps to end jamming of US broadcasts to the island as part of a tough new strategy to hasten the demise of communist rule. Bush decided to order deployment of military aircraft to transmit signals of the Miami-based Radio Marti and TV, an effort to end Cuba's jamming of US government broadcasts. The measure was one of a number of recommendations in a report prepared by a government commission on Cuba headed by Secretary of State Colin Powell "We are working for the day of freedom in Cuba," said Bush, speaking during a meeting with commission members in the Roosevelt Room of the White House. (*AP*, 6/5/04)

May 20: President Bush marked Cuban Independence Day by pledging to ratchet up restrictions against Fidel Castro amid signs that his hard-line policy could cost him points among Cuban Americans with relatives on the island. Bush chose an uncharacteristically low-key approach to note the Cuban holiday, in sharp contrast to the fiery speech he gave in Miami six months before his brother, Governor Jeb Bush, faced reelection in 2002. "We stand firmly with the 11 million Cuban people who still suffer under the repressive Castro dictatorship," Bush said in the statement, promising to "vigorously implement" the findings of a Cuba study panel that recommended more aid for island dissidents, less travel to Cuba and greater restrictions on cash and gifts to people on the island. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/5/04)

June 4: New US travel restrictions could cut travel by Cuban Americans to the island by as much as 40 percent - despite new Cuban rules making it easier for them to visit relatives in the island, a Foreign Ministry official said. Under new US regulations, Cubans living in the United States will be able to legally travel to the island only once every three years, rather than annually. "In the end, it is the Cuban family that suffers," said Benigno Perez, head of the Foreign Ministry's Department of Consular Affairs and Cubans Living Abroad. Perez spoke in an interview with the press. The rules also limit which relatives Cuban Americans can send financial assistance to. Now, Cuban Americans will only be able to help their children, parents, grandparents and siblings on the impoverished island - but not their cousins, aunts and uncles. (*AP*, 4/6/04)

June 23: US residents will no longer be allowed to send to Cuba clothing, personal hygiene items, fishing gear and other goods under new rules unveiled by the US Department of Commerce. Gift parcels are limited to food, vitamins, medicine, medical supplies and equipment, and receive-only radio equipment. Previously, the parcels could include such other items as seeds, veterinary supplies and soap-making equipment. Parcels containing items other than food are limited to once per month per household, instead of once monthly per individual. The recipient must be a grandparent, grandchild, parent, sibling, spouse or child of the donor. (*The Miami Herald*, 23/6/04)

June 25: The United States defended the new restrictions it plans to adopt against Cuba, saying these respond to "the needs of the Cuban people" and will help promote democracy on the communist-ruled island. The restrictions come from recommendations made in May by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, created by the White House with the aim of fostering a transition toward democracy in Havana. At a press conference, State Department deputy

spokesman Adam Ereli said the US measures seek to respond to "the needs of the Cuban people," though he gave no further explanation. (*EFE*, 25/6/04)

June 30: Fidel Castro said US President George W. Bush was given bad advice when he decided to impose new and highly unpopular restrictions cutting visits and money remittances to Cuba. "The least I can tell you is that Bush was ill advised," Castro told reporters at the Argentine Embassy where he met with a group of Argentine business leaders. Castro said the new US restrictions on Cuba "could work against his efforts to get reelected." "The measures injure the sensibilities of Cuban families," Castro said, adding that the US policy "was not well thought out." Despite Bush's hardening of the 42-year-old economic embargo on Cuba, Castro said: "Mentally, we're ready for any measure; either a message of peace or war." (*AFP*, 1/7/04)

July 1: Cuba's parliament speaker, Ricardo Alarcon, painted a bleak picture of what the communist nation would be like if a US plan for a "Free Cuba" ever became reality. Speaking at a general meeting of Cuba's National Assembly attended by Fidel Castro and Defense Minister Raul Castro, Alarcon said that under such a plan Cubans would have their property taken away, lose free access to education and health care and pensions for the elderly would disappear. The United States wants to "convert our country into an American territory, and subject our people to slavery," said Alarcon, the president of the assembly. (*AP*, 1/7/04)

July 1: The Cuban National Assembly issued a strong statement condemning Washington's anti-Cuba measures and the objective of destroying the Cuban nation. The island's parliament passed the document during a session that was attended by both Fidel Castro and Raul Castro. The statement passed by the Cuban parliament says the US measures seek to intensify Washington's economic war against Cuba, encourage internal subversion, step up anti-Cuba propaganda and pressure other countries to join in isolating Cuba - all with the aim of creating conditions for a direct military aggression against the island. (*AIN*, 1/7/04)

July 1: The US Congress TV station expressed interest in the TV broadcast of the Cuban parliamentary session dealing with the impact of the new batch of measures against Cuba implemented by Washington, said Fidel Castro following the debates and the approval of a declaration on that issue. (*AFP*, 1/7/04)

July 4: New US restrictions towards Cuba have caused an outcry from Democrats and some Republicans. They are complaining that the Bush administration is causing suffering among the people it is wooing politically. "Why would we be promoting something that's so antifamily?" said Representative Jo Ann Emerson, Republican of Missouri, worrying aloud that the measures could turn some critical votes against President Bush in his reelection campaign. "I think it will alienate Cuban-Americans who would otherwise be inclined to support the president, because he has been so strong against the Cuban regime." The issue "very much" could affect the outcome of the Florida presidential race, said Representative Jeff Flake, Republican of Arizona. "I think we've been very close to the tipping point for awhile, and now we've crossed it," he said. (*The Boston Globe*, 4/7/04)

July 5: American medical students in Cuba have rushed back to the United States, missing their final exams, over fears that US authorities will jail them, fine them thousands of dollars, or revoke their citizenship for studying medicine on the island. "The majority of the students have left," said one student, of New York. James Cason, the top US diplomat in Cuba, said he wasn't aware the American students were cutting their education short. "It wasn't our intention," he said. "We'll have to get word to them somehow." (*Knight Ridder Tribune*, 5/7/04)

July 7: Days before tighter restrictions on travel to Cuba went into effect, Secretary of State Colin Powell quietly agreed to tweak the new rules to allow a small group of US students attending medical school on the island to continue to do so. Nearly 80 US students -- mostly black and Hispanic -- are enrolled in Cuba's Latin American Medical School. Located on the outskirts of Havana on the campus of the country's old naval academy, it has more than 3,000 students from

Africa, Central and South America, plus the US contingent. The students are attending school in Cuba "because our constituents could not -- and still cannot -- afford the high cost of medical education in the United States," 28 black and Hispanic members of Congress said in a letter to Powell. They asked him to ensure that the students "be permitted to continue their studies uninterrupted." That's exactly what Powell has done. After reading their missive, he scribbled on the letter: "We ought to find a way to fix this," according to a State Department spokesman. (*USA Today*, 7/7/04)

July 23: Nearly a month after the US government clamped down on travel to Cuba, local air charter companies say their businesses have been decimated, passengers have yet to receive new licenses required for travel and thousands have voiced their opinions to the Treasury Department about the proposed new rules. "Today is the 24th day of the [new] regulations, and not one Cuban-American has been able to travel because the Treasury Department has not issued any -- zero -- licenses," said Xael Charters owner Eddie Levy. Levy, who had already laid off 14 of his 16 full-time employees, says his business has been paralyzed. Treasury Department official Juan Zarate, in town this week to meet with local federal officials, said his office has received more than 2,000 comments about the new regulations. (*Sun Sentinel*, 24/7/04)

August 21: While the US government's TV Marti broadcast from an airborne C-130 cargo plane to the island for the first time, it was not likely seen by many amid ongoing electricity problems after Hurricane Charley. According to a survey, in various municipalities in the capital, the first attempt to introduce the channel to the island has not yielded the results its proponents had hoped for. Of the 43 neighborhoods in Havana, only Centro Habana and a small area of El Vedado had clear reception for less than four hours. "Some friends in Centro Habana called (...) to let me know they were watching TV Marti on channel 13," dissident Vladimiro Roca explained to *Reforma*. "They said they were broadcasting a very interesting debate program featuring Luis Zuniga, a Cuban American and member of the Cuban Liberty Council. But in Nuevo Vedado, where I live, there was only audio, no visual," Roca added. The broadcast went practically unnoticed due to the blackouts covering much of western Cuba as a result of Hurricane Charley, as well as the draw satellite broadcast of the Olympic Games in Athens, which is keeping awake those who have electricity. (*AP, Reforma*, 22/8/04)

September 8: An international working group comprised of analysts, former government officials and diplomats is "most troubled" to see that the recommendations to the U.S. president by a special commission on Cuba are more concerned with putting an end to Fidel Castro's rule than with a "peaceful transition," the long-avowed policy of the U.S. government toward the island. In an open letter addressed to Secretary of State Colin Powell, the working group of the Inter-American Dialogue -- a Washington-based think tank -- maintains that the recommendations to President George W. Bush "poorly serve U.S. interests in Cuba and the wider region." (*IPS*, 9/9/04)

September 15: The number of people visiting Cuba from the United States has dropped 25 percent since new US travel restrictions took effect this summer, Cuba's tourism minister said. That trend isn't expected to change before the US presidential elections on November 2, Tourism Minister Manuel Marrero said. "These measures have really pressed down the flow of American tourists (...) and Cubans residing in the United States," Marrero told a news conference. "We are hoping for recovery after November." (*AP*, 15/9/04)

October 9: To hasten freedom in Cuba, the United States is pursuing a comprehensive approach that includes greater support for the Cuban political opposition and measures to limit the resources available to the regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, according to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Dan Fisk. In his remarks to the Cuban American Association in Miami, Florida, Fisk outlined the Bush administration's efforts to isolate and pressure the Castro regime through the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on Assistance to a Free Cuba (CAFC). As part of this effort, Fisk explained, the United States has already provided \$14 million of a proposed \$29 million in additional assistance

to support the development of civil society in Cuba. He pointed out that the United States is also working to promote greater international support for, and involvement with, Cuban civil society and transition planning. (*Washington File*, 14/10/04)

October 27: Stricter travel policies and restrictions on the number of visits to Cuba approved by Washington, have cut the number of visits by US residents to the communist island by half, according to official estimates. The flow of visitors from the United States to the island had dropped by almost 50 percent, as of September, while the number of visits to the island by Cubans who live in the United States had fallen this year by 38 percent, Cuban Tourism Minister Manuel Marrero said. Marrero estimated that at the end of this year, the visits of Cuban-Americans and other US residents to the island will have dropped to only 30 percent of their former levels, down from 115,000 and around 40,000, respectively, in 2003. (*EFE*, 27/10/04)

December 5: According to Cuban sources from the Tourism industry, during 2004 travels from Cuban Americans to the island have decreased significantly. "For Christmas 2003 we processed documents for 3,500 persons, while this year the number only rose to less than 250", said Armando García, vice president of Marazul, a travel agency. Other tour operators have said that tickets prices have gone up by 30 %. Non-official statistics reveal that in 2003 over 154,000 persons travelled to Cuba, while only 30,000 travelled during 2004. This reduction resulted in lost income of 66 million USD, compared to year before. (*DPA*, 5/12/04)

December 21: The number of passengers flying to Cuba from the United States has plummeted since last year, according to figures compiled by the State Department. The decrease suggests tougher travel restrictions by the Bush administration are having their intended effect. Since July, when the new regulations took effect, 50,558 seats have been reserved on charter flights to Cuba, most originating in South Florida. During the same period last year, the number was 118,938. (*Chicago Tribune*, 21/12/04)

United Nations

October 19: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said Cuba would win a "resounding victory" when the resolution condemning the US embargo of the island comes up for a vote in the UN General Assembly. Perez made the remarks while introducing a multimedia presentation entitled "No More Embargo" and a digital photography exhibit, "In Spite of the Embargo," both prepared by the Foreign Ministry. (*EFE*, 19/10/04)

October 28: Friends and adversaries of the United States voted overwhelmingly in the UN General Assembly against the four-decade-old American economic, financial and commercial embargo against Cuba. The vote, conducted for the 13th consecutive year, was a lopsided 179 to 4 with one abstention on the resolution opposing the embargo. The United States, Israel, Palau and the Marshall Islands voted "no" and Micronesia abstained. "The U.S. government has unleashed a world wide genocidal economic war against Cuba," said Havana's foreign minister, Felipe Perez Roque, the only speaker warmly applauded. But the US delegate said Cuba has shown no interest implementing economic reforms that would lead to democratic change or a free market. "The Cuban government is not a victim as it contends. Rather it is a tyrant, aggressively punishing anyone who dares to have a differing opinion," said Oliver Garza, a State Department adviser. (*Reuters*, 28/10/04)

November 23: The Venceremos Brigade has received a Requirement to Furnish Information (RFI) notice from the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). According to a news release issued by the Brigade, the letter is the first phase in the enforcement of laws that restrict travel to Cuba. The Venceremos Brigade (VB) says that the OFAC letter calls the organization a "travel service provider" -- but the VB clearly states that it is not a travel service provider. The Venceremos Brigade is "an anti-imperialist education project that works to develop friendship with the Cuban people". (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 23/11/04)

US opinion leaders

April 16: US Congressman Clement Leroy Otter (Republican-Idaho) met with Fidel Castro for the third time and said he was very satisfied with the Cuban leader's awareness of the problems of Cuba and the world. Lawmaker Otter, leading the US business delegation to this year's first bilateral negotiations, fully agreed with Fidel Castro's remarks on the need to peacefully work together to solve the problems of humanity. We have the talent, technology, and ability, we only need to build the willingness to do it, Otter declared. The congressman was equally enthusiastic about an artistic function offered to the visitors at the Hotel Nacional, and said he was certain Cuban ballet and music would be well received by the US market if there were no economic blockade. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/4/04)

September 13: A key lawmaker renewed his criticism that the Bush administration was dedicating too many resources to squeezing the communist government in Cuba rather than tracking down terrorists. Senator Max Baucus (Democrat-Montana), ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee and a critic of the Cuba embargo, said that the Office of Foreign Assets Control devoted "more personnel resources to prevent US citizens from vacationing in Cuba than it does to root out the international sources of terrorist financing in Iraq, Afghanistan or Iran." OFAC deploys 21 employees to enforce the Cuba travel ban. That compares to 16 employees who track the financial support networks of Iraqi insurgents and another 16 who pursue the al Qaeda terrorism network, Baucus' office said in a statement. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/9/04)

October 6: Government and business leaders from across the country will convene in Tampa to look at the evolving relationships between the United States and Cuba, and to discuss the implications of opening Cuban markets to US businesses. The National Summit on Cuba will be hosted at the University of Tampa's landmark Plant Hall. Previous summits have been held in Miami and Washington. (*Tampa Tribune*, 6/10/04)

October 8: Free trade with Cuba could generate \$50 billion and 900,000 jobs for the United States over a twenty year period, according to a forecast presented at the National Summit on Cuba by Dr. Tim Lynch, director of the Center for Economic Forecasting and Analysis at Florida State University. "It's in everyone's best interest to see free trade between the US and Cuba," said Lynch. This is good for America and good for Cuba." Lynch determined that Florida would stand to benefit more than any state for three reasons -- a historic linkage to Cuba, Florida's proximity to Cuba and large and growing Hispanic population. "Florida could see as many as 112,000 new jobs over a 20 year period that would not otherwise exist in a variety of industry sectors," said Lynch. "Where is a hungry nation like Cuba going to turn? It's cheaper to ship from Florida to Cuba, especially from Tampa and Miami, than anywhere else." (*PRNewswire*, 8/10/04)

October 8: Lifting trade and travel restrictions on Cuba is the only way to bring about real change in the island nation, panelists said during a national summit largely critical of long-standing US policies. But some speakers at the third National Summit on Cuba showed there is still support for using the trade embargo, now more than four decades old, and recently tightened travel restrictions to squeeze the island's economy and push leader Fidel Castro out of power. They were supported by a knot of protesters near the event's venue at the University of Tampa. Wayne Smith, a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and former chief of the U.S. interests section in Havana, said the containment policy has made less and less sense as the years have passed, especially after the breakup of the Soviet Union, with which Castro had aligned himself. (*St. Petersburg Times*, 9/10/04)

HELMS-BURTON LAW

January 17: US President George W. Bush announced that he is proroguing for another 6 months legislation preventing US citizens from filing legal suits against the Fidel Castro regime for property expropriation. (*Europa Press*, 17/1/04)

February 2: Pernod Ricard said that a US patent appeal board upheld its registration of the Havana Club trademark in the United States, handing the French spirits group a victory in its long-standing dispute with Bacardi USA. In a joint venture with the Cuban government, Pernod Ricard has been selling Havana Club-brand rum worldwide, although a four-decade old embargo against Cuba bars Pernod Ricard from selling the product in the United States. (*Reuters*, 2/2/04)

February 9: The Bush administration identified 10 foreign companies -- most of which are involved in the travel business -- that it believes are linked to Cuba and thus are forbidden from doing business in the United States. The Treasury Department's action marks the latest development emerging from President Bush's call for more stringent enforcement of provisions that forbid most travel to Cuba. Under current rules, there are exceptions that cover working journalists, relatives of Cuban citizens, providers of humanitarian aid and others. The 10 companies named in the action are: Travel companies: Canada Inc., Montreal and Quebec; Corporacion Cimex S.A., Havana and all other locations worldwide; Havanatur S.A., Havana and other cities in Cuba; Havanatur, S.A., Buenos Aires, Argentina; Havanatur Bahamas Ltd, Nassau; Havanatur Chile S.A., Santiago, Chile; Cubanacan Group, Havana; Cubanacan International B.V., Zevenhuizen, Netherlands; and Cubanacan U.K., Limited, London. The gift company: La Compania Tiendas Universo, S.A., Cuba. (*CNN*, 9/2/04)

February 9: Appearing before about 100 Cuban-American businessmen in vote-rich southern Florida, US Treasury Secretary John Snow blasted Fidel Castro while naming the organizations to be put on a Treasury list that makes it illegal for Americans to deal with them. "We're cracking down," Mr. Snow told Cuban leaders. "We mean business. We're cutting off American dollars headed to Fidel Castro, period. At the same time, we're reaching out to the freedom hungry people of Cuba. While we will not tolerate illegal travel to Cuba, we sympathize with those desperate to travel here from Cuba. Because until Cuba is free, people will risk their lives to come to these shores of freedom." (*Reuters*, 9/2/04)

February 12: Havanatur Tour company operating in the Bahamas may be forced to change the way it does business, in the face of an embargo by the US Treasury Department for allegedly providing Americans with travel packages to Cuba. Havanatur manager, Nelson Sarduy, told *The Guardian* newspaper that his firm is waiting to see what will happen and to have a better view of the measures they have to take. Sarduy admitted that the company would have to make adjustments to the present state of business. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/2/04)

February 13: Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, one of the biggest US law firms, is facing a \$40 million malpractice suit from a former client for allegedly advising it to continue trading with Cuba through foreign subsidiaries. Purolite, a privately owned water purification resin manufacturer based in the US, accuses Morgan Lewis of malpractice and gross misconduct for advising it that trading between a British subsidiary and "entities affiliated with Cuba", which is subject to a US trade embargo, was legal. (*Financial Times*, 13/2/04)

May 22: Resort chain Superclubs, based in Jamaica, was informed by Washington that its top executives, stockholders and their families will be denied entry into the United States due to their investments in Cuba. SuperClubs, with properties in Jamaica, Bahamas, Curacao, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Brazil, operates five hotels in Cuba, accounting for 1,500 rooms. The most recent one is the Grand Lido Varadero in the 5-star category and 442 rooms in the island's most famous beach resort. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/5/04)

June 15: A Jamaican resort company has cut back its business in Cuba to avoid having top officers denied entry into the United States for investing in confiscated property, company officials and a lawyer close to the case said. They said SuperClubs Super-Inclusive Resorts has canceled

three hotel management contracts - a move analysts said is likely to have a chilling effect on foreign investment in Cuba. "We now have two hotels in Cuba. Until two months ago we had five, but we've been closing contracts," said one SuperClubs official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. (*Reuters*, 15/6/04)

July 8: Biotechnology company Chiron Corp. (CHIR) admitted it illegally exported goods to Cuba and paid the US government \$168,500 in civil penalties, the US Treasury Department reported last month. The Emeryville, California-based company voluntarily disclosed to the department that a European subsidiary illegally shipped two vaccines for infants to Cuba between 1999 and 2002. "It was an inadvertent shipment on our part," said Chiron spokesman John Gallagher. He said Chiron is licensed to ship one type of pediatric vaccine through UNICEF to Cuba but inadvertently shipped two others not approved by the US government. (*AP*, 8/7/04)

September 1: The US has imposed a fine on Iberia, the Spanish airline, for breaking its embargo on Cuba. According to the US Treasury, Iberia - in which the Spanish government has a 5.35 per cent stake - was guilty of the "transportation and importations of Cuban goods to the United States". The fine, which was imposed in June but only is emerging now, threatens further to undermine relations between Washington and Madrid. (*The Financial Times*, 1/9/04)

September 2: Spanish airline Iberia said it had agreed to pay \$8,000 to settle US government accusations that it broke the US embargo on Cuba. The events at issue in the case date back to 2000 when, according to the airline, Iberia carried tobacco originating in Spain's Canary Islands from Spain to Panama via its Miami hub. "It was Canaries tobacco, but they (the United States) insisted it was Cuban tobacco, although they were unable to prove it and finally we opted for a less costly settlement," an Iberia spokesman said. The settlement with the US Treasury was reached in June but has only now been made public. (*Reuters*, 2/9/04)

September 3: The US has imposed fines on several European companies in the last few months, including Alitalia, the Italian airline, for breaking its Cuban embargo laws, raising fears of a new trade confrontation between Washington and Brussels. The fines follow the penalty imposed on Iberia, the Spanish airline, after it was accused of shipping Cuban goods through the US. The sanctions may force the European Commission, which has strongly criticised the extra-territorial application of the Cuban embargo laws, to protest to Washington. Brussels said it was studying the fine imposed on Iberia. "We are opposed to any extra-territorial measure (from the US government) that affects any European interest," said a spokeswoman for Pascal Lamy, the trade commissioner. (*The Financial Times*, 3/9/04)

October 5: The Russian company TNK has been accused in an American court of engaging in "criminal activity" by trading with Iraq and Cuba in the 1990s. The allegations were made by Norex Petroleum in a new legal submission to a wider "racketeering" case but were rejected by TNK's lawyers as "devoid of fact and logic". The Canadian-based oil company Norex has been fighting a case against TNK and its former majority shareholders - Access Industries, Renova and Alfa Finance Holdings - in the US legal system. Norex lost the first round in a New York district court and has sought to introduce new evidence for its appeal. (*The Guardian*, 5/10/04)

October 13: The Dutch firm Intervet has stopped sending a quadruple vaccine to Cuba after warnings from the United States that it could be fined since the vaccine uses a US antigen. According to the online edition of the weekly *Trabajadores*, the US embargo has also prevented Cuba from obtaining isotope I-125 for the treatment of children with eye cancer. "After acquiring the Mexican company Refractarios Mexicanos, the American company Harbison Walker Refractories banned any sales to Cuba of those supplies", adds *Trabajadores*. (*EFE*, 13/10/04)

November 16: DaimlerChrysler, the German car manufacturer, has been fined by the US for breaking the embargo on Cuba. US Treasury officials told the press that DaimlerChrysler was guilty of "exporting goods to Cuba". The case was settled last month, after the company paid a fine thought to be \$30,000 US. The penalty was imposed on DaimlerChrysler North America

Group, the US subsidiary of the company, because of exports by DaimlerChrysler Vehiculos Comerciales, the Mexican subsidiary of the German manufacturer. (*Financial Times*, 16/11/04)

December 7: Banco Santander Central Hispano, the Spanish bank which owns Abbey National, has been fined \$20,000 (£10,000) by the US authorities for breaching trade sanctions against Cuba. The fine has been levied against Santander's bank in Nassau, Bahamas, for a transfer of funds through Cuba in 2001. Information posted on the treasury department's website showed that the Spanish bank was fined last month. Santander was fined under the range of civil penalties used by the department, which can levy financial penalties of up to \$55,000 for each violation. Criminal penalties for violating the sanctions range from 10 years in prison, \$1m in corporate fines and \$250,000 in individual fines. (*The Guardian*, 9/12/04)

MIGRATION

[See also, Domestic Affairs/ Migration]

Cuban rafters, smugglers, deportations, and Cubans returned by US Coast Guards

January 6: The US Coast Guard has eight Cuban migrants in custody after their sinking boat was spotted by a cruise ship and was provided with care. The Coast Guard is expected to return the eight Cubans back to the island nation aboard a cutter under current US policy. Spokesman Michael Sheehan of Royal Caribbean Lines said passengers on the Brilliance of the Seas spotted the eight men 36 miles southwest of Key West. (*UPI*, 6/1/03)

January 10: Cubans continued their attempts to reach the US shores illegally last year, but that option is taking a back seat to the Mexican border route. According to Department of Homeland Security statistics, 1,541 Cuban immigrants made it to Florida in 2003, continuing a declining trend in the last four years, while 1,374 of them were picked up by the US Coast Guard at sea, the highest number of interceptions since 1999. However, quickly on the rise are the statistics for the US-Mexican border cross points, where increasingly more Cubans are arriving in search of political asylum. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 10/1/04)

January 15: The Coast Guard transported 14 Cuban migrants back to their homeland while another was sent to Guantanamo Bay for further questioning by federal immigration officials. The 15 migrants were rescued by the Coast Guard from two 16-foot rafts, which had been lashed together. They were discovered about 40 miles south of the Dry Tortugas. The migrants had been at sea for several days and were in various states of hypothermia and dehydration. Several were unconscious, said Petty Officer Anastasia Burns in a prepared release. (*Sun Sentinel*, 15/1/04)

January 26: Eight Cuban men came ashore Key West, Florida, police said. A patrolling officer spotted the migrants at the corner of White Street and Atlantic Blvd. Their small homemade boat was discovered beneath one of the underpasses at the White Street Pier, and they were transferred to the Monroe Co. Detention Center to be picked up by the US Border Patrol. (*The Miami Herald*, 27/1/04)

February 3: Two Cubans who tried to sail to Florida in a truck converted to a pontoon boat last year have made another attempt, this time piloting a seagoing 1950s-era Buick. Marciel Basanta Lopez and Luis Grass Rodriguez, who were sent back to Cuba in July after they failed to reach Florida in a converted 1951 Chevy pickup, were apparently at the helm of the newest vehicle-boat conversion. The US Coast Guard refused to confirm the status of the tail finned car or the origin of photos of it in the water that were broadcast on television. US policy prevents the disclosure of information on such cases until they are resolved, such as by sending the participants back to their home countries, Petty Officer Sandra Bartlett said. Under US immigration policy, Cubans who reach US shores are allowed to stay, while those caught at sea are usually returned. (*The Globe and Mail*, 3/2/04)

February 6: In a race against time, a carload of 11 Cubans found floating at sea in a vintage Buick sought a court order to get into the United States against federal policy rather than face a return trip home. Taken aboard a US Coast Guard ship, the Cubans would lose their legal rights in US courts if they were repatriated, so their only hope was to get a helpful court ruling while still at sea. The attorneys contend U.S. agents rule differently on claims of political persecution depending on whether people are caught at sea or reach U.S. soil. They said about 99 percent are denied at sea, but almost all Cubans are allowed to stay if they reach land under a policy adopted by the Clinton administration and kept by the Bush administration. [For more on this, see Exile Community] (*Sun Sentinel*, 6/2/04)

February 9: A Cuban family caught at sea on a floating 1959 Buick will not be returned to Cuba for at least two more days, a judge decided. US District Judge Federico Moreno extended an order while attorneys for the federal government and the family continue to examine immigration law and policies. Luis Grass Rodriguez, his wife and 4-year-old son are among 11 people found on the Buick off the Florida Keys. Assistant US Attorney Dexter Lee said the Coast Guard may be in a position to repatriate the other eight. [For more on this, see Exile Community] (*CNN*, 9/2/04)

February 10: Eight of the eleven Cubans who tried to cross the Florida Straits in a boat made from a green 1959 Buick car were sent home by the US Coast Guard, which confirmed it had sunk the Buick. The Coast Guard said it repatriated the group as part of a larger batch of 98 Cuban migrants who were picked up at sea in recent days and delivered to the port of Cabañas in western Cuba. The other three Buick boaters, a family of three, are still being held on a Coast Guard cutter at sea pending a decision on their immigration status. (*CNN*, 10/2/04)

February 14: The US Cuban Adjustment Law (1966) is responsible for illegal emigration in the Island, Granma daily reiterated, after informing that US authorities recently returned another 112 illegal Cuban emigrants. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/2/04)

February 20: The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office dismantled a ring of human smuggling between Cuba and South Florida, which had brought 250 persons into the US in the last three years making about \$2 million. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 20/2/04)

February 21: Thirteen Cuban migrants were picked up by US Border Patrol agents after being smuggled into the Florida Keys aboard a speedboat, an official said. Members of the group said they left from Cuba, and the boat left them on Duck Key, about 90 miles southwest of Miami, Border Patrol supervisor Kerry Heck said. The group had made it to shore by the time they were spotted, and will therefore likely be allowed to stay in the country. (*CNN*, 21/2/04)

February 27: One of the Cubans who tried to reach Florida last summer aboard a truck converted into a boat was called by US officials to a surprise interview about his request to migrate legally to the United States. (*AP*, 27/2/04)

February 27: Thirty-six Cubans were returned to their homeland after they were found at sea in two separate interdictions, the US Coast Guard said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 27/2/04)

February 27: Seven months after a group of Cubans boarded a customized '51 Chevy pickup and headed out to sea, only to be returned by the US Coast Guard days later, the remaining *camionautas* -- or "truckonauts" -- have yet another chance. Eight of the Cubans whose political asylum claims were denied by US officials were summoned once again to resubmit their paperwork, according to family members and reports from the island. A ninth truckonaut, Ariel Diego Marcell -- whose asylum application is still being processed -- fainted on the steps of the US Interest Section in Havana after showing up for interviews. "He just passed out from nerves," said Rubén García of Miami, a relative of several of the Cubans who left the Havana coast aboard the battered, diesel-powered Chevy. (*The Miami Herald*, 28/2/04)

March 10: Since January, over 3,900 Cuban immigrants have been intercepted or rescued at sea before touching US coasts, the US Homeland Security Department reported. (*Europa Press*, 10/3/04)

March 10: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón has accused Washington of promoting illegal migration from the island in an attempt to justify a military invasion. Speaking with reporters, the Cuban leader said that Havana is concerned about the recent US decision to suspend regularly scheduled talks on migration issues. The talks are slated every six months -- alternately held in New York and Havana -- to discuss the 1994 and 1995 migration accords signed between the US and Cuba. In January, the United States announced it would not take part in the talks scheduled for Havana that month, subsequently inferring that negotiations slated for New York in July would also be scrapped. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/3)

March 19: The United States has denied asylum to Ariel Diego Marcell, one of the Cubans who tried last July to reach the coast of Florida in a truck modified for seaborne travel. Marcell, 29, was one of 12 Cubans who set sail in a converted 1951 Chevrolet truck only to be intercepted by the US Coast Guard and repatriated to the communist-ruled island. He told the press that he received a letter from the US Interests Office in Havana informing him that his request for asylum was denied based on officials' judgment that he was not facing the threat of persecution in Cuba. (*EFE*, 19/3/04)

March 25: Three exhausted and dehydrated Cuban refugees were spotted bobbing on inner tubes in rough waters just off Lauderdale-by-the-Sea. As rescue and news helicopters hovered overhead, Good Samaritans and rescue workers ventured into the water to pull two of them onto the beach one block north of Commercial Boulevard. The third was plucked out of the water by Coast Guard rescuers about a mile farther north. The three were all that was left of a group of eight who set off from Jibacoa, Cuba seven days earlier on a makeshift raft of inner tubes roped together, with very little food and not nearly enough water. (*Sun Sentinel*, 25/3/04)

March 26: The father of the two underage children of the dehydrated "balsera" (raft-woman) rescued off the coast of Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, north of Miami, has officially initiated the family reunification sponsorship process to have the children join him in the US. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 26/3/04)

March 27: The body of a man washed ashore at Hutchinson Island, Florida, is believed to be one of the five who drowned in an attempt to escape Cuba last week. Three others on the journey on the inner tube raft made it to shore in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, the Port St. Lucie Tribune reported. "A call to the Coast Guard revealed that a group of Cubans had been rescued south of here, and some were missing," a Martin County sheriff's report said. "This is likely to be one of the missing," it said. The body was dragged to shore after it was spotted. (*UPI*, 31/3/04)

March 30: In the latest Roundtable broadcast from Havana, Cuban political analysts recalled many Cubans have died trying to benefit from the Cuban Adjustment Act, enacted by the US in 1966, after the US government denies them formal and safe ways to leave for the United States. The panelists looked into the tragedy of nine Cuban rafters that left a toll of 5 dead, 1 unaccounted for and 3 survivors. They said the survivors had hidden the existence of a ninth person on board the raft called Lázaro Contreras. This was found out because Contreras' brother in Cuba reported Lázaro's disappearance. The US media did not mention Contreras neither among the survivors nor the dead. The Roundtable informed that in the past three months and half the Cuban Coast Guard Service had thwarted 70 illegal exits, half of them carried out by human traffickers. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/3/04)

April 1: The second of three Cuban rafters who arrived near Lauderdale-by-the-Sea was discharged from Holy Cross Hospital. US Border Patrol agents picked up William Villavicencio Pérez, 31, of Cuba's Arroyo Naranjo neighborhood, at the Fort Lauderdale hospital, spokeswoman Christine Moncrieffe said. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/4/04)

April 6: A group of ten Cuban rafters who were thought adrift may have been detained by the Coast Guard Service. According to some information, the group left off Santa Fe beach, west of Havana, on a wooden boat with a diesel engine. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 6/4/04)

April 6: A Cuban rafter who swam to shore along with two other men accused of attacking US Coast Guard officers testified that the guardsmen were the aggressors, using pepper spray and pointing a gun at the migrants. Alfredo Morales, who is not facing charges, was a witness in federal court for the defendants - his brother, Javier Morales Molina, and cousin, Reinaldo Molina Morales. The two men stand accused of attacking Coast Guard officers who tried to intercept their vessel at sea on May 6, 2003, during their bid to reach the Florida coast. Morales said the Coast Guard agents fired pepper spray when the Cubans refused to lower the sail of the wooden raft they used to flee the communist island. (*EFE*, 6/4/04)

April 8: Two Cuban migrants were acquitted of charges they threatened US Coast Guard officers with weapons as they tried to reach the US shore last year. A jury deliberated for three hours before clearing Javier Morales Molina, 27, and his cousin, Reinaldo Molina Morales, 30, of two counts of assaulting federal officers. The accused were two of three migrants whose evasion of a Coast Guard vessel and two-mile swim from their disabled homemade boat to the mangrove-thick shores of northern Key Largo was televised live last May. (*Sun Sentinel*, 8/4/04)

April 8: Cuba took its turn at the podium of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva to accuse the United States of encouraging and promoting the illegal emigration of Cuban citizens. By way of the Cuban Adjustment Act, citizens of the Caribbean Island are privileged with US residency if they are able to reach its territory, independent of how they get there. Many of those that don't make it have perished at sea. Cuban diplomat Jorge Ferrer reminded the UN commission that a very different welcoming exists for other undocumented immigrants, citing the 900,000 Mexicans detained annually in US border areas. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/4/04)

April 11: Fifty-seven Cubans landed on the South Florida coast on Easter Sunday in four different vessels, informed the Coast Guard. The first boat, carrying 32 people, landed in the Marquesas islands near Key West. Another group of five arrived in Miami Beach while two other groups landed on two different points along the Florida coast. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/4/04)

April 13: A US Coast Guard officer told the press that seven Cubans intercepted at sea have been returned to the island. The immigrants were detected in two groups trying to reach the US coasts. (*AFP*, 13/4/04)

April 13: Forty-five Cuban migrants were returned to the Caribbean island, including six who were apparently being smuggled to the United States, the US Coast Guard said. The Coast Guard sent nine people to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba, in a first group and 36 more in a second group, according to a news release. (*Sun Sentinel*, 13/4/04)

April 25: Cuba welcomed prison terms of at least 20 years handed down in Miami to six Cubans convicted of hijacking an airliner from the island to Florida. In a short statement published in the Communist Party daily newspaper *Granma*, Cuba's foreign minister said the sentences given were "a positive act that contributes to the struggle against the commission of violent acts during emigration attempts." The communiqué reiterated Cuba's stated commitment to honor 1994 and 1995 accords with the United States aimed at promoting safe, orderly migration between the countries. (*The Miami Herald*, 25/4/04)

May 25: Cuban authorities have declined to broadcast a US-made video portraying the often mortal danger faced by emigrants who depart the island illegally on precarious vessels or the "fast boats" of people smugglers. The approximately one-minute video shows images of shipwrecked rafts and fast boats on the Florida Straits as a voice-over lists the perils involved in the journey. But the offer of the tape was rebuffed by officials at the Cuban Foreign Ministry, said

James Cason, head of the US Interests Section in Havana. "We can discourage the population from venturing out on rafts without videos such as this," Cuban officials said when asked about the US offer. (*EFE*, 25/5/04)

June 15: A group of 19 Cubans who reached the Florida coast may be eligible for residency in the US, said the border patrol. (*AFP*, 16/6/04)

June 21: Cuban exile activists are asking for the release of Cubans and Haitians who are being held, more than three years in some cases, at the US Naval Base at Guantánamo. The activists say the indefinite detention violates the detainees' civil rights. "The president of the United States needs to allow them to come here," said Cuban-American activist Ramon Saul Sanchez. "That's the bottom line." The Cubans and Haitians are refugees who were intercepted by the US Coast Guard at sea and transferred to Guantánamo to process their claims for political asylum. (*Sun Sentinel*, 21/6/04)

June 21: A Cuban rafter intercepted at sea who slit his wrists in an attempt to prevent his repatriation remained aboard a US Coast Guard patrol boat, according to an exile group lobbying for him to be allowed into the United States. The Miami-based Democratic Movement, or MD, said it was doing everything possible to have Hector Martin Sanchez brought to a hospital in Miami, but noted that if authorities order him to be treated aboard the Coast Guard boat, he would probably be deported back to Cuba. (*EFE*, 21/6/04)

June 21: A go-fast boat with 21 Cuban refugees and two suspected smugglers aboard led the US Coast Guard on a three-hour chase, then brought the Cubans ashore at Big Pine Key before they could be intercepted. Earlier, 26 migrants, also Cuban, were discovered at Elliott Key. Their boat came ashore after a two-hour journey from Cuba, according to US Coast Guard representatives. (*The Miami Herald*, 21/6/04)

June 22: Jose Contreras' family defected from Cuba this week, and the New York Yankees pitcher left the team and traveled to Miami to reunite with his wife and two daughters. Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokesman Barbara Gonzalez said she did not know details on how the family got out of Cuba. Contreras, the former star on Cuba's national team, defected in 2002. Nicaragua twice granted Contreras' family visas, but the Cuban government denied permission for his relatives to leave the island. Contreras' family was informed in late 2002 that it would have to wait five years for a document required to leave. (*AP*, 22/6/04)

June 27: Two small groups of refugees landed in the Keys within about 24 hours in homemade boats, according to the US Border Patrol. Two Cuban men in a homemade, wooden boat powered by an engine landed along Long Beach Road on Big Pine Key. The men, who departed from Havana, were taken into Border Patrol custody and transported to Krome detention center in Miami-Dade. Another group of three men landed in Marathon after departing from Villa Clara province on Cuba's north coast. (*The Miami Herald*, 28/6/04)

July 1: The US Coast Guard returned to Cuba 23 migrants who were found at sea in the past week, officials said. Two groups of Cubans were spotted on rafts by a Coast Guard jet on June 27, about 25 miles southwest of Key West. A cutter took 10 migrants from the first raft and 12 from the second, the Coast Guard said. (*AP*, 1/7/04)

July 1: Citing the US Supreme Court ruling that gave suspected terrorists at Guantánamo the right to challenge their captivity in federal court, advocates for Cuban and Haitian refugees at the US Navy base said that they too should be allowed to come to the United States to press their case for asylum. The 38 Cubans and 14 Haitians -- including at least four children -- have already cleared an initial hurdle: proving credible fear of political persecution if returned to their countries. But US policy prevents them from entering this country, even though many of them have relatives in South Florida. The State Department has been unable to find a third country to take these

refugees -- some of whom have languished at Guantánamo for three years. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/7/04)

July 7: The United States repatriated 12 Cuban rafters detained in two separate operations by the Coast Guard off the coast of Florida. The Coast Guard in Miami said agents in a helicopter detected the first group, two Cubans on a raft, and they were intercepted 74 kilometers (50 miles) south of Key West by a Coast Guard vessel. Coast Guard agents rescued the second group, 10 Cubans on a raft, in international waters north of the communist-ruled island, providing them with life jackets, water, food and medical attention. (*EFE*, 7/7/04)

July 8: The US Coast Guard unveiled new restrictions for US recreational vessels traveling to Cuba, changing its focus from preventing international incidents in Cuban waters to tightening the economic embargo against the island. The original restrictions were created by then-President Bill Clinton after two exile group planes were shot down over international waters in February 1996, hoping to avoid a similar situation. The new restrictions, part of the Bush administration's crackdown on travel to Cuba, prevent boaters from leaving any part of the United States without first getting a permit, not just from the Coast Guard, but also from the US Treasury and Commerce departments. It no longer matters whether boat operators intend to enter Cuban waters, Coast Guard Lt. Tony Russell said. Anyone who does so without a permit will be in violation of US policy, he said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 9/7/04)

July 9: An appeals court ruling means a high-profile Cuban migrant smuggler may have his sentence reduced from life in prison to 13 years or less. A US federal appeals court has thrown out the longest prison term ever meted out to a South Florida migrant smuggler -- life in prison plus five years -- and ordered that he be sentenced within guidelines that call for fewer than 13 years. Cuban migrant smuggler Jorge "Bombino" Aleman, 39, was handed the heavy sentence in 2002 after pleading guilty in a massive, multi-count smuggling case that resulted in the 2001 death of a 48-year-old Cuban woman fleeing the island. But the Atlanta-based US 11th Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that US District Judge James Lawrence King "improperly considered" what King characterized as Aleman's "total callous disregard for human life" in sentencing Aleman to a much harsher punishment than anticipated in a plea agreement. (*The Miami Herald*, 9/7/04)

July 9: A Cuban dance company billed to perform at Las Vegas's legendary Stardust Casino this month defied Cuban authorities and applied for US visas, in a rare case of overt disobedience in communist-run Cuba. Fifty-three dancers, musicians and singers with the Havana Night company went to the US Interest Section for visa application interviews even though Cuban officials told them they should not travel to the United States for the five-week show. The National Union of Writers and Artists, or UNEAC, which holds their passports, had summoned the company to a meeting the same morning, but the dancers stayed away -- something unheard of in Cuba. "The dream of any singer is to perform in Las Vegas. It is a dream that can come true," said 18-year-old Osmany, who sings in the music and dance extravaganza. He declined to give his last name. (*Reuters*, 9/7/04)

July 15: A Cuban dissident who was once a State Security agent has requested asylum in the European Union, complaining the United States revoked his visa even though he served a six-year prison sentence in the communist-ruled island. Bernardo Arevalo Padron, who worked as an independent journalist, told the press that in April he obtained a refugee visa at the US Interests Section in Havana to travel to the United States. Arevalo Padron said he received a telegram from the Interests Section telling him his visa had been revoked "without the right to appeal," and his flight had been canceled. "I need to get out of the island. I am requesting a visa from the European Union countries," said Arevalo Padron, who had planned to leave Cuba with his wife. "We were left without work, without money, marked by the regime, and the Americans turned their backs on us," he said. (*EFE*, 15/7/04)

July 19: An immigration judge has issued an order to deport Jorge de Cárdenas Agostini, a Cuban detained in Miami on suspicion of having supervised a team of torturers targeting dissidents in Cuba in the 1990s. Nina Pruneda, a spokeswoman for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Miami, said: "Mr. de Cárdenas will be removed from the United States at some point, based on the final order of removal issued by an immigration judge." But Linda Osberg-Braun, de Cárdenas Agostini's lawyer, said she was working to have her client released instead. She declined to discuss the removal order. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/7/04)

August 1: A heavily promoted Las Vegas show featuring more than 50 Cuban performers was unravelling on the eve of its scheduled opening as red tape and politics bogged down the group's last-minute push for its travel documents. Meanwhile, the show's producers, who were in Havana trying to speed things up, were called by immigration authorities for violating their tourist visas and ordered to leave. Jorge Gonzalez, head of international relations for the government's National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, said his organization handled paperwork on the earlier US visas request and was unwilling to repeat the hassle when approval seemed unlikely. In the first official comment on the case, Culture Minister Abel Prieto told the press that the key problem was a break in the previous working relationship between the group and the writers and artists union, known here as UNEAC. "A kind of ghost has appeared (...) an imaginary creature," Abel said, referring to the group's characterization of itself as fully divorced from the government. "The main idea is that suddenly an official UNEAC group has become an independent group and then they miraculously receive the visas they were denied shortly before." (*AP*, 1/8/04)

August 1: If thousands of Cubans again took to the seas as they did in the summer of 1994, they probably would not come straight to the United States. Today, the US Coast Guard repatriates any Cubans caught at sea who immigration authorities determine do not have a credible fear of persecution if returned to Cuba. Those who show they have a credible fear are sent to the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, where they undergo further interviews. Most pass those interviews and then wait for another country to accept them. The United States will not take them in, however. That would send the wrong signal, said a State Department official who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "It would be incoherent for us to then bring these people to the United States because, again, the message here is safe, orderly, legal migration," he said. The policy also serves as a deterrent to mass migration, the official said. "I think it sends a signal to the Cuban people that the United States and Cuba, despite their many disagreements on many things, agree this is the only type of migration that should take place," he said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 1/8/04)

August 2: The US government has repatriated 23 Cubans who tried to reach the shores of Florida in late July in a boat allegedly piloted by migrant traffickers, an official reported. Miami Coast Guard spokesman Luis Diaz said the migrants were returned to Bahía de Cabañas, in Cuba, after being intercepted at sea in late July in a nine-meter (38-foot) boat. (*EFE*, 5/8/04)

August 10: Four Cuban migrants traveling on a homemade boat came ashore at a Hilton hotel pier, the US Border Patrol said. The four men landed at the pier in Key West, four days after they told authorities they departed from the province of Havana. They came on a homemade wooden boat powered by an American-made tractor engine, officials said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 10/8/04)

August 19: Fourteen Cuban migrants traveling on a wooden boat landed on Puerto Rico's Mona Island, officials said. The six men and eight women turned themselves in to Puerto Rican rangers who patrol the island, said Leila Andreu, spokeswoman for the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources. (*Sun Sentinel*, 19/8/04)

August 26: Six Cubans who spent two months at sea trying to reach Mexico to cross into the United States landed on Mustang Island on the Texas coast, the US Customs and Border Protection said. "They were somewhat malnourished and dehydrated," Eddie Flores, a spokesman for the agency's McAllen sector, told the press. Five of the six were treated and released from a Corpus Christi hospital. After being processed by the Border Patrol and having

hearing dates set for Harlingen in a couple of months, two of the men were released to relatives from Dallas and three were placed on a bus to join relatives in Miami. The sixth person, a woman, remained hospitalized in stable condition. Border Patrol agent Felix Cantu said that the six left Manzanillo, Cuba, on a raft on June 25. He said they purchased their 30-foot boat, water and fuel in the Cayman Islands five days later. The trip took them hundreds of miles across the Gulf of Mexico. (AP,26/8/04)

August 31: Six Cubans who said they left the north coast of Cuba in a small motorboat were taken into custody after they came ashore at Key Biscayne's Crandon Park Beach. Sunbathers called authorities after spotting the six persons -- three men, two women and a 3-year-old boy. The six told the press that they were from Yaguajay, Sancti Spiritus, a small town on Cuba's north coast. (*The Miami Herald*, 31/8/04)

September 2: In the shadow of the best-known and most controversial result of the Cuban balsero crisis in 1994 - the wet-foot/dry-foot policy - more than 230,000 Cubans have legally immigrated to the United States in the past decade. That quiet inflow of Cubans represents nearly seven times the 35,000 would-be migrants who wound up at the US Navy base in Guantanamo Bay - another of the searing images from those days when Cubans by the tens of thousands took to inner tubes, homemade rafts and other flimsy vessels in desperate bids to cross the Florida Straits. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/9/04)

September 6: According to relatives in Havana and sources with the Miami Coastguard Service, seven Cuban balseros who left the island illegally are currently missing at sea while a freighter on its way to the Bahamas picked up another 24. [For more on this, see also Foreign Affairs] (*El Nuevo Herald*, 7/9/04)

September 15: In separate trials, a US judge gave 1-year prison sentences to four individuals charged with conspiracy to smuggle 62 illegal aliens from Cuba into the US territory. The Miami-based Office of the US Attorney for the Southern District of Florida informed that the accused would also serve one year's probation. (*EFE*, 16/9/04)

September 18: A group of Cubans who tried to make it to Florida aboard a boat made from a 1959 Buick have started a hunger strike to protest the limbo they've fallen into since being sent to Guantanamo Bay where they are waiting on their asylum claims. The Cubans - 13 of the some 38 - began the hunger strike after being held at the US outpost in eastern Cuba for months, according to William Sanchez, a Miami attorney for Luis Grass Rodriguez, one of the Cubans who made the trip in the makeshift boat in February. "What they're asking for is to be granted political asylum in the United States or for the United States to expedite political asylum, or for the minimum a third country, but to not keep them in Guantanamo any longer because that violates international law on political asylum and because the stay there is unbearable," said Sanchez. The migrants are being held on the Leeward side of the base away from the terror suspects. (AP, 18/9/04)

September 22: A Cuban-American man convicted of smuggling Cubans into the United States has been sentenced to nearly 13 years in prison for a mission that claimed the life of a 48-year-old woman after a life prison term was erased on appeal. Under a plea bargain, Jorge "Bombino" Aleman admitted organizing five smuggling trips that ferried more than 100 Cubans to Florida from October 1999 to June 2001. (AP, 22/9/04)

October 3: The United States will not allow a new wave of rafters illegally fleeing from Cuba as a result of the current economic crisis facing Fidel Castro's regime, now worsened by the discontent created by shortages of electric power, warned a high-ranking official of the US State Department. "We have previously warned the Cubans that the United States will deem any attempt to stimulate or manipulate a mass exodus to our shores as a threat to its national security", said Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Roger Noriega. "I think that they have understood the message", he added. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 3/10/04)

October 7: A proposed bill aimed at terrorists could drastically change rules for undocumented migrants and place Cuban refugees at risk of being sent back to their homeland even if they make it onto US soil. The lengthy Recommendations Implementation Act was born from suggestions by the 9/11 Commission to keep terrorists out of the country. Immigrant advocates and several lawmakers are pushing for an amendment that would strike worrisome language affecting immigrants and essentially eliminate a 10-year-old policy -- known as wet-foot/dry-foot -- which allows most Cubans who make it to US soil to remain in the country. The same policy permits only those Cubans interdicted at sea to be returned to Cuba. "We want to make sure it is the terrorists who we are keeping out and not the immigrants who need our protection," said Florida Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who co-sponsored the amendment. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/10/04)

October 11: Five veterans of Cuba's national series and a member of the country's national junior program are in Miami after the largest mass desertion of baseball players since Fidel Castro's revolution. The six players, all reportedly under the age of 24, arrived in the Keys after spending two days at sea. They are infielder Yunel Escobar Almenares, pitchers Yamel Guevara, Jose Angel Cordero Valdez, Rafael Galbizo Figueroa and outfielders Yoel Perez Mendieta and Yoan Limonta Zayas. (*AP*, 11/10/04)

October 13: The Supreme Court debated the fate of two Cubans who are scheduled for deportation, aren't welcome back in their native land, and exist in a state of indefinite detention in America that wouldn't be legal for other immigrants or citizens. Deputy Solicitor General Edwin Kneedler told the justices that that is just as it should be because the nation's need to protect its borders requires that some foreign nationals be treated as if they have no due-process rights. Advocates for the two Cubans said the government's behavior was unconstitutional, and they urged the justices to apply their ruling barring indefinite detentions to the refugees. The two were part of the 1980 Mariel boatlift, in which 125,000 Cubans were welcomed to the United States by President Jimmy Carter as a humanitarian gesture. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/10/04)

November 6: The United States repatriated 108 illegal Cuban migrants intercepted in seven separate groups, the Coast Guard said. Most of the deportees sent back to Cabañas, Cuba, were apprehended off the Florida coast on vessels crewed by presumed alien smugglers. A total of 68 migrants were traveling on three fast boats that developed engine problems, two of which were adrift in the Florida Strait. Another boat manned by alleged people traffickers was halted with 30 Cubans on board, while 13 other illegal immigrants were rescued by the Coast Guard aboard three rafts. Of the Cubans taken into custody, three will be turned over to the authorities at the US Naval Base at Guantanamo, Cuba. Meanwhile, nine persons suspected of alien smuggling are in custody and are being questioned by US law enforcement authorities. (*EFE*, 8/11/04)

November 15: In what appears to be the largest mass defection of Cuban performers to date, Cuban members of a theatrical production in Las Vegas sought asylum in the United States, leaving families behind and defying their government, the show's founder and creator said. The 43 performers, including dancers, singers and musicians, submitted their requests at the federal courthouse in Las Vegas, said Nicole "N.D" Durr, who also directs the "Havana Night Club" show. Durr said seven additional cast members, who are currently in Germany, also are seeking asylum. They are expected to arrive in the US within the week. Another three members have decided to return to Cuba, she said. (*NYT, CNN*, 15/11/04)

December 20: Police and the US Coast Guard searched for refugees in the ocean waters off Palm Beach County after a suspected Cuban national swam to shore in this exclusive town wearing just his underwear. After being taken into custody, the refugee, who was described as being in his 30s, told authorities he had been on a roughly 15-foot, homemade raft containing six other men, who were mostly in their 20s. He said the raft's engine stalled about two miles offshore and he and two other men decided to swim to shore. He said he lost track of the other

two during his more than 17-hour swim to shore and does not know what happened to them. (*Sun Sentinel*, 21/12/04)

December 22: US immigration authorities ordered the deportation of a former Cuban government employee accused of persecuting dissidents in his communist-led home country. Luis Enrique Daniel Rodriguez, a former Cuban interior ministry employee, was detained in July after a judge issued a deportation order. Rodriguez, 37, has been held at an immigration detention facility in Miami. US authorities accuse him, among other things, of breaking into the homes of two Cuban dissidents in Havana, including the residence of Elizardo Sanchez, head of the Cuban Committee for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, Rodriguez's attorneys said. But Sanchez has denied that Rodriguez took actions against him. (*AFP*, 22/12/04)

Migration agreements

January 6: Cuba announced that US officials have suspended regular migration talks scheduled in Havana this week. In Washington, State Department spokesman Curtis Cooper said he had no information about the migration talks, including whether they had been suspended. The Cuban Foreign Ministry said in a statement sent to international reporters that State Department officials had informed Havana the talks were impossible "until Cuban authorities show a true interest in dealing with very important issues for achieving orderly, legal and safe migration between the two countries." Without specifying what issues the Americans were reportedly concerned about, the Cuban foreign ministry said they had nothing to do with migration accords the countries signed in 1994 and 1995. (*Sun Sentinel*, 6/1/04)

January 7: US officials announced the suspension of bilateral migration talks with Cuba in a further sign of deteriorating relations between the two nations. US officials said the talks -- which occur every six months and were scheduled to begin today in Havana -- were cancelled because Cuban officials refused to discuss several key issues involving an accord governing the legal flow of migrants from Cuba to the United States. Among the issues are Cuba's failure to grant exit visas to about 200 Cubans who already have been issued permanent entry visas by the United States. "We have told Cuba that we're ready to go to talks when they're ready to discuss the serious issues that need to be discussed," Richard Boucher, the US State Department spokesman, said in Washington. "Unfortunately, the Cubans have continued to refuse to discuss the issues that we've identified." (*Chicago Tribune*, 8/1/04)

January 8: Dagoberto Rodriguez, the lead Cuban diplomat in Washington, accused the State Department of using lies as pretexts to cancel migration talks that were to have taken place this week between the two countries. "The ball is on their side of the court, and we expect them to come up with a date proposal to hold the talks, setting aside those pretexts that only seek to satisfy narrow anti-Cuban interests," said Rodriguez, chief of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington. (*Sun Sentinel*, 9/1/04)

January 14: Despite the US Supreme Court ruling that persons ordered deported from the country cannot be held for longer than six months, more than 1,000 Cubans are detained indefinitely because Fidel Castro's government will not take them back and the United States will not release them under its administrative custody-review procedures. These Cubans have served their criminal sentences and been ordered deported. In some cases, relatively short prison terms have stretched into multiyear administrative detention with little chance of release anytime soon. Many of the detained Cubans departed from the port of Mariel as part of the 1980 exodus of 125,000 refugees. Their arrival in the United States created a legal dilemma: how to treat persons defined as "excludable aliens" whose return Castro refused. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/1/04)

January 16: The US Supreme Court said it would decide whether hundreds of Cuban criminal aliens and other convicted immigrants who have completed their U.S. prison terms can be held indefinitely when they represent a danger to the community or their home countries refuse to

repatriate them. More than 2,000 criminal aliens are currently being detained by federal authorities, based on Justice Department arguments that they are too much of a risk to be released. Most are part of an influx into the US of Cuban criminals from Port Mariel in 1980, when Fidel Castro temporarily lifted restrictions against leaving the island and released hardened convicts and others from Cuban jails and mental hospitals in what has become known as the Mariel boat lift. The Cuban government has refused to permit their return and, as a result, about 1,750 Mariel Cubans still remain in federal detention because of their danger to the community. (*The Washington Times*, 17/1/04)

February 23: America's top diplomat in Cuba said that there were no plans to restart formal US-Cuba migration talks that the United States suspended last month. The meetings, held every six months, were established to monitor 1994 and 1995 accords designed to promote legal, orderly migration between the two countries -- and prevent a mass exodus as in 1994 when tens of thousands of Cubans took to the sea in flimsy vessels for Florida. The United States said it suspended the migration talks because of Cuba's repeated refusal to discuss key issues, while Cuba blamed the suspension on US presidential election politics. "The talks potentially could be useful," James Cason, chief of the US Interests Section in Cuba, said. "But I think we have found in recent years that they haven't been." Cason said Cuban authorities are still refusing to discuss allowing American diplomats to visit repatriated migrants in the countryside and are denying exit permits to hundreds of doctors and health care workers who have US government approval to immigrate. He said three other issues Havana refuses to discuss are: Cuba's cooperation in holding a new registration for the lottery from which two-thirds of all legal migrants are chosen; a deeper port in Cuba for repatriations, allowing the US Coast Guard to use its larger vessels to return migrants and free up smaller ones for patrols; and Cuba's obligation under international law to accept the return of Cuban nationals the United States wants to deport. (*Houston Chronicle, AP*, 23/2/04)

May 21: US authorities denied statements made by Cuba's Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque regarding migration agreements. Pérez Roque accused Washington of having issued only 700 travel documents to Cuban citizens by the middle of last fiscal year. In a statement distributed to the press by Washington's Interest Section in Havana, it was said that by the middle of last fiscal year (from October 2002 to September 2003) that diplomatic office had issued almost two thousand travel documents. The statement also noticed that the Cuban Foreign Affairs minister "deliberately distorts facts" and "lies" to the international press. (*Notimex*, 21/5/04)

July 21: The US Interests Section in Havana issued an official statement on migration agreements between the island and the US. The USIS' statement says that, "20,000 travel documents to Cubans" have been issued this fiscal year, "fulfilling the annual US obligation under the US-Cuba Migration Accords". "This achievement, the earliest ever in the fiscal year, underlines our continuing commitment to safe, legal and orderly migration", the statement adds. It also emphasizes, that "the Cuban government's repeated assertions about US designs to cause a mass migration crisis are patently false". "If the Cuban government would allow the US Interests Section access to Cuban official media equivalent to that which the Cuban Interests Section has to American media, we could inform the Cuban people that there is hope to seek a better life through legal means, not by taking to dangerous seas. Instead, Cubans are kept uninformed about their options to emigrate". The statement says that the US government expects "that the Cuban government also would adhere to its commitments and issue exit permits to the almost 1,352 Cubans who have received US travel documents but have been denied exit permits by the Cuban government". "Meeting our obligation also is a reminder to ordinary Cubans that the 1998 special Cuban lottery, also known as "el bombo", is still functioning. We help keep alive the option of a safe, legal way for entire families who participated in the 1998 lottery to leave Cuba". The statement reiterates that, "US policy toward Cuba is a rapid, peaceful transition to a democratic, market-oriented Cuba. The US government has no intention to invade Cuba and does not support military action or a violent overthrow to change the Cuban police state". (*USIS Press Statement*, 21/7/04)

July 22: A US State Department press release revealed the results of its annual visa lottery, whose winners can apply for US visas and permanent resident status. In Latin America, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela and Cuba emerged as the big winners, with 674 Cubans hitting the jackpot. (*EFE*, 22/7/04)

October 1: The US government allowed several hundred more Cubans to migrate to America over the past year than during the year previous, according to figures released by the US Interest Section in Havana. The American mission in Cuba said it had granted 23,000 immigrant visas for Cubans during the US fiscal year that just ended — 2,000 more than last year and 3,000 more than required by migration accords. Under migration agreements signed in the mid-1990s, the United States must provide at least 20,000 visas to Cubans annually, and Cuba must discourage its citizens from making risky attempts to immigrate illegally to the United States. The accords are aimed at encouraging safe, legal and orderly migration from Cuba to the United States. Nevertheless, hundreds still leave communist Cuba each year on smugglers' fast boats, or homemade rafts made with floating inner tubes, heading toward an uncertain fate in hopes of illegally reaching the United States. (*AP*, 1/10/04)

Visas (restrictions)

February 5: Cuban officials complained that the Bush Administration has denied visas to Cuban Grammy nominees for the awards ceremony and wondered how aging musicians could be considered security threats. All five nominees for best traditional tropical Latin album are Cubans who live on the island. They include 77-year-old singer Ibrahim Ferrer of Buena Vista Social Club fame and salsa pianist Guillermo Rubalcaba, aged 75. "I am not a terrorist. I couldn't be one. I am a musician and have always been well received by American audiences," said Ferrer, one of the veteran musicians who were rediscovered and shot to world fame by the Buena Vista project. (*Reuters*, 8/2/04)

March 6: Controversial Cuban singer/songwriter Carlos Varela has been denied a US visa to enter the country to perform at the Guzman Center for the Performing Arts. The trip would have been Varela's second visit to Miami in the past six years. (*The Miami Herald*, 6/3/04)

March 23: The US government denied visas to two officials of the Cuban Institute of Sports to participate in the 10 th General Assembly of the Ibero- American Sports Council taking place in San Juan, Puerto Rico this month. A Cuban press release, issued in response to this most recent act of the US State Department, asserted that "In this manner, the Cuban Institute of Sports is once again being made the object of political and aggressive maneuvers against the island." (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 23/3/04)

April 9: A two-month US tour by the 15-piece Cuban jazz-pop band "Cubanismo" has been canceled because its members were denied visas to enter the US. The group's 43-show, 34-city itinerary included a stop in Los Angeles. "Cubanismo", made up of musicians from various Cuban bands, has played in the US several times over the last decade. (*Los Angeles Times*, 9/4/04)

April 10: The Cuban Olympic Committee (COC) decried the denial by the US government of a visa for one of its directors to travel to San Antonio, Texas where he is supposed to participate as a delegate in the General Assembly of the Pan-American Sport Organization (ODEPA). (*Prensa Latina*, 10/4/04)

June 12: The US government denied a visa to moderate Cuban dissident Dimas Castellanos, despite US policies that encourage links between the United States and Cubans opposed to Fidel Castro's communist government. The opposition group Arco Progresista, to which Castellanos belongs, said that the United States was targeting moderate dissidents who criticize US policy as well as the Cuban government. Castellanos, whom Arco Progresista described as a "prominent, social-democratic thinker," was invited to participate in a conference at the Institute of Cuban Studies in Miami at the end of June. "What's puzzling about the denial is that it comes from a

government that says it supports the promotion of human rights, the exercise of personal liberties (...) and the democratization of Cuba," Arco Progresista said in a statement. (AP, 12/6/04)

July 20: A Cuban dissident said the US government revoked his visa after granting him political refugee status, prompting other opponents of Fidel Castro's communist government to express concern they are losing support from the United States. Some dissidents said they have also been denied visas or suddenly lost permission to enter the US Interest Section in Havana and use computers there. "They didn't give me an explanation. The guards at the door simply took away my pass," said dissident Gradys Muñoz. Vladimiro Roca, a leading dissident with the opposition group United For All Movement, said officials at the American mission "have really changed their treatment of some dissidents lately." Elizardo Sanchez, an activist who heads the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation, said the US government appeared to suspect that dissidents were working as undercover agents for Castro. "I am very surprised and worried about the possibility that the United States' immigration service is adopting unjust measures in the midst of a certain paranoia," Sanchez said. (AP, 20/7/04)

August 2: The Weisman Art Museum canceled an exhibition of conceptual art from Cuba because of international tensions and visa problems, the director of the museum at the University of Minnesota said. Museum director Lyndel King and two curators in Cuba had been working on the show, which was scheduled to open early next year, for four years. Nine artists were chosen and were expected to oversee the installation of their work and present talks in Minneapolis. Some of the artists also planned to create new artworks on site. But King said tensions between the United States and Cuba are running so high that the museum concluded it was impossible to do the show. (AP, 2/8/04)

September 29: Cuban scholars charged that the US government denied visas to more than 60 Cubans seeking to attend a conference on Latin America in the United States. Milagro Martinez, a political scientist who was to attend the Latin American Studies Association congress in Las Vegas next month, said the American mission in Havana announced this week that she and more than 60 other Cuban academics were denied US visas. The reason for the denial was not immediately clear. Officials at the US Interests Section in Havana declined to comment and referred calls to the US State Department in Washington, which did not immediately issue a statement on the matter. (AP, 29/9/04)

October 6: The State Department's decision to deny visas to 65 Cuban scholars seeking to attend a conference in Las Vegas drew protests from Congress and academia. Representatives William Delahunt, (Democrat-Massachusetts), and Jeff Flake, (Republican-Arizona), asked Secretary of State Colin Powell to reconsider the decision to prevent the Cubans from taking part in the Latin American Studies Association annual meeting. Cuban scholars have participated for years; about 100 attended last year. Professors from Harvard University's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies said they are turning what was planned as a workshop on the Cuban economy into a protest about the government's action. (AP, 6/10/04)

October 7: The United States is defending its decision to deny visas to 67 Cuban scholars who wanted to attend a conference this week in the western US state of Nevada. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said that the academics are Cuban government officials whose aim is to "spout the party line." Mr. Boucher also noted that 68 Cuban dissidents remain jailed in the communist country after being arrested last year in a crackdown on opponents of Cuban leader Fidel Castro. (VOA, 7/10/04)

October 13: A protest was held at Harvard University over the recent denial of entry visas by the US State Department to a group of Cuban scholars. According to the Harvard Crimson newspaper -- published on the university campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts -- the protest was the idea of John Coatsworth, director of Harvard's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies. Coatsworth, along with several other professors at Harvard, set up 65 empty chairs

where the Cuban scholars were to have addressed a forum at the university. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 13/10/04)

October 19: Washington is blocking educational exchanges between the United States and Cuba by denying entry visas to teachers from the island. According to Lidia Turner, Honorary Chairwoman of Havana's Teacher's Association, the US blockade has forced Cuba to organize alternative educational seminars. In an interview with the daily *Granma* newspaper, Lidia Turner said that as a researcher and leader of the teacher's association, she has personally suffered from restricted academic exchanges between Cuban and US professors. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 19/10/04)

December 21: The United States Interests Section in Havana (USIS) withdrew a visa issued to dissident Osvaldo Alfonso, who was recently released from prison for health reasons. Alfonso, 39, had been granted a visa as a political refugee and had plans to immigrate to the US with his family. During his 20 months in prison, Alfonso suffered serious nervous disorders, which led to an attempted suicide. His case received particular attention during the summary trials of April 2003. Alfonso testified then that he was manipulated by USIS in his opposition activities. Images of his trial were broadcast by the official media and used by Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque as "proof of US interference in their internal affairs". (*El Nuevo Herald*, 21/12/04)

NON-GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS WITH CUBA

January 13: Leading American and Cuban neuroscientists and psychiatrists are meeting in Cuba for a four-day conference, the second in a series of meetings to develop collaborative research in basic and clinical neuroscience. The agenda for the conference includes presentations by both US and Cuban clinicians and scientists. There will be sessions on Cuban science and health, depression, neurodegenerative disorders, stress and anxiety, schizophrenia, functional imaging, developmental problems of childhood, and addiction. (*Ascribe News*, 13/1/04)

January 18: More than 600 university students from the United States arrived in Havana aboard the cruise ship "SS Universal Explorer" as part of the University of Pittsburgh's Semester at Sea (SAS) program. Havana University director Juan Vela Valdes headed the delegation that received the students at the Sierra Maestra terminal, along Puerto Avenue, in the capital's historic district. Valdes praised the educational program, which is making its tenth visit to Havana. (*EFE*, 18/1/04)

January 20: Representatives from the National Council of Churches, USA (NCC), are planning to intercede with Fidel Castro on behalf of the 75 dissidents on the island that were handed out lengthy prison sentences. "We have requested this meeting with President Castro because, from a moral standpoint, this matter is crucial to the interests of our organization and its relations with Cuba," said Dr. Antonios (Tony) Kireopoulos, NCC Associate General Secretary for International Affairs and Peace, "We believe those sentences to be excessive." (*El Nuevo Herald*, 21/1/04)

January 21: Although Cuba typically discourages religion, the nation has nonetheless become the destination of "caravans" of Florida United Methodists over the past five years. The most recent one traveled from Christ United Methodist Church, which sent its pastor and two members to the island as part of what the denomination's Florida Conference refers to as the Cuba/Florida Covenant. Most recent figures indicate that there are 197 Methodist churches in Cuba, with many missions attached to each. (*St. Petersburg Times*, 21/1/04)

January 21: In his talks with 637 US students and 24 US professors, Fidel Castro stressed the importance of knowledge and culture to better understand the problems facing the world. Responding to several questions posed by the students, Castro stressed that the guarantee of the revolutionary process lies "on teaching the people how to think". The group is visiting Cuba as part of the Semester at Sea Cruise program. (*A/N*, 21/1/04)

January 21: At the closing ceremony of the 2nd Cuba-U.S. Biological Psychiatry Workshop, which took place over five days at Havana's Hotel Nacional, Dr. Ismael Clark, president of the Cuban Academy of Science, confirmed that the reestablishment of a free exchange of knowledge, experiences and achievements is the desire and aspiration of Cuban scientists. Clark qualified the conference as a unique opportunity for opening new horizons for mutually beneficial collaboration in neuroscience. Dr. Charles Nemeroff, head of the Faculty of Psychiatry at the University of Emory, Atlanta, expressed his hope that the current barriers to cooperation will be eradicated, thus permitting cooperative advances toward the common goal of preventing neuropsychiatric disorders and developing more effective treatments against them. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/1/04)

January 22: A delegation of the US National Council of Churches left for Cuba on a six-day visit. The trip includes consultations with Cuban churches, celebration of the consecration of a Greek Orthodox cathedral in Havana, and possibly a meeting with Fidel Castro on political dissidents, the council said. The NCC, in the requested meeting with Castro, which was not yet confirmed, said it was "hoping to discuss church concerns and issues pertaining to US-Cuban relations, including the harsh sentences imposed on 75 dissidents by Cuba's courts in spring 2003. (*AFP*, 22/1/04)

January 25: Film producer Robert Redford invited the family of Ernesto (Che) Guevara to a private screening of his company's new movie about the revolutionary's early years. "The Motorcycle Diaries", directed by Brazilian Walter Salles, and featuring Mexican actor Gael Garcia Bernal in the lead role, tells of Guevara's travels across Latin America before joining the revolution of Cuban leader Fidel Castro. "I've come to present the movie I produced about Che," Redford said in brief comments to reporters outside a Havana theatre, "I'm very happy to be here." Guevara's widow, Aleida March, and several of their children were seen arriving for the show. (*The National Post* 25/1/04)

January 26: Fidel Castro paid a call on actor Robert Redford at his Havana hotel and discussed his latest film, on revolutionary icon Che Guevara. Redford was in Cuba over the weekend wearing his producer's hat for a private screening of "The Motorcycle Diaries" for the widow and children of the legendary Argentine guerrilla fighter. "He came to me (...) He seemed in good health, good humor, good spirit," Redford said of the 77-year-old Cuban leader after their brief encounter at the Hotel Nacional. (*CNN*, 26/1/04)

February 2: A US Cuban scientific expedition kicked off a biodiversity study in the Sierra Maestra mountains and the Nipe-Sagua-Baracoa massif in eastern Cuba. The purpose of the trip is to conduct quick ecological analyses of the La Bayamesa nature preserve in the Buey Arriba and La Melva municipalities, in the northeastern province of Holguin. Some 30 specialists from Cuba's National Museum of Natural History and the Eastern Ecosystem and Biodiversity Center, along with experts from Cornell University and Chicago's Field Museum, are participating in the study. (*EFE*, 2/2/04)

February 7: Cuba, where Ernest Hemingway lived for two decades, and a foundation in the US state in which he died agreed to swap information contained in books and documents the American writer left behind. The co-president of the Hemingway House Foundation in Idaho, Martin Peterson, struck the deal with Cuban officials at Finca Vigia, the estate on the outskirts of Havana where Hemingway lived from 1940 to 1960. Peterson gave the Cuban officials a black-and-white photograph of Hemingway on a hunting trip in Idaho during which he shot two antelope. Their stuffed heads hang in the sitting room at Finca Vigia. (*Reuters*, 7/2/04)

February 10: The world's only flying eye hospital and training center -- the Orbis DC-10 --- is restocking its medical supplies and picking up staffers in West Palm Beach after training eye-care professionals in the Philippines. The jet heads for its seventh mission to Cuba this month. Orbis

was invited as a humanitarian organization by the country's Ministry of Health -- where it will train doctors, nurses and medical technicians. (*The Palm Beach Post*, 10/2/04)

February 24: The Reverend Lucius Walker, director of IFCO/Pastors for Peace, is in Cuba with a group of US students who are enrolling in Havana's Latin American School of Medicine. Of the nearly 7000 students from Latin America and other parts of the world attending classes at the medical school, 60 students are from poor families in the United States. Their only obligation is to return as graduating doctors and treat poor people in their communities. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 24/2/04)

March 4: The Cincinnati Ballet has signed two former soloists from the National Ballet of Cuba to dance for the company in the 2004-2005 season. Dancers Adiaris Almeida and Cervilio Amador both have defected to the United States. Almeida left the Cuban National Ballet while the company was on tour in New York in October. Amador left the company while it was performing in Daytona Beach, Florida. (*The Cincinnati Post*, 4/3/04)

April 21: A philanthropist best known for selling millions of dollars worth of musical instruments at a discount to the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra has fled to Cuba to avoid tax fraud charges, authorities said. A federal judge issued an arrest warrant for animal publishing tycoon Herbert Axelrod after he failed to show up for an arraignment on charges that he hid income from the Internal Revenue Service. Assistant US Attorney Michael Guadagno said Axelrod's yacht was docked in Cuba and that the multimillionaire was staying at the Marina Hemingway, a four-star resort in Havana. The United States has no extradition treaty with Cuba. (*AP*, 21/4/04)

April 22: Cuba's foreign minister denied knowing anything about an American multimillionaire who reportedly fled here to avoid tax fraud charges, but said the island is not a haven for those fleeing justice. "Cuba has never been a refuge for those fleeing justice," Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque told international journalists. (*AP*, 22/4/04)

April 24: Looking for Fidel - a documentary by Oliver Stone about Fidel Castro-- has been panned by his critics for not being objective. Lending his voice to the criticism was the top US diplomat in Havana, James Cason, who felt that Justifying Fidel ought to have been a more appropriate title for the documentary. The diplomat said the message of Stone's film was that repression was justified in Cuba because the Bush administration was planning to invade the island. "It's the conspiracy theory that Stone has always had in his films," Cason said. (*AlJazeera.Net*, 24/4/04)

May 27: Plantation United Methodist Church is reaching across the ocean to share prayer and faith with Cuba. Four members recently returned from a six-day trip to Cuba, where they visited La Iglesia Metodista del Consolacion del Sur. Plantation United Methodist adopted the church about a year ago and has been swapping e-mails and prayer ever since. "We wanted to establish a personal connection with them, to worship with them and talk with them," Plantation Senior Pastor Tim Smiley said. "We're both praying and fasting for each other." This was the church's first trip to Cuba, Smiley said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 27/5/04)

June 5: Forty operations were done in a week at Cimeq, one of Cuba's top hospitals, by a 42-member team of medical practitioners from Los Angeles and different cities in Florida. Cimeq usually performs 50 to 60 such surgeries a year, said Dr. Alfredo Ceballos, an orthopedic surgeon who coordinated the Americans' visit to the hospital. "This allowed us to take care of a large number of patients and significantly reduce the waiting list," Ceballos said. "And all without politics, or having to deal with money." Prostheses are limited in Cuba, a communist country under a U.S. embargo where hard currency to import goods from overseas is scant. (*AP*, 5/6/04)

July 4: The 35th Contingent of the Venceremos (We Will Prevail) Brigade arrived in Santiago de Cuba, in open defiance of Washington's newly tightened restrictions on travel to the island. The group, made up of 81 US citizens from different backgrounds and states, flew to Cuba from

Canada and plans to hold several meetings with the community and engage in agricultural and other activities. Venceremos was founded in the United States in 1969 and made its first visit a few months later, helping with that year's sugar harvest. (*Radio Habana Cuba, EFE, 5/7/04*)

July 4: The African Awareness Association arrived in Havana in rejection of the Bush administration's new measures aimed at strengthening Washington's economic blockade against the island. (*Radio Habana Cuba, EFE, 5/7/04*)

July 10: A group of Americans openly challenged the Bush administration's tough new restrictions on Cuba by traveling to the Communist-run island to donate 126 tons of aid gathered in the United States. Wearing T-shirts that said "Regime change in the US, not in Cuba," the 120 members of the Pastors for Peace humanitarian organization arrived in Havana from Mexico before a shipment that includes school buses, medicines, medical equipment, computers and books. "We have one purpose: to challenge our government's blockade of Cuba," said the group's leader, Baptist Rev. Lucius Walker. (*Reuters, 10/7/04*)

July 30: Half of the island's 6,700 species of plants are found nowhere else, even within the greater Caribbean region. Despite the four-decades-old US embargo, a cadre of American scientists has been working quietly for years with their Cuban colleagues, racing to protect as much as possible before the natural splendor butts heads with resorts and condominiums. But recent Bush administration restrictions on travel to Cuba are reducing the flow of information once more. Scientists no longer can go for a few days to collect plants or consult with colleagues -- they must stay for 10 weeks. They can't spend more than \$50 a day, so renting a car may prove impossible. And a separate, specific license must be obtained if a research scientist wants to collaborate with a Cuban counterpart. Molly Millerwise, a Treasury Department spokeswoman, said the new rules will allow a trickle of exchange. "An accredited university can apply to have 10 weeks in Cuba, and when licensed, it can engage in research," she said. "That includes having a scholar come up to the US and teach. Cuban nationals under this license -- they can teach, and the university can pay them for it." The rules make it "much more difficult for people to engage in legitimate scientific research," said John Croatsworth, director of Harvard University's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies. (*The Miami Herald, 1/8/04*)

August 8: US theater personality and social activist Julie Belafonte, wife of popular performer, Harry Belafonte, inaugurated Havana's First International Audiovisual Festival for Children and Adolescents. In the opening event, Julie Belafonte, who was named the Festival's Honorary President, said that the gala will be held every two years. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 8/8/04*)

September 18: IFCO's Pastors for Peace, an organization based in New York, announced the creation of a relief fund for countries affected by recent hurricanes Charley, Frances and Ivan in the Caribbean. The second week of September, Hurricane Ivan hit hard across the Caribbean, destroying 90% of the housing on the island of Grenada and rendering 3/4 of the people of Grenada homeless; flooding Grand Cayman; killing more than 60 people and causing untold damage in Jamaica and other island nations, explains IFCO's Pastors for Peace in a press release. In Cuba, no lives were lost, it says, but major damage has been suffered in Pinar del Rio and the Isle of Youth, and torrential and sustained rains have damaged crops in Havana Province and homes in the oldest neighborhoods of Centro Habana and Old Havana. The note says that when Pastors for Peace brought their 15th Friendshipment to Havana in late August, Cuba was recovering from the summer's first big storm. (*Prensa Latina, 18/9/04*)

October 3: The National Network on Cuba (NNOC), a coalition of 55 groups that oppose the US government's anti-Cuban policies, met in Washington for its second meeting of the year. About 70 persons from all over the US discussed the situation in Cuba today, ending US-imposed restrictions on travel and trade with the island, and finding additional ways to highlight the case of the "Cuban Five." Representatives from the Cuban Interests Section in Washington and the Havana-based Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples also participated in the sessions, as did Marvin Glass, co-chair of the Canadian Network on Cuba, and representatives of the

Venezuelan UN Mission in New York. At a pre-meeting reception at the Cuban Interests Section, Cuban Minister of Health Jose Ramon Balaguer said that the Cuban people are unified, that they will fight to preserve their values, and that "to prevent a war is to win the war." (*People's Weekly World*, 15/10/04)

October 13: A US doctor has led a Cuban surgical team performing an operation on the island, defying restrictions imposed by the administration of US President George W. Bush. William Stetson, a specialist in sports medicine and a professor at the University of Southern California, led the team that performed arthroscopic surgery on Oscar Luciano Martinez's shoulder at a hospital in Ciego de Avila in central Cuba, the official newspaper Granma reported. Stetson also donated some of the surgical instruments needed for this type of operation, which had previously been done only at Havana's Frank Pais Hospital. (*EFE*, 13/10/04)

November 28: Miami Archbishop John C. Favalora led a delegation of 12 religious leaders to Cuba to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Archdiocese of Santiago -- a diocese Florida had been associated with nearly 500 years ago. In a ceremony at the Cathedral of Santiago de Cuba attended by thousands, Favalora said, "I found a church very, very alive. Their hearts were full of fervor. You could see it in the way they prayed." Favalora, however, also experienced the religious and humanitarian restrictions of the Cuban government. The group had taken 21 suitcases filled with donated rosaries and such medicines as insulin, antibiotics, vitamins and decongestants. They were stopped at the airport by Cuban government agents. (*The Miami Herald*, 30/11/04)

December 1: US filmmaker Oliver Stone's letter to Fidel Castro was made public in Cuba. Stone's letter was sent on October 26 from London, according to Granma newspaper. The paper says the existence of the letter was known on November 24 through the Cuban embassy in Spain. In his letter published by Cuban newspapers, Stone calls Fidel an incredible man, "first you fall and fracture your knee and instead of relaxing and allowing doctors to administer anesthesia, as most people would do, you keep on working during surgery." (*Prensa Latina*, 1/12/04)

SALES AND BUSINESS

January 6: Despite US restrictions, Cuba looks forward to normal trade relations with the United States, where the island's purchases increased in 2003. In statements to the press, the director of Alimport enterprise Pedro Alvarez said that in the past 25 months Cuba has paid in cash some 524 200 000 dollars, 344 millions of which belong to last year when the amount of purchases doubled the 2002 figure. Alvarez also stressed the signing of an accord at a value of 10 million dollars with the governor of Kansas, Kathleen Sebelius, which was the first of its kind at that level. (*AIN*, 6/1/04)

January 8: Cuba and the state government of South Carolina signed a trade agreement that provides for thousands of tons of farm products to be sold to the island at a cost of \$10 million. This latest agreement was signed by Pedro Alvarez, president of Alimport, the Cuban company authorized by Fidel Castro's government to purchase agricultural products, and South Carolina Lt. Governor Andre Bauer, who heads a state delegation visiting the island. (*EFE*, 8/1/04)

January 22: The Port of Corpus Christi is sending another large shipment to Cuba. The shipment consists of 6.6 million pounds of beans currently sitting in a warehouse. (*KRIS TV*, 22/1/04)

January 30: The Cuban government agency responsible for importing food and agricultural products from the United States has selected A.R. Savage & Son as its shipping agent for goods sent from Tampa Bay. The agreement formalizes the business relationship between Alimport and A.R. Savage of Tampa, which has handled five shipments of the animal feed supplement dicalcium phosphate from Port Manatee and private docks to Cuba last year, according to Arthur

Savage, chief executive of the company. Although trade with Cuba remains limited, the designation may give Savage the inside track if it expands over time. (*St. Petersburg Times*, 30/1/04)

February 1: In an attempt to bring Texas farmers a potential \$57 million in food and agricultural exports to Cuba that could result in 1,500 new jobs, Texas businesses, organizations and individuals pursuing the Cuban market have formed the Texas Cuba Trade Alliance. The TCTA is designed to support the effort with current information about economics, business opportunities, and export trade policies. (*Farm Press*, 1/2/04)

February 16: US farmers and businesspeople believe that Cuba is a valuable market with which they want to develop and strengthen trade, according to Marvin Lehrer, director of the US Rice Federation for Latin America. Lehrer arrived in the Cuban capital to continue negotiations with Cuba's ALIMPORT company on US rice exports to Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 17/2/04)

February 17: Despite four decades of trade sanctions and increasing White House hostility, Cuba has become the United States' 35th market for food exports. Cuba's purchases of American agricultural products doubled last year, as US agribusiness giants sold more and more grain to the Caribbean island, according to a report by a New York-based business group. The US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, which monitors trade between the two countries, said Cuba imported \$256.9 million worth of US agricultural products in 2003. (*Aljazeera.Net*, 17/2/04)

February 21: Cuba, the US poultry industry's eighth export market, said it would increase imports despite the appearance of the dreaded bird flu in four states and bans slapped on US chicken and eggs by some countries. "We have limited purchases from a few states due to avian influenza, but see no problem with the vast majority," said Pedro Alvarez, chairman of Cuba's state food importer Alimport. Alvarez said Cuba would purchase 120,000 metric tons of US poultry in 2004 as his company increased US food imports in general. (*Reuters*, 21/2/04)

February 21: Cuba announced an agreement to buy \$1 million in cattle feed from Iowa under ongoing deals that have carried Cuba to No. 35 on the US's list of food export markets. Pedro Alvarez, president of the Cuban food import-export firm Alimport, announced the deal to buy 10,000 metric tons of feed from Midwest Grain Processors during a news conference with visiting Iowa farm representatives. The deals announced are the latest in a series of ongoing transactions between the communist-run island and US farm producers that are allowed under an exception to the US trade embargo. (*AP*, 23/2/04)

March 3: Cuba signed an agreement with the Port of Houston to ship more of its American food purchases through Texas, in a deal that could give the communist-run country trade clout in a key political state. Cuba has been eager to spread its purchases through more than 35 states to increase domestic pressure against the embargo. The Port of Houston, the second largest in the United States and the world's sixth largest in tonnage handled, is the 18th American port to ship food to Cuba. The No. 1 departure point for American ocean travel to Cuba could be Texas when US travel restrictions against the communist island end, the port authority's chairman said. "I suspect that when everything opens up, a lot of cruise lines will want to come here," said James Edmonds, chairman of the Houston port commission. "It will be a great race." "We see that in this part of the world Mexico, Central America, Cuba is our future," Edmonds told a news conference. (*AP, Reuters*, 3/3/04)

March 25: With 99 Cuban and foreign enterprises participating, the 10th International Agricultural Fair opened in Havana. In this year's expo, both scientific and commercial activities will be featured. John Parker, participating as a representative of US farmers from the state of Florida, said that his visit was in part to monitor several agreements signed last year with the Cuban Agriculture Ministry. Speaking on behalf of North American farmers, Parker said, "We hope the 10th International Fair helps us to consolidate our bilateral relations." (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 25/3/04)

March 22: A trading company and economic development groups are leading an export mission to Cuba to try to increase California's share of the island's import market. Gregory Estevane, president of Global Strategies Trading, said the company hopes to take representatives of about 20 Central Valley companies to Havana April 13-16, when the Cuban government has said it wants to negotiate and sign more than \$100 million of contracts. Global Strategies Trading is a company that trades in Latin America, Europe and Asia. Estevane said it is also the trading arm of the World Trade Center in Los Angeles, and is affiliated with the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation. The trip is co-sponsored with the Tulane and Los Angeles economic development corporations, said Paul Saldana, president and chief executive of the Tulane County Economic Development Corporation. (*Tribune Business News*, 23/3/04)

March 29: In the US, government figures show there are about 200 businesses licensed to offer travel and shipping services to Cuba. Chris Robinson, desk officer for Cuban Affairs with the US State Department, said the businesses help fill an economic need in Cuba. Robinson said travel and shipping businesses that focus on getting packages and people to Cuba provide a valuable service, even though it's not lined with gold. Cubans in the United States annually send an estimated \$800 million in cash, clothes, food and medicine to relatives in Cuba, said Antonio Jorge, professor of economics and international relations at Florida International University in Miami. (*Tampa Tribune*, 29/3/04)

April 7: Vermont Lieutenant Governor Brian Dubie is expected to announce an upcoming state trip to Cuba. Dubie says the goals of the trip are to help establish a relationship between the people of Vermont and the people of Cuba and pursue opportunities to export Vermont products to the country. (*AP*, 7/4/04)

April 12: Farm leaders say Cuba wants to buy at least \$10 million of agricultural products from South Dakota. Making that happen will take persistence and patience, said Gary Duffy, president of the South Dakota Value-Added Agricultural Center. Agricultural and business leaders met in Huron recently after a trade mission to the Caribbean nation. Duffy said he hopes South Dakota farm products will be on their way to Cuba within a year. (*AP*, 12/4/04)

April 12: Vermont Lieutenant Governor Brian Dubie is expected to announce an upcoming state trip to Cuba. Dubie says the goals of the trip are to help establish a relationship between the people of Vermont and the people of Cuba and pursue opportunities to export Vermont products to the country. (*AP*, 12/4/04)

April 13: Moving to cement trade ties with US business, Cuba agreed to buy \$13 million in food from American companies and reached a tentative deal for up to \$10 million in farm goods from California. Hundreds of US farm representatives hoping to build a trade relationship with communist Cuba traveled to Havana for three days of talks organized by Cuba. Cuban said that by the time talks end they hope to contract to buy as much as \$100 million more in American farm products. More than 300 people from about 150 U.S. companies attended the gathering. The biggest contract announced was with Archer Daniels Midland of Decatur, Ill., for \$9 million in corn. The other contracts were for \$3.4 million in rice from Riceland Foods Inc. of Stuttgart, Ark., and nearly \$1 million for peas from PS International Ltd., of Chapel Hill, N.C. "Cuba was the No. 1 market for American rice prior to sanctions," said USA Rice Federation representative Marvin Leherer. Mexico is now the world's No. 1 importer of American rice, buying about 750,000 metric tons annually, said Leherer. (*AP*, 13/4/04)

April 14: Joining the bandwagon of trade with Cuba, Philadelphia port and state agriculture officials are scheduled to fly to Havana to sign commitments for up to \$10 million in exports to Cuba. The signings would make Philadelphia the only port, and Pennsylvania the only Northeastern state, with limited commerce with the government of Fidel Castro, the officials said. (*The Inquirer*, 15/4/04)

April 14: "To support its political interests, the Cuban government is looking for a way to manipulate the political process in the United States through purchases," James Cason said in a communique released in this capital. Cason's statement coincided with the first round of negotiations between Cuba and the United States concerning food purchases, which is taking place here this week with some 400 representatives of more than 170 US companies interested in trade with the island attending. (*EFE*, 14/4/04)

April 15: Cuba opened its petroleum sector to US investment at a bilateral meeting with US businessmen in Havana. Officials from Cubapetroleo (CUPET) and the Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Ministry presented to the participants at the 1st Round of Cuban-US Food Negotiations the characteristics of the island's petroleum industry and the possibilities for investment in Cuba. "We are open to US oil companies interested in exploration, production and services," Juan Fleites Melo, vice president of state oil monopoly Cubapetroleo, told the US companies' representatives. His invitation came on the third day of a four-day event during which \$65 million in food sales agreements have been signed. CUPET vice president Juan Fleites explained that currently the island has 16 contracts with European and Canadian firms in the oil sector. "There is no reason US companies shouldn't take advantage and compete so close to home," he added. (*EFE, Reuters*, 15/4/04)

April 15: Central Bank President Francisco Soberon told the US representatives of 173 companies, who gathered in Havana to sell agricultural products, that "the United States would have less than 90 miles away the world's second-largest nickel reserve," if the embargo were lifted. He said ports and airports would open to US companies and trade would boom. Cuba is one of the world's largest producers of nickel plus cobalt at 71,600 tonnes last year. Nickel is used to make stainless steel and alloys for construction and industrial uses. Nickel oxide and cobalt oxide are used in the manufacturing of lithium batteries. (*Reuters*, 15/4/04)

April 16: The Cuban government has agreed to buy more than \$100m worth of American food and agricultural produce. The sales come after a week of talks with US business representatives in Havana. Food sales have been permitted since 2000 under an exception to the four-decades-old US trade embargo on Cuba. (*BBC*, 16/4/04)

April 19: Pennsylvania, the first northeastern US state to send a trade mission to Cuba, pledged to lobby for an end to trade and travel sanctions against the communist-run island. The Port of Philadelphia, once the second largest importer of Cuban sugar, signed a memorandum of understanding to reopen its docks to trade with Cuba under an easing of sanctions in 2000 that allowed food sales to the island. "We intend to talk to our congressional delegation (in Washington) and encourage them to consider lifting the trade and travel restrictions," said Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Dennis Wolff, heading an 18-member business delegation to Cuba. Wolff said Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell was "very much in favor" of restoring two-way trade and free travel to Cuba. (*Reuters*, 19/4/04)

April 21: Alabama's poultry industry has resumed sales to Cuba that were interrupted by the island nation's concerns about avian influenza. State Agriculture Commissioner Ron Sparks said that poultry sales to Cuba from Alabama resumed April 14 -- a day after Sparks visited Havana on his third trip to Cuba negotiating sales of agriculture products. (*AP*, 21/4/04)

May 20: After a four-day trade mission in Havana and other rice industry areas of Cuba, the USA Rice - led delegation returned to the United States with a stronger trade relationship and a better understanding of Cuba's rice needs. "Cuba is estimated to import 550,000 tons of rice this year, however, only a fifth of that comes from the US due to US-imposed export restrictions," said USA Rice Chairman Gary Sebree, a rice grower from Arkansas. "However, if that market was made available to us, it would become a top market overnight. This visit helped to further strengthen our relationship with the buyers of rice, the users of rice, and most importantly, the consumers of rice in Cuba." The USA Rice delegation was the largest and most visible among the estimated 400 farmers and food traders in Havana to make trade contacts. (*Southwest Farm Press*, 20/5/04)

May 25: In its third report in just over a decade on opportunities in a post-Castro Cuba, the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce offers a road map for investing and trade but concedes that it could be a bumpy path to the long-expected economic reforms. The latest study, titled "The Trade Impact of a Free Cuba" which stresses potential business opportunities in the island, was released during a chamber panel discussion that brought together executives, diplomats and Chamber representatives. The study, the Chamber's third on the topic since 1991, aims to provide the local business community with an understanding of the implications -- both in opportunities and challenges -- of a "free" Cuba. (*The Miami Herald*, 26/5/04)

June 24: Cuba bought 5,300 tonnes of US durum wheat during the week ended June 17, the US Agriculture Department said. In its weekly export sales report, the USDA said Cuba's durum purchase was the first since the USDA began reporting such data in 1973. (*Reuters*, 24/6/04)

July 27: According to federal government figures, Florida-Cuba trade volumes have increased ten-fold in the last five years. The Foreign Trade Division of the US Census Bureau contrasted Florida's exports to the island in 2003 adding up to US\$ 13.4 million vs. only US\$ 1.6 million in 1998. This year, up until May, exports to Cuba through Florida ports have reached US\$ 5.5 million. (*UPI*, 27/7/04)

August 4: Despite US efforts to strangle the flow of dollars to Cuba and fresh exchanges of acrimony between Presidents Bush and Fidel Castro, the cash-strapped Cuban government intends to make record US food purchases this year, according to its chief international shopper. "By the end of August, Cuba will have purchased in eight months as much as it did in the whole previous year," said Pedro Alvarez, head of Alimport, the government's food procurement enterprise. Cuban purchases from what is now the nation's biggest food supplier, already nearing the \$300-million mark by the end of July, are set to exceed \$440 million this year, Alvarez said in an interview. That would represent at least a 25% increase over last year's purchases from U.S. producers. More significant, say analysts in both countries, the expanding food trade represents broader spending by the Cuban government on vital staples for the monthly food ration on which most in this country of 11.2 million depend for survival. (*Los Angeles Times*, 4/8/04)

August 8: A shipment of 15,000 tons of field peas arrived in Cuba from the US state of Illinois. The peas are sent from several locations in partnership with the Illinois International Trade Center. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/8/04)

August 11: Sysco Corp, the largest US food services distributor, signed an agreement with Cuba to increase food sales, which go primarily to the island's tourist trade. As part of the agreement, David Dickson, president and CEO of Sysco Food Services of Central Alabama, signed a letter of intent with the Cuban food import agency Alimport and pledged to lobby for the lifting of US trade sanctions against the communist-run country. Since entering the Cuban market in November, Sysco Alabama has sold \$500,000 worth of 195 food items to Cuba, including canned fruit and vegetables, tomato puree and other products. Dickson declined to say how much the sales would total. In June, Sysco acquired International Food Group Inc. of Plant City, Fla., to expand its presence outside of North America. (*Reuters, Houston Business Journal*, 11/8/04)

August 20: Food imports from the United States exceeded 960 million USD according to Alimport enterprise, since sales of produce were authorized by Washington on December, 2001. Cuban authorities have so far paid 830 million USD, while the rest will be paid in the same way when merchandise is ready to be shipped to Havana. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/8/04)

September 1: Vermont's Secretary of Agriculture Steve Kerr is planning a trip to Cuba, to work on a deal to export the state's agricultural commodities and dairy cattle to the island, according to *The Boston Globe*. Kerr is following up on an April trade mission to Havana by Lt. Governor Brian Dubie, who returned home with plans to eventually sell apples, dried milk and cows from Vermont, the newspaper reports. The agriculture secretary said he hoped to return after his four-

day trip with contracts in hand for the sale of five container loads of apples valued at approximately \$100,000 and for 3,000 metric tons of powdered milk valued at \$6 million. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/9/04)

September 8: A US Senate subcommittee has authorized business trips to Cuba by U.S. citizens selling domestic agricultural products. The agricultural affairs subcommittee gave its unanimous approval to a joint proposal submitted by Republican Larry Craig and Democrat Byron Dorgan, who represents the agricultural states of Idaho and North Dakota, respectively. (*AFP*, 9/9/04)

September 9: Vermont Agriculture Secretary Steve Kerr is bringing home from Cuba seven million dollars worth of business for the state. Kerr met with Fidel Castro before Kerr signed the agricultural deals. Kerr says he and Castro talked about everything from the importance of education to Parkinson's disease and eye surgery. He described his meeting with Castro as "remarkable." Kerr signed agreements to send dairy cattle, apples and powdered milk to Cuba. The American food sales to Cuba are an exception to US trade sanctions against the island. (*AP*, 9/9/04)

October 3: A Houston company's recent cancellation of an agreement with Cuba has sparked new complaints about Havana's insistence that Americans wishing to sell products to Cuba should first agree to push Washington to ease economic sanctions against the communist-ruled island. In recent months, US businesses have been privately grumbling that Alimport, Cuba's food-importing monopoly, has increased pressure for political cooperation. Americans who have exported food products to Cuba or wish to do so report that they "are receiving pressure (...) to be more public" and "more forceful" about their opposition to the United States policy," the New York-based US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council reported recently. Americans also "report that representatives of Alimport have decreased purchases from (...) [U.S.] companies whose 'commitment' to a change in United States policy (...) is suspect; or have stated that products would be sourced from those United States-based companies that 'support our position'," the USCTEC report added. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/10/04)

October 4: Cuba's top trade official has warned that American agricultural companies could suffer sharp financial losses because of the new US restrictions on trips to the island nation. Trade with the United States has already declined to a trickle since the Bush administration sought in June to further squeeze the government of Fidel Castro, said Pedro Alvarez, chairman and chief executive of Empresa Cubana de Alimentos, or Alimport, the national import agency. On paper, 2004 looks like a record year for US imports to Cuba. By the close of December, US suppliers and shippers will have earned some \$450 million, a 20 percent increase over 2003 sales of \$349 million. But Alvarez said he signed 95 percent of the year's US contracts before the White House limited Cuban-American travel and remittances to family members on the island. Now, in a challenge to the US government, Alimport is inviting American companies to show their products at Havana's annual trade fair next month. The company intends to sign its first contracts for 2005, worth some \$150 million. (*NBC News*, 4/10/04)

October 6: A North Dakota trade delegation has agreed to sell 5,000 metric tons of peas to Cuba, and Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson hopes the country will strike another deal to buy five times that amount. The sale of yellow and green peas is worth \$1 million to North Dakota, and about \$500,000 to pea producers themselves, said Eric Bartsch, director of the North Dakota Dry Pea and Lentil Council. "Any time you have a sale ... it's always an impact to North Dakota. It's moving the product," Bartsch said during a telephone conference call from Havana. "We have a lot of product out there, so we're going to be continually needing sales like this to move our product." Johnson, Bartsch and Greg Johnson, owner of Premier Pulses International Inc. of Minot, are in Cuba this week to explore pea sales. The country, which has a centralized system for buying food, has bought \$5.5 million worth of North Dakota dry peas and beans in the last five years. (*AP*, 7/10/04)

October 7: Under an exception to a US trade embargo, communist Cuba has become the third importer of American rice after Mexico and Japan, officials said. Cuba bought 110,000 tons of rice this year from the United States, said Pedro Alvarez, chairman of Cuba's food import company Alimport, which signed a letter of intent to strengthen trade relations with the US Rice Producers Association. Dwight Roberts, president of the association, said Cuba could eventually surpass Mexico and Japan as America's main rice importer. (*AP*, 7/10/04)

October 14: The Cuban trade organization has indicated in a letter to Senator Tom Daschle that it is interested in pursuing an arrangement that would lead to the purchase of agricultural commodities from South Dakota. The group, known as Alimport, is Cuba's largest single importer of food supplies. The letter was a follow-up to a visit from a South Dakota delegation that traveled to Cuba earlier this year to pursue expanded exports to Cuba. In the letter, the head of Alimport indicated that Cuba would like to enter into negotiations to purchase roughly \$10 million in various agricultural commodities from South Dakota. The letter referenced the visit of a delegation of South Dakota farmers and ranchers to Cuba this past March. Daschle and his staff have also met with Cuban officials to urge Cuba to purchase South Dakota products. (*Aberdeen American News*, 14/10/04)

October 16: Representatives of the US Rice Producers Association were in Havana, Cuba, at the invitation of Pedro Alvarez, president and CEO of Alimport (Empresa Cubana de Alimentos), the Cuban food import agency. The visit was highlighted by the joint signing of a letter of intent by Alvarez and Dwight Roberts, president and CEO of the US Rice Producers Association, which called for the expansion of trade relations between the two groups including the proposition to elevate the level of Cuba's purchases of rice from the United States. "Cuba has imported 100,000 tons of rice from the United States this year, and despite commercial restrictions placed on doing business, Cuba is the third largest importer of rice from North America after both Mexico and Japan," Alvarez said. (*The Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, 16/10/04)

October 31: Just days before an American presidential election, Cuban communist officials were designing deals to buy \$US150 million more in corn, wheat, cattle and other American farm products at a trade fair. Agribusiness giant Archer Daniels Midland of Illinois, Tyson Foods of Arkansas, Splash Tropical Drinks of Florida, Marsh Supermarkets of Indiana and White Rose Foods of New Jersey were among 125 American companies participating in the weeklong International Fair of Havana. "This is happening at a crucial moment, during elections in the United States," Pedro Alvarez, chairman of the Cuban food import company Alimport said Saturday after inspecting stands at the exposition centre where the Americans will display food samples. "Many companies and their people will come after the elections," so they don't miss the chance to vote, Alvarez said. Alvarez declined to talk about the US presidential candidates or express a preference. (*News 24*, 31/10/04)

November 1: Cuba signed contracts to buy \$10 million of US wheat and meat products, and \$300 million of American dairy cattle, launching a new round of deals for US farm products projected to reach \$150 million. "We're all committed to cooperation," said rancher John Parke Wright, of J.P. Wright & Co. "What we represent are good relations, fellowship and free and open trade." Wright's Naples, a Florida company will ship the cattle to Cuba from Vermont. The \$10 million deal was with Louis Dreyfus of Georgia for wheat, chicken and pork. The deals were announced at the weeklong International Fair of Havana, also attended by companies including Archer Daniels Midland of Illinois, Tyson Foods of Arkansas, and Cargill Inc. of Minnesota. (*AP*, 1/11/04)

November 1: Agricultural goods produced in the United States and exported to Cuba have reached \$298 million, more than double than in 2003, according to a Texas Cooperative Extension economist. "Sales could exceed \$400 million for 2004, ranking Cuba the 25th largest market for US agricultural exports," said Dr. Parr Rosson, Extension economist and director of the Center for North American Studies at Texas A&M University. "Growth in the Cuban market has become especially important as the US agricultural trade surplus has narrowed over the last

two years." Importantly for Texas, Rosson said, rice was the top export to Cuba for the first eight months of 2004 with sales reaching \$64 million. (*Agnews*, 1/11/04)

November 4: Cuba agreed at an international trade fair in Havana to buy nearly \$30 million in food products from the United States. The products will include \$600,000 worth of cooking oil from a company in Miami. The latest numbers represent deals made through the weeklong fair. Pedro Alvarez, chairman of the Cuban food import company Alimport, said he expects Cuba to sign agreements totaling some \$150 million by the fair's end. The latest deals with US companies totaled more than \$7.5 million. (*AP*, 4/11/04)

November 6: With \$65 million worth of contracts for the sale of US farm products to Cuba signed this week, purchases by the Communist-ruled island since Washington authorized such sales in 2001 have topped the \$1 billion mark. "With what was signed today, we hit \$1 billion since negotiations began" in 2001 for sales to Cuba of food and agricultural products, the president of the state-run purchaser Alimport, Pedro Alvarez, told reporters. Purchases this week totaling more than \$65.5 million were made at the Havana International Fair. (*EFE*, 5/11/04)

November 8: Vermont's agriculture secretary has returned from a successful trade mission to Cuba. Steve Kerr said he hoped to work out a contract to sell Cuba 2,000 bushels of Macintosh apples valued at \$40,000. He also said he had made substantial progress on the sale of 3,000 metric tons of powdered milk with an estimated value of \$6 million. He added that New Zealand, a major powdered milk supplier, also is competing for the contract. (*AP*, 9/11/04)

November 16: Cuba had completed its promised purchase of \$10 million in Montana agricultural products, Senator Max Baucus said, and another deal is possible. The Democrat is scheduled to visit the island nation next month. In September 2003, Baucus traveled to Cuba with state agriculture producers and business officials and secured a deal in which Cuba would buy \$10 million in farm products. The country wound up buying \$10.4 million in wheat, dry beans and peas, he said. "We're all very excited here about the potential for this sale to help our agricultural economy and create jobs on main streets across Montana," Baucus said. (*AP*, 16/11/04)

November 16: The Bush administration has delayed some Cuban payments to US food exporters to investigate compliance with rules governing sales to Cuba under an exception to the four-decade trade embargo, trade sources said. They said the US Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), which enforces sanctions against the Communist nation, is preparing new guidelines for the growing food sales to Cuba. Nerves are frayed on both sides of the Florida Straits with exporters and importers worried the Bush administration, which has stepped up actions aimed at depriving Cuba's government of hard currency, may introduce more stringent payment procedures. "The US banks have been delaying some payments as Treasury checks cargo status and other requirements," a source deeply involved in the food trade said. "They sometimes rule a company is not in compliance, but issue a special license allowing the payment to go through," he said, asking his name not be used. A US Treasury Department spokeswoman declined to comment on the payments issue involving food trade with Cuba. (*Reuters*, 16/11/04)

November 18: Vermont's Agriculture Secretary, Steve Kerr, said that he has completed a deal to sell six million dollars in powdered milk to Cuba. Cuba has agreed to purchase powdered milk through DairyAmerica, a California-based marketing cooperative. Part of the order would come from the Saint Albans Co-op and Agri-Mark, Vermont's two major dairy cooperatives. Kerr, who returned from Cuba, expects the state will sign a contract for the milk next month. (*World Now*, 18/11/04)

November 23: Some companies that sell food and agricultural products to Cuba are reporting that payments are not being credited to their bank accounts in the United States, according to a representative of a group that tracks business between the two countries. John Kavulich, president of the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council Inc., said that fewer than half a dozen companies have contacted his organization recently about such problems. He said banks have

confirmed receipt of payments from Cuba but have not credited the accounts of exporters on instructions from the US government. A spokeswoman for the Treasury Department said its Office of Foreign Assets Control, which enforces the economic embargo against Cuba, is looking into the matter. OFAC, she said, has been asked to clarify the government's policy regarding payments. She wouldn't say who requested the clarification. (*AP*, 24/11/04)

November 24: The Treasury Department has begun issuing licenses to several companies doing business with Cuba to allow those exporters to receive payments from the island that had been frozen, pending a federal review of Cuba trade policies. The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, which enforces the existing US embargo and travel restrictions to Cuba, is not expected to make a decision about whether to change the business practice until after the holiday weekend. But in order to clear any deals that had already been paid for, OFAC began issuing licenses for each individual transaction. "U.S. financial institutions interdicted a handful of transactions due to confusion among some agribusinesses about the types of payments authorized for Commerce-licensed agricultural sales to Cuba," said a statement from a Treasury spokeswoman. "Thus, OFAC has adopted an interim specific licensing policy for exporters whose Cuban payments have been interdicted pending further guidance on the payment policy for shipping agricultural goods to Cuba, pursuant to licenses issued by the Commerce Department. OFAC is working directly with these exporters and is currently issuing specific licenses to unblock their payments". (*Sun Sentinel*, 24/11/04)

December 2: Senator Byron Dorgan (Democrat-North Dakota) said the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) is quietly using new tactics and resources to stop legal sales of American farm products to Cuba. Senator Dorgan said he is calling on the Treasury Department's Inspector General to investigate whether OFAC is exceeding its legal authority by using its resources to block Cuba food sales. OFAC's top job is to track terrorists' funding sources, Dorgan noted. The new effort diverts attention and resources from that, in addition to hurting US farmers at a time when farm incomes need bolstering. (*Hindustan Times*, 2/12/04)

December 3: The Bush administration has temporarily halted the transfer of money to US agricultural firms selling goods to Cuba. Congress Daily reported that the move, apparently aimed at discouraging trade with the communist nation, comes amid a review of existing law to investigate whether Cuba is required to make advance payments for US farm products. (*UPI*, 3/12/04)

December 8: A Senate Democrat threatened to block the president's Treasury Department appointments as the Bush administration reconsiders a rule for companies that sell food and agricultural products to Cuba. Senator Max Baucus of Montana, the top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, said a potential revision threatens to obstruct trade and "takes this administration's dangerous obsession with Cuba to a whole new level." "I will not sit idly by if the Treasury Department attempts to rewrite legislation Congress intended to facilitate trade with Cuba," he said. (*AP*, 8/12/04)

December 9: Changing the method of payment for US farm goods sold to Cuba could be detrimental to America's farmers and ranchers, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation. AFBF, and an extensive coalition of agricultural associations, sent a letter to President Bush asking him to instruct the Office of Foreign Assets Control to not change the method of payment procedures used in agricultural exporting to Cuba. The letter was prompted by indications that the OFAC, an office under the Treasury Department, is considering new guidelines to interpret payment terms in a way that would force US exporters to receive payment before goods leave US ports. The value of US agricultural exports to Cuba has reached about \$400 million per year. (*AFB*, 9/12/04)

December 9: Agriculture Secretary Dennis Wolff announced that Pennsylvania will export the first live cattle shipment made from the US since bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or mad cow disease, was found in a cow in Washington state last December. In January 2005,

some 200 Holstein and Jersey cattle, predominately from Pennsylvania, will be exported to Cuba as part of a recent trade agreement. Pennsylvania's agricultural products are known worldwide for quality," said Wolff. "Earlier this year, I discussed dairy genetics in detail with Fidel Castro during a trade mission to Cuba. Since the first cattle from Pennsylvania shipped so successfully, Cuba is interested in purchasing another group of the state's bred cattle. We believe this is a great step towards increased trade with Cuba, and a great sign to the international community that Pennsylvania genetics are a good investment." (*PRNewswire*, 9/12/04)

December 13: Two years ago in December, fewer than 30 US business representatives came to Havana to sign agreements with Cuban officials to export food to the Caribbean island. This week, Cuba expects more than 340 people — primarily producers of American farm goods — to attend the latest round of talks, in which communist officials hope to sign deals worth about \$100 million. "This shows a great interest on the part of American businesses," Pedro Alvarez, chairman of the Cuban food import company Alimport, said. Alvarez was optimistic that President Bush in his second term will start heeding requests from US business interests and lawmakers — particularly those from farm states — to ease restrictions. "I have absolute confidence that intelligence will prevail," Alvarez said. "I think the time is right." More than 165 US companies will be represented in this week's talks. Senator Max Baucus of Montana, the top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, is expected to attend, as well as several state lawmakers and agricultural commissioners. (*AP*, 13/12/04)

December 15: Pedro Alvarez, the president of Alimport, the Cuban state import agency, said that in 2004 imports from the United States would account for nearly \$480 million, triple the figure for 2002. Several agreements were signed between Alimport and US companies - including several from Montana - for nearly \$40 million in agricultural and food products like frozen chicken and milk. (*EFE*, 15/12/04)

December 16: Cuba has agreed to purchase up to \$10 million worth of farm products including potatoes, apples, and dairy cattle from Maine producers, Governor John Baldacci said. The announcement came at the end of a trade mission to Cuba involving representatives from the state's potato, apple, dairy, cattle and maple syrup industries. (*The Boston Globe*, 16/12/04)

December 18: Cuba has agreed to buy about \$125 million in farm goods from US companies attending trade talks in Havana, officials said. The deals, which were agreed on during three days of negotiations, surpassed expectations, Pedro Alvarez, chairman of the Cuban food import company Alimport, told the press. Cuba had expected to sign deals worth about \$100 million going into the talks, he said. More than 300 people, primarily producers of American farm goods, attended the meetings, as did several lawmakers — including Senator Max Baucus of Montana, the top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee. Fidel Castro addressed the group for several hours on subjects ranging from Cuba's health care system to a recent government decision to take the American dollar out of circulation on the island. (*AP*, 18/12/04)

December 21: An Alabama trade mission to Cuba lined up \$18 million in sales of agricultural products and more deals are expected to result from the trip, state Agriculture Commissioner Ron Sparks said. The deal is the biggest yet with the communist island nation since Alabama agriculture officials began pursuing trade in 2002, Sparks said. "Clearly, the results from this trip show how Alabama profits from exporting to Cuba," he said. Alabama's delegation was one of several from the United States that participated in trade negotiations last week. Cuban officials said they agreed to buy \$125 million in farm goods from the US. (*AP*, 21/12/04)

December 23: Cuba has agreed to buy more than \$1 million worth of yellow peas from North Dakota while industry officials sort through a new trade proposal that could change future negotiations. A North Dakota trade delegation secured a deal in October to sell 5,000 metric tons of peas to Cuba, with a verbal agreement for an additional 20,000 metric tons. A contract was

completed for about 10,000 metric tons to be shipped early next year, the North Dakota Dry Pea and Lentil Association said. (*AP*, 23/12/04)

December 28: US Representative Arthur Davis said he will ask the US Treasury Department not to change Cuba trade policies, because new rules could damage Alabama's growing trade relationship with the nation. Alabama-based agricultural companies have built an \$18 million export industry since 2002, when the state first began pursuing trade with Cuba. "If there was a significant problem with late payments, it would make sense to tighten the cash schedule but Cuba has made its payments in a timely fashion," Davis (Democrat-Birmingham), told the press. "It's either Alabama fills these chicken orders or Brazil fills these chicken orders. If someone else fills those orders, we are not going to get them back," said Alabama Agriculture Commissioner Ron Sparks. Alabama's exports include poultry, timber and snack foods. (*AP*, 29/12/04)

December 31: The first shipment of Florida-bred cattle to Cuba in more than 40 years was leaving from Port Everglades, near Fort Lauderdale. Twenty-two beef cattle were on a cargo chip for the three-day trip to Havana, said J.P. Wright & Co. Inc., which has a contract to ship the livestock under an exemption to the long-standing US trade embargo on Cuba. The shipment is the first part of a nearly \$1 million order totaling 300 head of Florida-bred cattle. The rest is expected to ship within the next few months. (*Sun Sentinel*, 31/12/04)

December 31: The first shipment of Florida-bred cattle to Cuba in more than 40 years was leaving from Port Everglades, near Fort Lauderdale. Twenty-two beef cattle were on a cargo chip for the three-day trip to Havana, said J.P. Wright & Co. Inc., which has a contract to ship the livestock under an exemption to the long-standing US trade embargo on Cuba. The shipment is the first part of a nearly \$1 million order totaling 300 head of Florida-bred cattle. The rest is expected to ship within the next few months. (*Sun Sentinel*, 31/12/04)

THE WASP NET / THE CUBAN FIVE

January 13: Cuba has demanded that the US government "end the hostilities" against the five Cubans imprisoned in that country since 1998 and their families, and is calling on Washington to fulfill its international, legal and moral obligations. The Foreign Ministry statement condemns the fact that the US State Department recently stated that the wives of Gerardo Hernández and René González should have made their visa applications personally and not through the normal Ministry of Foreign Affairs channels. (*Granma International*, 14/1/04)

February 26: The US National Committee to Free the Cuban Five has issued a statement on the status of two wire transfers sent to the Committee from overseas to help pay for the upcoming full-page New York Times ad on the Cuban Five. According to the solidarity organization, the US Department of Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), in conjunction with Wachovia Bank, first prevented the National Committee from receiving two wire transfers sent to it from two Cuban Five support committees: the Coordinadora Andaluza de Solidaridad con Cuba, in Andalucía, Spain, and the Paris-based National Coordinator for the French Committee to Free the Cuban Five. Neither the OFAC nor Wachovia explained why they unlawfully denied the National Committee access to these funds. Instead, they demanded that the groups involved answer intrusive questions about the work they do on Cuba and the case of the Five. It was announced that the funds have now been released. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 25/2/04)

March 3: A one-page advertisement supporting the five Cubans imprisoned in US jails, planned and paid for by solidarity groups, appeared in The New York Times, confirmed Gloria de la Riva from the US Committee to Free the Five. De la Riva explained previously that, in spite of all the obstacles, more than \$50,000 had been raised to pay for the advertisement in the daily. She also highlighted the generous contributions from Miami residents, whose committee made the most generous contribution of the campaign: \$10,000. (*Granma International*, 3/3/04)

March 5: The Cuban Foreign Ministry has denounced the Bush administration for taking new actions against five Cubans imprisoned in separate US jails as their March 10 hearing appeal approaches. In a statement, the Cuban authorities rejects a US Department of State decision to only allow Cuban diplomats in Washington to visit their jailed fellow countrymen once every three months. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/3/04)

March 10: Although the three judges of the Eleventh Circuit of the Atlanta Appeals Court can delay decision on the case of "the Cuban Five" for several months, the defense team expressed great optimism after the oral hearing. "They [the prosecution] had no answers to the Court's questions!" noted Paul McKenna, one of the defense attorneys, recounting prosecutor Christine Heck-Miller's failure to produce any evidence implicating Gerardo Hernandez in the incidence of the Cessna planes shoot down when they repeatedly flew over Cuban territory. Lawyers for the five Cuban spies argued that they were unfairly convicted in a flawed 2001 trial that never should have been held in an anti-Castro hotbed like Miami. Federal prosecutors countered the trial was fair, the judge gave the defense plenty of chances to seek a new venue and the life sentences handed down to three of the spies were justified. The three-judge panel of the 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals asked pointed questions about the government's evidence underlying the murder conspiracy conviction of spy ringleader Gerardo Hernández. (*Prensa Latina, The Miami Herald*, 11/3/04)

March 29: Relatives of five Cubans imprisoned in the United States as political prisoners have denounced at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva, for a second time, violations against their loved ones. Rene Gonzalez's wife and daughter, Olga Salanueva and Ivette Gonzalez, Gerardo Hernandez's wife, Adriana Perez, and Fernando Gonzalez's mother, Magaly Llort, traveled to Geneva to hold meetings with Human Rights Commission's officials. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/3/04)

April 8: The relatives of five Cubans imprisoned in the US gave their testimonies at the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). During a seminar to condemn the human right transgressions against the five Cubans, Magali Llort, Adriana Pérez O'Connor and Olga Salanueva also strongly denounced the US hostility on Cuba. Havana's Permanent Ambassador to the UNHRC Jorge Ivan Mora Godoy stressed that the visit of Magali, Adriana and Olga allows opening new opportunities for the understanding and solidarity with the Cuban Five. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/4/04)

May 3: Two websites dedicated to the daughter of Rene Gonzalez, one of the five Cubans imprisoned in the United States on political charges, launched by the President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada, are now available in Internet. The websites www.daddy.cu and www.quieroveramipapito.cu were inspired by Rene Gonzalez' youngest daughter, Ivette, who turned six without hardly knowing her father, because he was sentenced shortly after her birth. The websites reflect aspects of Ivette's school and social life, including stories and a description of her environment, as well as other topics of interest for young people. They also reveal details of Rene's life as a father. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/5/04)

May 10: The current situation of the five Cubans incarcerated in the United States was the main focus of a public hearing by the Cuban Parliament. The meeting was convened by the Parliamentary Commissions for Constitutional and Legal Affairs and International Relations at Havana's International Conference Centre to discuss the current situation of Gerardo Hernández, René González, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino and Fernando González, and the increasing public awareness of the case around the world. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/5/04)

May 13: US writer and sociologist James Petras has proposed the five Cubans imprisoned in the United States for combating terrorism originating in Florida, as candidates for the Nobel Peace Prize. In his proposal, Professor Petras (SUNY, Binghamton) pointed out that compiling information about terrorist groups that conspire to commit acts of violence is an accepted national security policy in every part of the world. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/5/04)

July 16: The International Committee for Justice and Freedom for the Five organized a meeting in Havana, to review the campaign in support of the five Cuban prisoners in the United States and to make plans for future actions. The meeting was addressed by the coordinator of the host committee, Graciela Ramírez and Gloria La Riva, coordinator of the US national campaign to free the five. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 17/7/04)

July 21: Puerto Rican lawyer Rafael Rodriguez, of the Rosenberg Fund for Children (RFC), is contemplating charges against the US Federal Government for violating the rights of six-year-old Cuban girl Ivette Gonzalez. The girl, younger daughter of Rene Gonzalez, one of the five Cubans prisoners currently in US jails, has been unable to visit her father in prison, because, as a minor, she should go with her mother, to whom the United States has repeatedly denied an entry visa. (*Prensa Latina*, 21/7/04)

August 10: The UN High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCR) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has sent a report to the US State Department, outlining the reasons why it believes that the five Cuban political prisoners jailed in the United States are being arbitrarily detained. According to reports received in Havana, the US State Department has responded to the report. The UN group will study this response and announce its considerations during the next period of sessions, which run from September 13th through the 17th in Geneva, Switzerland. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/8/04)

September 7: Antonio Guerrero, one of the five Cuban political prisoners in the United States, denounced in a public letter that prison authorities have forbidden him to collect stamps. The letter explains that after his stay in a punishment cell, he had accumulated more than 200 letters, kept for a month by the prison's Security Department. Nevertheless, the official who gave him the letters objected to two coming from Slovenia with no name and address, and containing stamps from that country. As the Cuban prisoner is not authorized to receive them, they threw them out. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/9/04)

October 19: Rosa Aurora Freijanes, married to Cuban political prisoner, Fernando González, has denounced the constant obstacles put in the way of family members to visit relatives in prison in the United States. Fernando Gonzalez is one of five Cubans who were arrested in the US and sentenced to severe jail terms by a Miami court. Rosa Aurora Freijanes, told *Trabajadores* newspaper that throughout the six years Fernando has been in prison, she has been allowed to visit him only three times even though he is serving a sentence of 19 years. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 19/10/04)

December 1: One of the five Cuban prisoners incarcerated in the United States has been placed under severe limitations. No reason has been given to Gerardo Hernández for confining him to his cell over the past few weeks, providing him with cold food only and giving him reduced bathing time, reported the Cuban daily *Juventud Rebelde*. The newspaper described the punishment as effective solitary confinement at the California prison in Victorville where Hernández is being held. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 1/12/04)

December 31: Cuban Parliament Chairman Ricardo Alarcón has denounced that the imprisonment of five of his countrymen in the United States clearly demonstrates Washington's complicity with terrorist groups based in South Florida. If those youths had really sought to harm that country, the White House spokespersons, so prolific telling lies against Cuba, would mention it every day, as they do with accusations that Cuba is producing biological weapons, Alarcón said. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 31/12/04)

US AND CUBAN STATEMENTS ON US MILITARY AGGRESSION TOWARD CUBA

January 1: Cuban National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon, dismissing US charges that Cuba is developing weapons of mass destruction as the words of a "liar," says Bush administration policies have made the risk of US invasion "a real, present danger for us." Mr. Alarcon took strong exception to remarks by Undersecretary of State John R. Bolton. "He's a liar," Mr. Alarcon said of Mr. Bolton during a recent interview in Geneva. Noting that the United States had cited Saddam Hussein's suspected weapons programs as justification for the invasion of Iraq, he said: "The risk of [Cuba] being attacked at this time — when preventive attacks have become a new American doctrine — is a real, present danger for us." (*The Washington Times*, 1/1/04)

January 6: The US State Department's top official for Latin America chided Cuba in a speech for attempting to destabilize the democratic governments of several Latin American countries, but dismissed the possibility of a military response from Washington. "The United States does not contemplate any military response," Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger Noriega said in an address to the Council of the Americas, while stressing that Washington and its allies would keep a close eye on Cuban leader Fidel Castro. "He's in his last days and perhaps he feels a little nostalgic for the days when he played an important role in the Americas," Noriega said, referring to the septuagenarian Cuban autocrat. Noriega was replying to a question regarding the United States' stance on the alleged presence of foreign agents in several Latin American nations with the mission of destabilizing their governments. "It should be very clear to Fidel Castro that his actions have caught the attention of Latin American leaders and that his actions to destabilize Latin America are increasingly provocative to the inter-American community," the diplomat said at a press conference following his speech. "Those that continue in destabilizing democratically elected governments, interfering in the internal affairs of other governments, are playing with fire," he said. (*EFE*, 6/1/04)

January 19: Dagoberto Rodriguez, Cuba's top diplomat in Washington, wonders if "regime change" is in the cards in this election year. That possibility can't be ruled out, he says, because the administration "has proved a tendency in the past to solve problems through violent means." Rodriguez said Cuba's suspicions have been heightened by what he sees as several "provocative" U.S. actions in recent days. To Rodriguez, the most inexplicable and troubling development has been the recent U.S. allegation of Cuban meddling in Latin America, sometimes in collaboration with the country's main South American ally, Venezuela. "That issue could legitimately have been raised 20 years ago, but not now," Rodriguez said, pointing out that Cuba has normal relations with all hemispheric countries except El Salvador. "They are trying to recreate the phantom of Cuban interference," he said. (*AP*, 19/1/04)

January 30: Fidel Castro has accused his US counterpart George Bush of plotting to assassinate him. Speaking at the end of a regional meeting against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, Castro said the assassination was aimed at overthrowing Cuba's communist government. "We knew that Mr Bush had made a commitment with the mafia of the Cuban-American Foundation to kill me. I said it once before and today I'll say it clearer: I accuse him!" Castro told some 1000 representatives from 32 nations. Cuba's long-serving leader vowed to "go down fighting" if the US tried to invade the country at any time. "I am not asking to survive a war. I've already done my part and I still have to do what I have to do. With weapons in hand, I don't care how I die, but I'm confident that if they invade us, I will go down fighting," he was quoted as saying. After charging Bush with conspiring with the virulent anti-Castro Cuban-American community of Miami, Florida to turn Castro into a dead man, he said referring to himself: "The deceased can still talk. The deceased can make plans. He's not dead yet." "And those idiots better not believe we're wasting our time, because we really work at our job. This country will never give up. It will never lay down its weapons," Castro stressed. He said Cuba does not want "in any way to assume the cost of a war (against) Yankee imperialism," but warned that despite the tremendous pressure from Washington, "we won't budge at all from our principles." (*Al Jazeera, AFP, The Miami Herald*, 30, 31/1/04)

January 31: Top US officials have dismissed the allegations by Fidel Castro that US president George Bush was plotting to assassinate him. "The world would be better off without Fidel Castro, a lot better off, but that doesn't mean anybody's trying to kill him," said Roger Noriega, assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, who was in Miami. "It's a ridiculous assertion." (*The Miami Herald*, 31/1/04)

February 2: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón has reaffirmed the Cuban people's determination to defend their Revolution by any means necessary. The island's top legislator was in Camagüey for the 490th anniversary of the foundation of the central Cuban city. Ricardo Alarcón noted that Cuban patriots fought almost barehanded against the Spanish colonialist army in the 19th century - - the most powerful army at that time. And he emphasized that Cuba is once again willing to do whatever is necessary to defend its independence and sovereignty against any invasion. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/7/04)

February 3: Cuba has accused the US government of preparing the ground for an invasion of the island and the assassination of Fidel Castro. Recent attacks by Bush administration officials on Castro for forging an axis with oil-producing Venezuela to destabilise Latin American countries are building a pretext for an invasion, the ruling Communist Party newspaper Granma said. They aim to "create a climate of artificial hysteria that would justify before American public opinion a military adventure against our homeland, including the physical elimination of compañero Fidel," Granma charged in a front-page editorial. (*Reuters*, 3/2/04)

February 14: Fidel Castro urged US President George W. Bush for the second time in a week to state whether he, as a policy, renounces the assassination of foreign leaders. Referring to Bush on the reelection campaign trail, the 77-year-old communist leader asked in a lengthy address at an economic conference: "How can the transition (the US says it wants) be sped up in Cuba?" Quickly answering his own question, Castro said "the only way is by moving to an extrajudicial execution," and Castro challenged Bush to state openly whether he believes he has the authority to order the executions of foreign leaders. "We will honor our obligations and duties until the last breath," Castro said, warning, "we always are on guard." Instead of his usual "Fatherland or Death" salute to cap a speech, Castro addressed Bush jokingly, saying: "Hail, Ceasar. Those who are about to die salute you." (*AFP*, 15/2/04)

February 20: The top US diplomat in Havana said Cuba's government was fabricating a threat of invasion by the United States to instill fear in Cubans and retain political control. "The Cuban government is fabricating the 'threat' of a US military attack to engender fear in the Cuban population", the head of the U.S. mission in Havana, James Cason, said in a statement. "Last year the Cuban Foreign Minister suggested that we were slowing down the processing of travel documents for Cubans migrating to the US to create a mass migration crisis as a pretext for war, which of course was untrue. The US Interests Section asked MINREX [the Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry] to allow Mr. Cason to address the Cuban public through Cuban newspapers and television to tell the Cuban public directly that we had no intention to attack or invade Cuba. We were trying to reassure the Cuban people. The Cuban government did not allow it", the note adds. (*News Havana, Reuters, AP*, 20,21/2/04)

April 28: Cuba repeated that it will defend its sovereignty and independence adopting every measure at hand to repel US electronic warfare. Cuban diplomat, Rodney Lopez, addressed the UN Information Committee to denounce over 310 hours of illegal radio and TV broadcasts "calling for violence and terrorist actions" made by at least 15 organizations linked to, or sponsors of, renowned terrorists that live and operate in the US with government consent. Lopez cited as an example "the poorly-named Radio and TV Marti, to which the US government allocates annual budgets of \$35 million in its electronic war against Cuba that encourages illegal emigration, incites violence and terrorist actions, and calls to violate the law". (*Prensa Latina*, 28/4/04)

May 1: Cuba's Fidel Castro urged US President George W. Bush not to use force as strategy against terrorism. In an almost two-hour speech marking May 1 celebrations, Castro counseled

US authorities to "be calm, act with equanimity, not be carried away by anger and hatred, or hunt people with indiscriminate bombing". "None of the world's problems, including terrorism, can be solved with force," said Castro, clad in his customary olive drab military fatigues. "Only reason, intelligent policy with the strength of consensus and international public opinion, can remove the problem at its roots," Castro told the Revolution Square crowd officially estimated at more than one million. (*AFP*, 1/5/04)

May 2: A government commission is recommending to President Bush a series of measures to cut US dollar flows to Cuba as part of a broader policy to hasten the end of the country's communist system, an administration official said. A commission report, in preparation for six months and overseen by Secretary of State Colin Powell, also calls for steps to overcome Cuban jamming of US-government sponsored radio and television broadcasts to Cuba, the official said. The official, asking not to be identified in advance of the report's public release, said it urges increased support for Cuban dissidents and families of political prisoners and also calls for measures to encourage foreign governments to distance themselves from the Cuban regime. (*AP*, *Canadian Press*, 2/5/04)

June 21: Tens of thousands of Cubans rallied, as Fidel Castro warned President Bush against launching a military attack on Cuba, saying it would provoke a mass exodus and an all-out ground war. Fidel Castro declared that in an invasion of Cuba, his hypothetical physical absence would not mean the slightest difference in the Cuban people's ability to fight and resist. "In Cuba's present condition to confront an invasion, my physical absence by natural or other causes would not hurt our ability, in any way, to fight and resist," the Cuban leader said in an open letter directed to US President George W. Bush read to more than 200,000 people in Havana. (*AP*, *Prensa Latina*, 21/6/04)

June 24: Independent journalist Manuel Vázquez Portal, who was recently released from prison, called for the prevention of a war between Cuba and the United States, and urged Fidel Castro to put an end to his "obstinacy" toward the US and the European Union. In declarations to the press, he said that Castro's "partisan entrenchment" in condemning the likelihood of an attack against the island "is not the solution" and that it is time for "sensible thinking" because a modern war is not fought with machetes but with missiles and "intelligent bombs." (*Notimex*, 24/6/04)

July 9: The United States is accusing Cuba of "blatant distortions" in claiming that Washington intends to invade the island and evict people from their homes as part of a post-Castro occupation plan. Responding to an official Cuban statement issued on July 9, the State Department registered its disagreement in a four-page note sent to the Cuban diplomatic mission in Washington. The Cuban position had been set forth in a statement by National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon the day after new US penalties against Cuba took effect. The State Department note said Secretary of State Colin Powell and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld have said repeatedly that the United States has no intention of invading Cuba. It added that Cuban authorities have refused US offers to directly inform the Cuban people of American policy, including the goal of a peaceful transition in Cuba. President Bush's directives are partly designed to curb the flow of US dollars to Cuba. Visits by Cuban-Americans to the island can be made only at three-year intervals instead of annually, with no humanitarian exceptions allowed. (*AP*, 15/7/04)

August 19: Despite denials by US officials, Cuban parliamentarians insist it would be naive to discard the possibility of a US military aggression against the island -- with the aim of destroying the Cuban Revolution and imposing a so-called "transition." Jorge Lezcano, a top adviser to Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power, also known as the Cuban Parliament, told Prensa Latina News Agency that recent US government statements reveal a concerted policy stemming from an annexionist way of thinking. As examples, Jorge Lezcano referred to a message from the US Department of State sent to the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, warning that the US would adopt measures to counter any flow of immigrants from the island to Florida - - calling it a threat to its "national security." (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 19/8/04)

August 20: The US Interest Section in Havana has stated that the US government does not have the intention to apply military measures against the Cuban government. In an official statement, James Cason, chief of the USIS denied that Washington is thinking about such measures. Cason reminded that president Bush has said that Washington wants a peaceful transition in the island, and wants the Cubans to be the ones who build it. (*USIS Press Release, 25/8/04*)

September 5: Cuban National Assembly President, Ricardo Alarcón, has expressed that there is a real threat of a US invasion of the island. Alarcon rejected that US authorities denied such a possibility after a denouncement made in a Cuban congressional statement in July. "I wouldn't say US authorities have denied that. There has been a brief statement by US Interest Section chief in Havana, James Carson, but he is a fourth-class bureaucrat," the official stressed. He also recalled what President Bush said when he created a commission to draft a plan for a so-called Cuban transition -meaning the process that will start the day Cuban President Fidel Castro is gone- "we are not just talking, but working, acting to get that, and we have to do it in a quick, aggressive manner," Bush said then. No US government has ever been more explicit in developing and revealing its designs for intervention, Alarcon concluded. (*Prensa Latina, 6/9/04*)

October 13: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón insisted that current plans by US President George W. Bush entail the destruction of the Cuban nation. The Parliament president emphasized -in an Internet forum - the real purposes behind the hostile policy promoted by the US administration in their efforts to subvert the Cuban political system. Bush's new genocidal measures in force since June are an example of this US aggressive policy on Cuba, said Alarcón, noting that Bush's project -favoring a Cuban political and economic dependence on the US- has met strong rejection in the Island and abroad. (*Prensa Latina, 13/10/04*)

October 25: Cuba said it was prepared to use "every possible measure" to repel any form of aggression against the Communist state as it renewed its criticism of the United States over its decision to establish a radio and television station to broadcast material to the island. Ambassador to Barbados, Rodeny López, told the International Frequency Registration Board (IFRB) of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) that Washington was using a military plane to broadcast the material to Cuban citizens. He said Radio and TV Marti underscored Washington's policy of tightening the four-decade old trade embargo against Cuba. (*BBC, 25/10/04*)

November 16: Fidel Castro warned the country will respond to any aggression from the United States, such as Washington's recent outrageous attempt to block Cuba's international transactions with US dollars. Castro said that Cuba decided to stop the circulation of the US dollar and use the convertible pesos instead to counteract the "treacherous action". The Cuban leader said that the White House tried to prevent Cuba from using the dollar in its international trade with "the bare-faced lie that Cuba was laundering US dollars in foreign banks". (*Prensa Latina, 17/11/04*)

November 25: Record failures by successive US administrations trying to destroy the Cuban Revolution is the factor triggering current US aggressiveness, said Ricardo Alarcón, president of the Cuban Parliament. This is a singular moment of threats and aggression risks for Cuba, he added. Alarcón described the offensive unleashed by George W. Bush after his reelection, promoting actions included in the Plan for a Free Cuba. Before specialists and scholars attending the Scientific International Seminar on the 45th Anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, the head of the Cuban parliament indicated that Washington has allotted 59 million dollars a year to organize mercenaries at their service. (*Prensa Latina, 26/11/04*)

December 13: The military exercises organized by the Cuban government seek to prevent people on the Communist-ruled island from focusing on their problems, the US State Department said. The maneuvers represent "one or more of the many things that the Cuban government does to try to distract people from the problems that they face in their daily lives," department

spokesman Richard Boucher said at a daily press briefing. Boucher dismissed that as a pretext, saying that "we don't think there's any justification or any particular foundation for this kind of charge." He also reiterated Washington's repeated calls for a peaceful transition toward democracy in Cuba. "We think that's what the Cuban people deserve and we think they deserve it in a peaceful fashion," he said. (*EFE*, 13/12/04)

December 19: Fidel Castro said that "the risks of attack (by the United States) are real," Cuban television reported. The island's leader, who is the overall commander of the Cuban military, "closely followed" the unfolding of the military maneuvers and "drew up important plans directed at strengthening the country's defense," the television said. In several working sessions, Castro "was informed of the activities carried out all over the island and gave instructions about crucial defense matters," it added. The Cuban president "acknowledged the quality of the preparation and specialization" by the exercises' participants, and was reported to be "impressed" by the country's advances in its defense, Cuban TV declared. (*Prensa Latina, EFE*, 19/12/04)

December 29: Cuba's government has asserted that countering US hostilities against the country is one of the main priorities of Cuban foreign policy. After assessing Cuba's strategy in the face of mounting US hostile policy towards the island in 2004, Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque asserted that "the US imperialism has once again failed in its bid to overthrow or weaken the Cuban Revolution". "We reiterate our deep conviction in the ideas we defend," stressed Perez Roque, *Granma* daily reported. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/12/04)