

TRADE

How Trump's Cuba policy will affect Jacksonville

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President Donald Trump announced in Miami on Friday he plans to roll back some of the steps President Barack Obama had taken to open relationships between the United States and Cuba.

But it seems little will change in Jacksonville, which has a small cadre of companies looking to take advantage of the thaw, as well as elsewhere.

"The speech was very strong rhetorically, but very little has changed in terms of what activities are permitted or not," said John Caulfield, who was the chief of U.S. Interests in Havana – the top diplomat America had in Cuba – before retiring to Jacksonville four years ago.

Jacksonville's business interests with Cuba will remain largely unaffected, he said. While a few Jacksonville companies have business ties with Cuba, including Crowley Maritime Corp., Trump's policy doesn't target businesses engaging in legal trade with Cuba.

The biggest changes are aimed at Americans looking to travel to the island, Caulfield said, and issues could arise if Cubans decided to do business with other countries as a result of Trump's policy, or if they found the goods cheaper from another country.

Until Cuba reacts to Trump's policy or the regulations are set, Crowley – which has been one of the largest U.S. exporters to the island, shipping alternately from Port Everglades and Jacksonville – is taking a wait-and-see approach, said Jay Brickman, vice president of government services and Cuba services at Crowley.

The big question is what will happen when Cuban leadership changes hands after Raúl Castro steps down in 2018, handing power to a significantly younger group of leaders.

Travel

A significant portion of Trump's policy is aimed at American travelers to the country. Americans will be prohibited from patronizing Cuban state-run businesses and those who travel to the island will do so under stricter rules: Travelers will be subject to audits and they will need to be part of an organized tour group.

The administration said by not allowing Americans to spend money at state-run companies, money will go to Cuban people, rather than to the Cuban government.

Additionally, travelers will no longer be allowed to travel under the premise of "people to people" exchanges. The travel restrictions are designed to keep Americans from traveling to Cuba for tour-

ism, which was still prohibited under the Obama-era regulations.

Trump's policy isn't a complete rollback of Obama's opening of relations. While his plans restrict relations with Cuba, it doesn't entirely cut off diplomatic relations. The U.S. Embassy will

remain open, the "wet foot, dry foot" policy will not be restored and most importantly for those who do visit, rum and cigars taken home from the island won't be further regulated.

The regulations to enforce Trump's directive are expected in the coming

months. So until those regulations are set, things will stay as they are.

"There will be more rhetoric," Caulfield said, "but in terms of actual economics and programs, not that much is going to change."



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