

### **With Cuba Decision, Obama Hands Hillary Clinton A 2016 Gift**

Potential 2016 Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton knows a political gift when she sees one. She was quick to embrace the step this week when President Obama, a fellow Democrat no longer having to face an electorate, relaxed U.S. policy toward Cuba. While assailed by Republicans opposed to restoring ties with the communist-led island, the action has the power to solidify support for Democrats among increasingly influential Latino voters and appeal to voters in farm states like Iowa eager to do business in Havana.

Obama's unilateral move has gently shaken up the 2016 race to succeed him, exposing divisions among Republicans and possibly helping Democrats already buoyed by his decision to liberalize immigration policy. Potential contenders Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio adhered to the traditional Republican hard line on Cuba and sharply criticized Obama. But Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, who has a libertarian streak, backed the new policy. A likely White House candidate, Paul told a West Virginia radio station that the 50-year-old embargo with Cuba "just hasn't worked."

Clinton, Obama's former secretary of state, also had asserted the previous policy was not working. In her memoir, "Hard Choices," she wrote that she urged Obama to shift. She therefore welcomed the change. Democrats argue that Clinton's embrace of Obama on Cuba could help her with Latino voters, especially younger ones in the key state of Florida, who are less inclined than their elders to be virulently opposed to the Cuban government.

Of America's 1.5-million-strong Cuban-American population, about 80 percent live in Florida. "I think it'll help her with the younger folks," Democratic strategist Bud Jackson said of Clinton. Latinos already like what they see in Clinton.

The Cuba shift could also prove popular among those dependent on America's agricultural businesses, major hotels and even sports fans who enjoy watching the best Cuban players make it to Major League Baseball.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll of more than 31,000 adults between July and October showed Americans largely open to forging diplomatic relations with Cuba. About one-fifth opposed such a move, while 43 percent backed it and around 37 percent were unsure.

But there are potential pitfalls for Clinton. She will need to stake out some positions of her own or risk criticism that she simply represents the third term of a president who is saddled with a 40 percent approval rating. In their 2008 battle for the Democratic presidential nomination that Obama won, Clinton accused him of being "naive" for offering to meet leaders of such renegade nations as Cuba without conditions. Since flirting with a presidential race, Clinton for the most part has chosen not to separate herself from Obama other than to question his decision not to arm Syrian rebels, as her memoir reveals.

There are also risks for Jeb Bush, a former Florida governor, and Rubio, a Florida senator. In their criticisms of Obama's policy, the two Republicans are aligning themselves with their party's conservative base but their views could appear outdated to moderate voters.

"I think it's kind of a blind cul-de-sac for people like Rubio and Bush to get pushed into," said Democratic strategist Bob Shrum, who was Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry's campaign manager in 2004. "It reflects a Florida that doesn't exist anymore."

*Huffington Post*, 18 décembre 2014 2921 signes