

Easing travel, communications with Cuba a welcome move

by The Detroit News

President Barack Obama's decision to end restrictions on visits to Cuba by Americans to see family members, and to allow U.S. telecommunications firms to operate in Cuba, may be largely symbolic. But these are welcome first steps toward a more open trade policy with Cuba.

The United States' 50-year trade embargo and travel restrictions are a failed policy. The better course is to open trade and travel and engage with a nation that is passing out of the Castro era. Under the Obama policy, Cuban-Americans will face fewer restrictions on sending money to their relatives.

A more conciliatory approach is the best policy in the long term, if only to counterbalance the influence of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and the Chinese government. Venezuela and China are major trading partners with Cuba.

The Obama administration is making it easier for telecom companies to operate directly on the island rather than go through a series of routing maneuvers. The Cuban government would still have to cooperate, but these moves put the onus on the Cuban government to make it easier for Cubans to communicate with their American relatives.

Easing barriers to communications, travel and the flow of funds to Cuban-Americans' families on the island is both more humane and in this nation's best strategic interest.

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