

Study details how Cuban exiles have aided key U.S. lawmakers

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WASHINGTON – A small group of foreign citizens has sought for four decades to influence policy on Cuba through hefty political contributions to lawmakers who share their anti-Castro views, according to a study by critics of U.S. policy.

Much of the money comes from wealthy business executives whose vast fortunes in Cuba were seized by Fidel Castro after he took power in 1959.

The study was conducted independently by Cynthia Thomas, a Dallas public policy analyst for TriDimension Strategies and a member of the executive committee of Americans for Humanitarian Trade With Cuba, a group dedicated to normalizing relations.

The report offers the most detailed list matching recipients with individual Cuban-American contributors and Free Cuba PAC, which handles direct political contributions on behalf of the Cuban American National Foundation.

Between Jan. 1, 1999, and Feb. 28, 2002, the combined individual and corporate contributions by the Cuban-American business executives was an estimated \$1.8 million, she said. More than 70 percent of the \$1.8 million came from the brothers who run the Bacardi Martini rum company.

An earlier study by the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan group, illustrated a similar pattern between donors and recipients, though it didn't completely identify the full list of contributors. The two studies illustrate some of the possible influences on the policy that President Bush is expected to tighten even more in a speech scheduled for Monday.

The findings of the two studies buttress a long-held belief among critics of U.S. policy to Cuba that the policy remains a Cold War obsession fueled in part by campaign contributions from those with personal interests in the island.

"When U.S. foreign policy becomes personal it can also become dangerous," said Eric P. Farnsworth, a former Clinton foreign policy adviser on Latin American affairs. "Cuba is an example of that."

Effect on policy denied

State Department officials denied that either politics or votes influence their policy to Cuba.

"What drives U.S. foreign policy to Cuba is our deeply held commitment to helping the Cuban people achieve the same basic rights and freedoms that are enjoyed in every other country in the hemisphere," said Wes Carrington, a spokesman for the State Department's bureau on Western Hemisphere Affairs.

The Federal Election Commission says that noncitizens can make contributions if they are legal U.S. residents.

Ms. Thomas said that few foreign citizens play a more active role in seeking to influence U.S. foreign policy than the Bermuda-based Bacardi Martini rum company and sugar barons Alfonso and Jose Fanjul. The Cuban-born brothers, better known as Alfie (a Democrat) and Pepe (a Republican), are Spanish citizens but have homes in West Palm Beach, Fla.

Of the \$1.8 million contributed between 1999 and 2002, the Fanjul brothers; their corporation, Flo-Sun Sugar; and Bacardi contributed \$1.34 million, or 71 percent of the total.

"The debate on this delicate and important issue is being colored by people who can't even vote in this country," Ms. Thomas said. She noted that the contributions also serve to help them gain access to lobby for federal price subsidies.

The Helms-Burton Act

The Fanjul brothers, who did not return several calls placed to their West Palm Beach homes and offices, and their corporation together control about 40 percent of Florida's sugar crop. They made contributions to 39 political candidates and committees, among them the 2000 presidential candidates George W. Bush and Al Gore, with \$2,000 and \$1,000 respectively.

The company Bacardi Martini, which contributed nearly \$400,000, was among those who sought through contributions to influence enactment of the 1996 Helms-Burton law, which tightened the U.S.

embargo on Cuba and allowed Cuban-Americans to sue foreign companies using, or investing in, expropriated properties in Cuba.

The authors of the law, Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., and Dan Burton, R-Ind., both received substantial contributions from the executives. Before 1990, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, Mr. Burton hadn't received a penny from Cuban-Americans. By 1996, he had received more than \$61,000 from Cuban-Americans individuals and companies, including Bacardi, the center reported.

Similarly, 74 percent of the \$86,000 Mr. Helms has received from those groups and individuals came in 1995 and 1996, "while Helms was running for re-election and the Helms-Burton Act was before Congress," according to the center's report.

"We're not saying that money comes in forms of bribes for votes," said Steven Weiss, a spokesman for the Center for Responsive Politics. "But contributions buy access. They buy face time."

Since 1997 neither Mr. Burton nor Mr. Helms has received a contribution. Their representatives did not return calls seeking comment on the contributions.

The person now in charge of enforcing the Helms-Burton law is Mr. Bush's top Latin American diplomat, Otto J. Reich. He helped write the bill and also worked as a paid Bacardi lobbyist from 1997 to 2000, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Split between parties

Ms. Thomas listed 99 individual contributors to Free Cuba (for contributions of \$200 or more); 74 individual recipients, including both Republicans and Democrats; and 17 political action committees. Between 1999 and February 2002, Republicans and Democrats generally split the contributions, with Republicans receiving about \$909,595 and Democrats getting \$882,399, her report said.

Among the top PAC recipients was the Republican National Committee with \$465,300 – with \$337,500 coming from Flo-Sun Sugar. The Democratic National Committee received \$246,250 – with the Fanjul corporation contributing \$185,000.

The Fanjul name lives on both sides of the Florida Straits. In Havana, where a street is named after their

grandfather, some people call the Fanjuls powerful and arrogant. At one time, according to Cuban historians, the Fanjuls' father, Alfonso Fanjul Sr., and their grandfather, Jose Gomez-Mena, presided over one of the largest sugar holdings in Cuba, more than 150,000 acres and 10 sugar mills.

Today, their childhood home is one of Mr. Castro's homes. After their father lost one of Cuba's great sugar fortunes to Mr. Castro's revolution, the brothers built a new empire in Florida, importing cheap Jamaican labor for sugar cane harvesting and learning the secrets to wielding political power from Tallahassee to Washington.

The contribution amounts range from very large to small.

Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., a member of the Armed Services and Foreign Relations committees, received \$80,700 from individuals, corporations and Free Cuba PAC.

Rep. Henry Bonilla, R-San Antonio, who has consistently voted against trade with Cuba though farmers in his district have joined the Texas Farm Bureau in lobbying for it, received a total of \$6,250.

Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., the 2000 Democratic vice presidential nominee, received about \$40,400 from both individuals and Free Cuba PAC from 1999 to this February. He's a favorite among Cuban-Americans, who consider him a staunch foe of communism. During the 2000 campaign, Mr. Lieberman even visited the grave of the late Jorge Mas Canosa, the Miami leader of the anti-Castro movement.

Contacted by phone, spokesmen for each of the elected officials denied that politics or contributions had anything to do with the way they voted.

Correction "On page 1A Monday, a story incorrectly reported that brothers Alfonso and Jose Fanjul are both Spanish citizens. Alfonso Fanjul is a Spanish citizen, but Jose Fanjul became a U.S. citizen in 1999. The story also incorrectly said that the brothers run the Bacardi Martini rum company. Their company is the Flo-Sun Sugar Company.