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Cuba is a political minefield for Marco Rubio

By **Dolf Garcia**

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As witnessed during the recent **Republican** debates, U.S. Sen. **Marco Rubio** had very strong performances leading to a deserved boost in his ratings and the viability of his candidacy. However, I find it interesting that Rubio has not yet received any questions in any of the debates about his position on Cuba, given the change in U.S. policy initiated by the Obama Administration in December 2014 and Rubio's prominence as an opponent to the administration's policies and his position on maintaining the embargo.

Despite being vocally identified as a progressive voice for the GOP, while maintaining a foothold in present realities, Rubio is without question supporting a position that is defined by more than 50 years of futility and ineffectiveness. The policy, which used to be a winning position for political candidates, including presidential candidates in Florida since the embargo was first adopted, is likely to be regarded as a fateful position for anyone aiming to secure Florida in the 2016 election.

As a Cuban exile whose family lost everything when we moved to Miami in February 1961, I disagree totally with Rubio's position on the administration's policy change.

The fact is that this is 2015 and not 1960. The decision by the administration to re-open the embassy and establish diplomatic ties with Cuba provides an opportunity for a new beginning. One led by an increase in dialogue and economic opportunity, which is likely to benefit both countries, most importantly the residents of South Florida.

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Whoever the **Democrats** choose to nominate for president will drive this crucial point home in a

very effective way. The fact is that the Democrats have the luxury of simultaneously showering praise and credit onto Cuban exiles and the Cuban-American community at large for what they have done for the economy in South Florida (and United States) while doubling down on their position that this country is long overdue for a fresh policy on Cuban relations.

It should be evident that Rubio's outdated views on this will not fare well in the general election. The Republican Party will end up directly opposing the administration's new policy toward Cuba. This will include support for maintaining the existing embargo and U.S. laws restricting or limiting business with Cuban companies while imposing penalties and sanctions on non-U.S. businesses that do business with the country. The current GOP-majority thus far has used, and is likely to continue to use, its majority position to prevent any vote to change U.S. law toward Cuba to be taken on the floor of the House or Senate before the 2016 elections. Thus, Rubio could win the party nomination for president but lose the general election because his position on Cuba is likely to make securing Florida's critical 29 electoral votes an unwinnable battle.

It is my strong view that trying to maintain the embargo and the outdated and failed laws and policies toward Cuba will be a recipe for a losing GOP strategy in Florida in the 2016 election.

Dolf Garcia is a corporate attorney focusing on cross-border transactions who emigrated to the U.S. from Cuba in 1961.

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