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Obama Administration to Remove Barriers to Cuban Telecommunications Opportunities

The Obama administration announced on April 13 that it will “reach out to the Cuban people” through a series of policy changes easing certain restrictions on travel, remittances, humanitarian assistance and communications, some of which are expected to create market opportunities for the U.S. telecommunications industry. President Obama directed government officials to take the steps necessary to:

- Authorize U.S. telecommunications network providers to enter into agreements to establish fiber-optic cable and satellite telecommunications facilities linking the United States and Cuba;
- License U.S. telecommunications service providers to enter into and operate under roaming service agreements with Cuba’s telecommunications service providers;
- License U.S. satellite radio and satellite television service providers to engage in transactions necessary to provide services to customers in Cuba;
- License persons subject to U.S. jurisdiction to activate and pay U.S. and third-country service providers for telecommunications, satellite radio and satellite television services provided to individuals in Cuba (except certain senior Communist Party and Cuban government officials); and
- Authorize, consistent with national security concerns, the export or re-export to Cuba of donated personal communications devices such as mobile phone systems, computers and software, and satellite receivers through a license exception.

These announced changes to longstanding U.S. policy appear to be part of a greater effort to transform relations with Cuba in the wake of Fidel Castro’s recent exit from the political stage. The House of Representatives and the Senate in February each introduced a bill to ease Cuban travel restrictions, the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act.

The president’s requested changes will likely require the executive branch agencies involved to revise existing regulations and issue guidelines—a process that can present opportunities for telecommunications companies to voice their interests and concerns.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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