

CUBANEWS

www.cubanews.com

In the News

Worst in 105 years?

Granma warns Cuba's sugar harvest may be the smallest since 1905Page 3

Kerry blasts TV Martí

Senate panel suggests rolling OCB operations into Voice of AmericaPage 5

Mora defends record

Pentagon official: Obama has done exactly what he promised on CubaPage 6

Cuba seeks U.S. yachts

Marinas hope to roll out welcome mat for U.S. boating communityPage 7

Carretera Central

Special 3-page report looks at the 'lifeline' of Cuba's highway networkPage 8

Dutch trader

Rotterdam's Willem van 't Wout has made a career out of his Cuba tiesPage 11

Business briefs

Etesca to slash mobile phone rates; Saudi fund to renovate hospitalsPage 12

Bookshelf

Learning to Salsa; Historic photos of Cuban Miami; Mañana in CubaPage 13

Che's Swahili translator

New documentary examines little-known role of Freddy IlangaPage 14

CubaNews (ISSN 1073-7715) is published monthly by Luxner News Inc. © 2010. All rights reserved. Subscriptions: \$479 for one year, \$800 for two years. For editorial inquires, please call (301) 452-1105 or send an e-mail to: larry@cubanews.com.

Weak support stalls Peterson measure to expand U.S. farm sales, travel to Cuba

BY ANA RADELAT

Rep. Collin Peterson, head of the House Agriculture Committee, is struggling to find support for a bill that would ease restrictions on U.S. food sales and travel to Cuba.

The Minnesota Democrat hopes to have his bill (HR 4645) voted out of his panel in early May, three months after introducing the legislation with Rep. Jerry Moran (R-KS).

Yet even though Democrats enjoy a 25-18 majority in his committee, it still appears that Peterson is at least two votes short.

An aide to Peterson, speaking on condition of anonymity, hinted that the early May deadline may slip. "Chairman Peterson continues to gather support for his bill, and he will hold a markup of the bill once he is confident that it has sufficient support," the aide told *CubaNews*.

The stumbling block in HR 4645 is an end to the U.S. ban on travel to Cuba. Most members of the Agriculture Committee oppose lifting existing travel restrictions. They criticize the

measure — which could unleash a boom in U.S. tourism to Cuba — as an unwarranted and unwise economic lifeline to the Castro regime.

"Our priority should be finding a way to increase food exports to help meet the needs of the Cuban people without supporting Cuba's oppressive government," said Rep. Frank Lucas of Oklahoma, the committee's top Republican, speaking at a February hearing on the bill.

Lucas, however, said he could support other provisions in Peterson's bill that would help U.S. farmers sell their goods to Havana.

Legislation approved in 1999 allows food shipments to Cuba, but restrictions exist on such sales. Peterson's bill would settle debate over one of them — a requirement that Cuba pay "cash in advance" for U.S. agricultural products.

President Bush interpreted "cash in advance" as requiring Cuba to pay for goods before they left the United States. The Obama administration has agreed to that definition.

See *Peterson*, page 2

With Internet's help, Cuban dissidents begin exposing state security agents

BY TRACEY EATON

For decades, government surveillance in Cuba has targeted dissidents and opposition figures. Now some foes of the socialist government are turning the tables, posting images of security agents and other government supporters on the Internet and asking people to identify and denounce them.

The practice is drawing praise from some and condemnation from others.

"It's the beginning of the end of impunity," Cuban blogger Ernesto Hernández Busto told *CubaNews*. Countered an official of the Castro government: "This is a campaign against Cuba, one more campaign that will be defeated."

Undeterred, Hernández and others are trying to shed light on Cuban authorities' treatment of political activists and dissidents.

On Apr. 21, Hernández posted an article about a purported agent said to be leading government efforts to control the opposition group

Las Damas de Blanco [Ladies in White]. That triggered a flurry of comments from readers, one of whom suggested that some state security agents will have to be summarily executed once the Castro regime is no longer in power.

Hernández said he believes people who have taken part in "acts of violence" against peaceful opposition members "should be punished in accord with the laws of a democratic society. This isn't about revenge, but the responsibility that all societies have with respect to their past."

Two days before Hernández's story appeared, Cuban blogger Yoani Sánchez posted a video showing a "political policeman" reading a warning letter to several Las Damas supporters.

In the video, which Sánchez says was recorded secretly, the man says Las Damas members must obtain government permission before marching in Havana. Otherwise, he says, the authorities will not be able to protect them from

See *Dissidents*, page 4

Dissidents — FROM PAGE 1

from possible aggressions from indignant government supporters.

Yoani Sánchez began publishing photos of the people who watch her and her husband Reinaldo Escobar in November 2009. Days earlier, she said, government agents had grabbed her off the street, shoved her into a car and hit her.

These agents are “shadow people — vampires who feed on our human happiness and inoculate us with terror...” she wrote afterward on her blog, *Generacion Y*. But now these “hunters” are the hunted.

One blurry photo on her blog shows Sánchez pursuing two agents down the sidewalk, sticking a camera in their face as they retreat. Another depicts two supposed agents post-

ed outside her apartment. The caption reads: “Will their families know they dedicated themselves to spying and repression?”

More recently, Sánchez and others have focused on the people who have been breaking up Las Damas’ weekly marches.

Las Damas members are mostly the wives, daughters and other relatives of political prisoners. They’ve held peaceful Sunday marches in Havana since 2003. In recent weeks, video footage of security agents and government supporters clashing with the women and breaking up their marches has drawn international condemnation.”

EXILE LAWYER LAUNCHES ‘REPRESSION ID’

Wilfredo Allen, a Cuban-American lawyer in Miami, came up with the idea of identifying harassers as a way of helping to protect the Ladies in White. Three more Cuban-American lawyers joined him: Luis Fernández, Santiago Alpizar and Ricardo Martínez-Cid.

The result was Repression ID, a project aimed at identifying people shown on film while breaking up Las Damas’ rallies.

Miami’s AmericaTeve, Spanish-language Channel 41, supports the effort and regularly urges viewers to email or call in tips on the identities of people shown on-air or at the TV station’s website, www.americateve.com.

“Here are the images, the faces of repression,” the website asks. “Who are they? What are their names? Where do they work?”

Martínez-Cid said it’s too early to say how many people have been identified so far.

“The TV station is being bombarded with information,” he told *CubaNews*. “Las Damas de Blanco, who simply march to plead for humane treatment for their husbands and other

family members, have been subjected to the unrelenting attacks of state-sponsored mobs.”

Repression ID is working to distinguish between mere supporters of the socialist regime and people who are actively “choreographing” the mob that breaks up Las Damas marches, Martínez-Cid said.

Cuban officials contend that Las Damas is a U.S.-financed group and that supporters of the revolution show up spontaneously to



A Cuban security agent hides her face from the camera of blogger Yoani Sánchez.

reject the Sunday marches. Hernández, creator of a blog called *Penúltimos Dias*, said he doesn’t believe the anti-Damas demonstrations are spontaneous.

Rather, he said, participants are likely recruited by the Interior Ministry, or MININT, and the Department of State Security.”

‘OUTING’ GOVERNMENT AGENTS

Some evidence of that came in March, said Hernández, when Cuban TV aired footage of an anti-Damas rally and quoted a woman called Ariadna Yero. A Google search revealed she was once a MININT volunteer.

That doesn’t mean Yero was a MININT plant, said La Joven Cuba, a pro-government blog. Yero “is one of thousands of girls” who have served voluntarily with MININT and other institutions before returning to civilian life, the blog said.

“What’s important is that more and more Cubans are losing their fear of repercussions and are beginning to speak out and expose abuses,” said Ted Henken, a Cuba expert at New York’s Baruch College. “I think it’s good that some of the impunity with which such agents have always operated is beginning to be eroded, but the real issue is whether the mass of Cubans can hear about it.”

The Cuban government still has a “lock on mass media” and so the impact of publicizing the names of government supporters “in Cuba — where it counts most — is unclear and I would guess very limited,” Henken told *CubaNews*. “The balance of power in Cuba is still firmly in the government’s hands.”

The vast majority of the people still support the 1959 revolution, said a Cuban official who spoke on condition of anonymity. Evidence of that, he said, can be seen each May Day,

when hundreds of thousands of people take part in pro-government marches.

Foreign observers pay far too much attention to the political opposition, said Nelson Valdes, a New Mexico sociologist who has studied Cuba for decades.

“The things that the mass media discuss about Cuba abroad are of no real consequence within the country,” he said. “Foreign journalists are tough on Cuba and soft on the opposition because it is safe to do so.”

A “huge struggle is going on within the Cuban state” over the economy and other internal matters “and the foreign journalists are paying attention to a bunch of idiots marching with no real message,” Valdes said.

ANTI-CASTRO SENTIMENT IN CYBERSPACE

As for posting security agents’ identity, Valdes believes that would only make them “tougher” and increasingly “pissed,” especially since opposition actions are “based on the assumption of getting even at some point in the future, that is, punishing” the agents.

“I can imagine what would happen anywhere in Latin America if they ‘outed’ security police,” Valdes said.

Henken said whether state security agents are punished in the future “depends on whether they committed any violent acts or abuses of human rights like torture or murder. Unless that is the case, I think it best to reintegrate them into normal life and prevent any vigilante justice.”

The creators of Repression ID say they are not interested in a witch hunt or vigilante justice. Still, cyberspace is brimming with hostility toward Cuban government supporters.

A Facebook group called “*Cubanos denuncian a los chivatos y represores*” (Cubans denounce informers and repressors) was formed in November 2009 and already has more than 1,000 members. It features homemade wanted posters, tales of accused government supporters and nearly 300 photos.

“Their hour will come,” one member of the group wrote. “There’s no forgiveness from me.” “Let them die of fear,” another wrote.

Whatever happens in the future, said Hernández, the opposition’s fight remains the same, at least for now: “The search for freedom for dissenting opinions on the island.” □

Tracey Eaton, a former Cuba correspondent for the Dallas Morning News, was based in Havana from 2000 to 2005 and now teaches journalism in St. Augustine, Fla. See his blog at <http://alongthemalecon.blogspot.com/>.

Chavez to Fidel, Evo: ‘Let’s twitter!’

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, who gained 120,000 followers on Twitter in three days, has asked Fidel Castro and Bolivian President Evo Morales to join him on the social networking site Twitter.

The once-skeptical Chávez now says he’s excited by Twitter and views it as a way to combat criticism of his government.

“Twitter has potential,” Chávez told reporters. “It’s not capitalist, it’s not socialist. It all depends on how it is used.”