

CUBA A new beginning

Vinik's grand vision for Channel District unfolds



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This rendering shows the entertainment and retail corridor Lightning owner Jeff Vinik envisions for the Channel District.

Revitalization would rank among biggest in the Southeast

BY RICHARD MULLINS
Tribune staff

TAMPA — Jeff Vinik isn't just developing some new buildings in the Channel District. He's remaking an entire area of downtown into a new neighborhood and nearly building a second skyline for Tampa's urban identity.

Unveiling a master plan Wednesday, Vinik said he looked around the area after buying the Tampa Bay Lightning hockey team five years ago and saw massive untapped potential. Now, his development team is ready to start making his



JAY CONNER/STAFF

"We have a blank canvas to develop an entire district ... and change this area for generations to come," Vinik said.

dreams into a reality.

Largely funded privately, the plan includes nearly a dozen new buildings, including hotels, office buildings, apartment towers,

restaurants, medical school facilities, retail promenades, parks and entertainment venues, with a budget topping \$1 billion. In all, the project could re-

The cost of progress

Although the majority of Vinik's plan is privately funded, taxpayers will still be on the hook for road and utility improvements. **Page 12**

make 40 contiguous acres along the waterfront and rank as one of the largest downtown development projects underway in the Southeast, letting Tampa join the ranks of other U.S. cities seeing a resurgence of urban spaces.

"We have a blank canvas to develop an entire district to help revitalize downtown and change this area for generations to come," Vinik told several hundred people gathered at the Marriott Waterside hotel. "It's critical we create a

DEVELOPMENT, Page 12

Sony bows under hackers' terror threats, cancels 'The Interview'

U.S. official says shadowy group is tied to North Korea

BY JAKE COYLE
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Under the threat of terrorist attacks from hackers and with the nation's largest multiplex chains pulling the film from their screens, Sony Pictures Entertainment took the unprecedented step of canceling the Dec. 25 release of the Seth Rogen comedy "The Interview."

The cancellation an-



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A worker carries away a poster for the movie "The Interview" after it was pulled at a Carmike theater in Atlanta.

nounced Wednesday was a startling blow to the Hollywood studio that has been

shaken by hacker leaks and intimidations over the last several weeks by an anon-

ymous group calling itself Guardians of Peace.

A U.S. official said Wednesday that federal investigators have now connected the Sony hacking to North Korea and are expected to make an announcement soon. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the official was not authorized to openly discuss an ongoing criminal case.

Sony said it was canceling "The Interview" release "in light of the decision by the majority of our exhibitors not to show the film." The studio said it respected

SONY, Page 11

Tampa will soon get direct flights to the Bahamas

Rays to ship out Myers in deal with Padres, Nationals

BUSINESS inside Metro

SPORTS Page 1



OBAMA: President vows action to normalize relations with Cuba, urges Congress to follow suit.

CASTRO: Cuban leader doesn't mention freedoms on island, focuses on re-establishment of diplomatic ties.

EXILES DIVIDED: Some embrace normalization, others say it rewards a repressive regime.

REACTION IN CUBA: Many cheer the move and hope for a tourism surge. **INSIDE, Page 10**

SPY SWAP: Released intelligence agent one of the most important in Cuba. **INSIDE, Page 11**

Secret talks yield plan to normalize relations

BY KAREN DEYOUNG
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The United States and Cuba ended more than a half-century of enmity Wednesday, announcing that they would re-establish diplomatic relations and begin dismantling the last pillar of the Cold War.

The historic move, after 18 months of secret negotiations and finally made possible

by Cuba's release of detained U.S. aid contractor Alan Gross, fulfilled one of President Barack Obama's key second-term goals.

The decision is likely to reverberate across many political frontiers where the standoff between Washington and Havana has played a role

— including across much of Latin America, where U.S. policy

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TWITTER ACCOUNT OF U.S. SEN. JEFF FLAKE, R-ARIZ.

U.S. aid contractor Alan Gross arrives Wednesday at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland after being imprisoned for five years in Cuba.

Tampa poised to be Cuba's top trading partner — again

BY PAUL GUZZO
Tribune staff

TAMPA — Alan Gross is home after five years in a Cuban prison, three Cuban spies jailed in the U.S. are back where they came from, and diplomatic relations are set to be restored between the U.S. and Cuba, including the reopening of a U.S. Embassy there.

These historic developments, if they all stand, put Tampa

in a position unique among U.S. cities.

"Tampa is well-positioned to benefit across the board," said Arthur Savage, president of a Tampa-based shipping company that represents U.S. ships hauling cargo to Cuba.

Already, travel and trade restrictions that sting nationwide feel easier here. And Tampa has maintained strong economic and

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Relations

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political relationships with Cuba that could mean a financial windfall for the city.

Some examples of how changes announced Wednesday could add to that:

Freeing up telecommunications in Cuba could make it easier for people in Tampa to reach their friends and family in the island nation. The possibility of taking Cuba off the State Sponsors of Terrorism list would enable students and professors at Florida's state colleges and universities to again take part in research projects in Cuba. And improved relations between environmentalists from the two nations could benefit Tampa's marine ecosystem.

"Cuban-Americans and our entire community already have benefited from travel and remittances — changes that have enabled families to visit and support their relatives on the island," said U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor, a Tampa Democrat who has advocated for improved relations.

"Small businesses, the tourism industry and Tampa International Airport also have seen a boost in jobs and economic opportunities and are poised to take further advantage of broadening travel and trade to the island nation," she said.

Wednesday's announcement that the U.S. will begin re-establishing diplomatic ties severed in January 1961 — after more than a year of clandestine talks between the two governments held in Canada and at the Vatican that included Pope Francis.

♦ ♦ ♦

When Barack Obama was

elected president in 2008, he promised to improve relations with Cuba.

During his first term, he eased travel restrictions so Cuban-Americans could visit family in Cuba as often as they want and allowed Americans to visit under people-to-people educational exchanges.

But Alan Gross became an obstacle in further normalizing relations.

He was working as a contractor for the U.S. Agency for International Development, which promotes democracy in Cuba, when he was detained in 2009 and sentenced to up to 15 years in prison in 2011. His family said he was working to expand Internet access for Cuba's Jewish community.

The Cuban government called him a spy.

Critics said the president didn't get enough out of Cuba, but Gross' release Wednesday provided the catalyst for Obama's sweeping changes.

"Isolation has not worked," he said in remarks from the White House. "It's time for a new approach."

The president cannot lift the travel and trade embargo against Cuba. That would take an act of Congress.

But he can strip away enough sanctions that the embargo moves toward irrelevancy.

"Obama did about as much as the president can do," said Patrick Manteiga, publisher of the weekly newspaper La Gaceta, which advocates for improved relations with Cuba. "I'm proud of the president, and this could mean big things for Tampa."

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Obama cannot lift the travel ban on tourists seeking to visit Cuba, but his initiative will make it easier to obtain a license

to travel there for those already in one of the 12 categories authorized by law, including family visits, professional research and education.

Tampa International Airport has offered flights to Cuba since late 2011, and the number of passengers has increased each year — 41,526 in 2012, 45,595 in 2013 and 61,408 in 2014.

Joseph Lopano, CEO of the airport, hopes the president's announcement will pay dividends for the port of entry.

"We have been successful with our flights to Cuba thus far," Lopano said. "This new relationship may result in our ability to grow our business, which means revenue and jobs. We are very encouraged by this news."

Economically, perhaps the biggest benefit Tampa could reap is in trade.

Agricultural trade with Cuba has been legal since 2000 and has totaled in the billions of dollars. Obama announced he will expand this opportunity to include commercial sales and exports of goods and services to Cuba to include building materials for entrepreneurs and private residences.

Because of Cuba's old, crumbling infrastructure, the value of sales of these supplies could dwarf what is earned through agriculture, said shipping agent Savage.

Tampa's longstanding relationship with Cuba could further help make the city the island nation's top trading partner — a position it held from the late 1800s until the embargo was imposed in the 1960s.

"Given Florida's close proximity to Cuba, I see great potential for trade and tourism exchange to positively impact St. Petersburg and the Tampa Bay region," St. Petersburg

Mayor Rick Kriseman said in a statement.

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Tampa helped fund Cuba's revolution against colonialist Spain in the late 1800s and supported Fidel Castro's cause in the 1950s, before he embraced Communism. This included a Castro fundraising trip to the city in 1955.

In 2003, then-Tampa Mayor Dick Greco met with Castro in Cuba.

The Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce sent a 38-member delegation of business and civic leaders to Cuba in 2013.

In January 2014, Cuba's top representative in the U.S., José Ramón Cabañas Rodríguez, attended a chamber luncheon as a guest of Rep. Castor.

"Tampa Bay area families and businesses played an important role in the normalization of relations with Cuba announced today," Castor said Wednesday.

Another prominent figure in the change has been Albert Fox Jr., who worked from Tampa through his Alliance For Responsible Cuba Policy Foundation.

Fox has traveled to Cuba almost 100 times. He has met with Castro on nine occasions and has brought business leaders and elected officials from all levels of government to the island nation. These include former Tampa Mayor Greco, Idaho Gov. Butch Otter, the late artist LeRoy Neiman and retired Marine Lt. Gen. Michael DeLong, former deputy commander of the Tampa-based Central Command.

Fox also helped broker initial talks between U.S. oil industry leaders and the Cuban government that led to an oil spill cleanup protocol the two nations agreed to in March.

"You hope we have a

deep enough relationship with Cuba to move fast as things change," said Manteiga, of La Gaceta, whose grandfather Victoriano Manteiga knew Castro. Patrick Manteiga met with Castro twice. "You hope we have earned some loyalty from the decision-makers over there."

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Shipping agent Savage said Tampa already is positioned for increased trade.

"Unlike other Florida ports, we have a diversified port that can handle any and all types of cargo, whether it be bulk form, containers — you name it," Savage said. "And if we don't have it, we have the land to expand and handle it."

Representatives from Port Tampa Bay did not respond to a request for comment.

The easing of travel restrictions and improved diplomatic relations could benefit Tampa's marine ecosystem that it shares with Cuba.

David Guggenheim, president of the Washington-based nonprofit Ocean Doctor, says the health of the Gulf of Mexico depends on scientists from the two nations working together.

Coral reefs, he said, are an example.

"We can learn a lesson from this Cuban ecosystem to help us restore reefs throughout the Gulf," Guggenheim told the Tribune just before Obama's announcement. "That is the hope. But we need consistent access to it."

If the State Department lifts Cuba from the State Sponsor of Terrorism list, some academics in Florida could access to its marine ecosystem for the first time.

Professors and students in Florida have been forbidden since 2006 from using money that flows through a state university — including grants from private foundations — for travel to a nation on the U.S. list of State Sponsors of Terrorism.

Florida is the only state with such a law.

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"I've instructed Secretary (of State John) Kerry to review Cuba's designation as a State Sponsor of

Terrorism," Obama said. "This review will be guided by the facts and the law. Terrorism has changed in the last several decades."

Based on this comment, Fox, of the Alliance for Responsible Cuba Policy Foundation, said he is confident Cuba will be taken off the list.

The U.S. added Cuba in 1982 primarily for its support of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known by its Spanish acronym, FARC. But according to the State Department's reports on nations with links to terrorism, Cuba has been hosting peace talks between FARC and the Colombian government and has been fighting terrorist financing through its banks.

"Cuba has never committed an act of terrorism," Fox said. "Taking them off that list will right a wrong."

In Tampa, the impact of Wednesday's announcement might be felt most strongly at a family level.

The region's Cuban-American population is about 80,000 — third largest in the U.S. — and just over 2,000 Cubans became legal U.S. citizens and settled in Tampa last year, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

It will be easier for them to visit Cuba now. What's more, they can send more money home — \$2,000, up from \$500, every three months. And shipping Internet equipment to Cuba will be easier now, too.

"Right now, you can email Cuba, but it is a slow and cumbersome process," Manteiga said. "And getting Internet in Cuba is hard. Hopefully, it will be easier for Cuban-Americans and Cubans to stay in touch now via email."

Other changes will include the acceptance of U.S. debit and credit cards in Cuba, plus travelers from the U.S. will be authorized to import \$400 worth of goods from Cuba — including up to \$100 in tobacco and alcohol combined.

Said Fox, "This is substantially more than I thought would get done."

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Cuba

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on Cuba has long been a source of friction.

"These 50 years have shown that isolation has not worked," Obama said in a televised midday address. "It's time for a new approach."

Saying that he was "under no illusion about the continued barriers to freedom that remain for ordinary Cubans," Obama said he was convinced that "through a policy of engagement, we can more effectively stand up for our values and help the Cuban people help themselves."

In simultaneous remarks in Havana, Cuban President Raul Castro affirmed his government's willingness for dialogue on "profound differences" between the countries, "particularly on issues related to national sovereignty, democracy, human rights and foreign policy."

Castro said "Obama's decision ... deserves the respect and acknowledgment of our people."

Obama and Castro — who spoke by phone Tuesday, the first such exchange between leaders of the two countries since the 1959 Cuban Revolution — thanked Pope Francis and the Vatican, which they said were instrumental in promoting their dialogue, and the government of Canada, where secret talks that began in June 2013 were held.

In addition to reopening its embassy in Havana,

the administration plans to significantly ease trade and financial restrictions, as well as limits on travel by Americans to Cuba, by using its regulatory and enforcement powers to evade limits imposed by a congressionally mandated embargo.

Americans will be permitted to send more money to Cuban nationals, use their debit and credit cards in Cuba, and bring \$100 worth of Cuban cigars into this country. U.S. exports to Cuba will be made easier, and additional items will be authorized. U.S. banks will be allowed to open correspondent relations with banks in Cuba.

The administration also said it would launch a review of Cuba's status as a state sponsor of terrorism, a designation it feels Havana may not deserve alongside Sudan, Syria and Iran, and would work with Congress to ultimately lift the trade embargo and other sanctions.

Although Obama said the Cubans had also agreed to expand Internet access and other freedoms, and to free 53 political detainees, Castro did not mention any of those measures in his own televised speech. Coverage of the momentous announcement in Cuba's Communist Party media was limited to the re-establishment of diplomatic relations and the release of three Cuban spies imprisoned in the United States.

In addition to Gross, whom the Obama admin-

istration said was freed on humanitarian grounds after five years, the United States exchanged the three Cubans for an unnamed U.S. intelligence asset said to have been held in Cuba for two decades.

The inclusion in the deal of the U.S. spy, a Cuban national, appeared to have been the break that allowed it to go through. Cuba had long offered to release Gross in a swap for its imprisoned intelligence agents; the administration had long refused on the grounds that Gross, a subcontractor working for the U.S. Agency for International Development, was not a spy and should be released without conditions.

Gross left Cuba on Wednesday aboard a U.S. government aircraft, accompanied by his wife and several members of Congress who had pushed for his release. Despite concerns about his ill health, he appeared relatively fit, albeit slimmer than at the time of his arrest and missing several teeth.

"What a blessing it is," Gross, a Maryland resident, said at a hastily arranged Washington news conference. "Thank you, President Obama, for everything you have done today and leading up to today."

Obama's decision to go far beyond a deal to bring Gross home and declare an end to the estrangement between the countries was rooted in the long-term strategic goal of eliminating what he called an outdated policy that

"has had little effect beyond providing the Cuban government with a rationale for restrictions on its people."

"Today," Obama said, "Cuba is still governed by the Castros and the Communist Party that came to power half a century ago."

The White House also said that the U.S. stance against Cuba alienated Washington from "regional and international partners." That alienation has been particularly apparent in Latin America, which long ago rejected U.S. insistence that it continue isolating Cuba. One senior administration official described U.S. policy on Cuba as "an albatross around the neck of the United States in the hemisphere and around the world."

Debate at the last Summit of the Americas, held in 2012 in Colombia, was dominated by criticism of the U.S. stance on Cuba. Ejected from the Organization of American States at U.S. urging in 1962, Cuba has been invited to attend the next summit, in April, by Panama, the host government.

Many Republicans were sharply critical of what House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, called Obama's "mindless concessions" to Cuba and what others referred to as "appeasement."

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Miami, called the announcement "just the latest in a long line of failed attempts by President Obama to appease rogue regimes at all cost."

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