

March 21, 2016

Remarks by President Obama at an Entrepreneurship and Opportunity Event -- Havana, Cuba

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT OBAMA

AT AN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND OPPORTUNITY EVENT

La Cervecería

Havana, Cuba

4:29 P.M. CST

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Thank you. (Applause.) Muchas gracias. Please, everybody have a seat. Buenas tardes.

Let me begin by thanking our hosts. This is my very first visit to a Cuban cervecería. I hear they've got some great pollo -- Moros y Cristianos. And, of course, cerveza. But today, we're here to work.

So I want to thank all of you for being part of this unprecedented event -- the Cuban government. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the new U.S.-Cuba Business Council. I'm also want to express my appreciation because we are joined on this trip by nearly 40 members of Congress, as well as some of America's top business leaders and innovators who are eager to invest in Cuba and its people. And most importantly, I want to welcome all the extraordinary entrepreneurs -- men and women who are here from across Cuba.

Now, I'm not here to give a big speech. I'm going to do that tomorrow. What I really want to do is hear from you and have a conversation about what we can achieve together. But I do want to begin by stepping back and talking about the forces and hopes that bring us together here today.

In many ways, the history of Cuba can be understood through the labor of the Cuban people. For centuries, under colonial rule, and then during decades of American involvement, the toil of the Cuban people was often used to enrich others as opposed to the people who were doing the work. And then, for much of the past half century, it was virtually impossible for Cubans to operate their own businesses. But in recent years, that's begun to change. To its credit, the Cuban government has adopted some reforms. Cuba is welcoming more foreign investment. Cubans can now buy and sell property, and today many Cubans own their own homes and apartments. It's easier for Cubans to travel, to buy a cellphone, for farmers to start cooperatives, and for a family to start their own business.

The United States has been proud to help. Shortly after I took office, we said that Cuban Americans could send unlimited remittances to their families here in Cuba. And we allowed Cuban Americans to visit more often. Across this island, Cubans have used those remittances often to start businesses. And when Cuban Americans come visit, they often bring supplies and materials. We also made it easier for Cuban entrepreneurs to import and to export. And since we've made it easier to travel to Cuba, a lot more Americans are visiting the island -- you may have noticed.

So the Cuban economy is beginning to change, and just look at the results. Groups like Cuba Emprende are training a new generation of entrepreneurs. Today, about half a million Cubans -- including some of you -- are proud cuentapropistas -- running your own restaurants, cafes, beauty salons, barber shops, or working as artists, seamstresses and taxi drivers. Your businesses now employ about one-third of the Cuban workforce. With help from services like Airbnb, more Americans are staying at your casas particulares and eating at your paladares -- like my family did last night. That food was really good -- even if my Spanish is not that great. (Laughter.)

Those of you who run your own business knows what this means. You can earn a little more money for your family. You can provide more for your children. And then there's the pride that comes from creating something new and improving the lives of those around you. And that's the power of entrepreneurship. It's about self-determination -- the opportunity to forge your own future. It's the belief that even if you don't have much -- maybe just a kitchen, or a sewing machine, or a car -- if you're willing to work hard, you can make your own way and improve your situation in life for the next generation. It's the spirit of youth -- talented and driven, daring young people like so many of you ready to make your mark on the world.

It's an investment in the future, because as we've seen in America, businesses that start small -- even in a garage -- can grow into some of the world's most successful companies, and

change the way we work and the way we live and connect with each other. That's the spirit of entrepreneurship. And that's what we're encouraging here today. Because Cuba's economic future -- its ability to create more jobs and a growing middle class, and meet the aspirations of the Cuban people -- depends on growth in the private sector, as well as government action.

And it's not easy. In the United States, we work to help entrepreneurs and small businesses get the resources they need because it can be a struggle to get a new venture off the ground. Around the world, we help young people and entrepreneurs access training and skills to put their ideas into action. Here today, you're talking about the challenges you face as entrepreneurs in Cuba.

Now, many of the changes that our two countries have already announced, including today, will help you to meet some of those challenges. More Americans coming to Cuba means more customers for your businesses. More Americans using the dollar will mean that they will spend more, as well. There will be more channels for you to import supplies and equipment. More Americans will be able to buy your arts, crafts, food, Cuban-origin software -- as well as, of course, Cuban rum and cigars.

We also know that, around the world, entrepreneurs flourish when there's an environment that encourages their success. When professionals like architects and engineers and lawyers are allowed to start their own businesses, as well. When entrepreneurs can get loans from banks -- capital to start and

expand their businesses. And then we need wholesale markets where you can buy supplies. When there's a single currency and modern infrastructure so you can get your goods to market and import supplies. And when there's a single currency and a modern infrastructure so you can get your goods to market and import supplies. And perhaps most importantly, when everybody has a chance to succeed, including women and Afro-Cubans. These are all areas where the United States hopes to be a partner as Cuba moves forward.

And I can tell you one of the reasons I'm so confident in the potential of the Cuban people is because you have some important advantages. Your commitment to education and very high literacy rates -- that gives you an enormous advantage in the 21st century. That's been an investment that has been made here in Cuba. Your ingenuity -- who else could keep almendrons running all these years? You've got more than 300 million potential American customers -- and one of the world's most dynamic cities, Miami, right next door. And you have more than two million talented, successful Cuban Americans -- some of whom joined me on this trip -- ready to invest in you and help pursue your dreams, and have deep family commitments and deep roots in Cuban culture. So I'm absolutely convinced -- if just given a chance, more Cubans can succeed right here at home, in the Cuba that you love.

So I'm here today to say that America wants to be your partner. Around this visit, American companies are moving ahead with new commercial deals. GE is going to sell more products here, from aviation to energy technology. CleBer will be the first U.S.

company to build a factory here in more than 50 years -- they're going to build tractors for Cuban farmers. Starwood will become the first U.S. hotel that operates here in nearly 60 years, and Marriot plans to come, as well -- and they'll help train Cubans in the hospitality industry. The first Carnival cruise is expected to pull into Havana in May. And I will keep saying it every chance I get -- one of the best ways to help the Cuban people succeed and improve their lives would be for the U.S. Congress to lift the embargo once and for all. (Applause.)

Here today, we're doing even more to empower Cuban entrepreneurs. I know you've been networking with each other and potential American partners. Innovators in business -- like Airbnb's Brian Chesky -- are sharing the lessons that they've learned. We've got a shark here named Daymond John -- for those of you who don't know, there's a show in America called Shark Tank, which is an outstanding show where, on television, young entrepreneurs bring their ideas and present them, and they try to get some financing right there on the air. And it's a fun show to watch. Julie Hanna supports entrepreneurs all over the world with micro-financing. So give them your best pitch. They just might bite and decide to invest.

We're also announcing some new commitments today. As part of our Young Leaders in the Americas Initiative, we're going to welcome up to 15 young Cuban entrepreneurs to the United States to help them get the training and skills to grow their own business. For the first time, we'll welcome Cubans to our annual Global Entrepreneurship Summit, which I'll host in Silicon Valley later this year. And later this year, our Small Business

Administrator, Maria Contreras Sweet -- who is here today. Where's Maria? There she is. She's going to lead a delegation of business leaders here to promote more entrepreneurship in Cuba.

And we also want to help connect more Cuban entrepreneurs to the Internet. Some are here today, including Yon Gutiérrez, who designed AlaMesa, an app to connect Cubans to restaurants; and InfoMed, connecting doctors and scientists. More Cubans are going online at Wi-Fi hotspots, but still, very few Cubans have Internet access. Although I just learned that my skit with Panfilo got two million hits here in Cuba, so that -- (laughter and applause) -- I think with Internet access paid attention here.

But in terms of Internet access, even those who have it often are using old dial-up connections that can be expensive and slow. I don't even remember the sound of the phone when it went (makes "dial-up" sound) -- so new technology has come and we need to bring it to Cuba. "If we had Internet" one Cuban entrepreneur said, "we could really take off."

So America wants to help you take off. And Verizon will help deliver direct landline phone connections between Cuba and the United States. Cisco has announced it will help Cuban students develop their IT skills. The American high-tech firm Stripe, is partnering with Merchise Startup Circle here in Havana to help Cubans start ventures and do business online.

The bottom line is this. We believe in the Cuban people. We believe in artists like Idania Del Rio who designs and illustrates her own goods -- "99 percent Cuban design," she calls it. We believe in merchants like Sandra Lidicie Aldama, who says, "One of the most important things in the Cuban nature is perseverance, optimism, and our capacity to find a solution to any obstacle in the way." We believe in the entrepreneur who said, "I think with these changes in Cuba there's no turning back." And another who said, "This opens us up to the world." And one who also said, "Just give us the chance."

Just give us the chance. Well, as your friend and as your partner, the United States of America wants to help you get that chance. And we're so grateful that we're off to this outstanding start at this event here today. Muchas gracias. (Applause.)

Thank you very much. Thank you. Now, as I said, I didn't want to just talk, I want to also hear from you. So I've asked to join me one of our outstanding journalists in the United States, an entrepreneur herself who works to empower girls through education. She is a proud Cuban-American who, on this visit, has brought her children to Cuba to meet their cousins for the first time. Please give her a big round of applause --Soledad O'Brien. (Applause.)

MS. O'BRIEN: So welcome, everyone. My name is Soledad O'Brien, and I'm a journalist, as the President said. And I'm also a Cuban-American. My mother grew up not very far from here,

Habana Vieja. And so it's not only nice to be back, but it's great to be able to bring my children here for the first time.

I'm also an entrepreneur. I run a small business that employs nine people full-time. So I know very well the joys and the struggles of running your own business. And I'm excited to be here today to moderate a discussion -- to talk to several businesspeople, some people who work in the private sector and others who work in the state sector, to discuss some of the opportunities to improve business and also improve cooperation between Cuba and the United States.

So I'm going to ask the people that I call on to stand and talk for just a couple of moments about your business. And if you have a question for the President, we would love to hear it.

So we'll begin with Gilberto "Papito" Valladares. He's a small business owner. He is a barber. He's also a community organizer.

Welcome. (Applause.)

Q (As interpreted.) Good afternoon. Mr. President, my name is Gilberto Valladares. Everybody calls me by my nickname, "Papito." I'm a bald barber and a dreamer. I'd like to share with

you my vision, my personal vision. I am also from Old Havana. I love Old Havana. We have that in common.

In '99, I made a major decision in my life to become a private self-employed person. At the time, 95 percent of barbers worked for the state. Now, 95 percent of them are private operators, meaning that something is happening in Cuban society. It is a very important moment for me. I know that the historical moment of committing the private sector with society is tomorrow, and that's what's been happening in my community. I live in the callejón de los peluqueros, or barbers' street. I do like barber work. That's why they talk about that callejón, or alley.

Three years ago, on that street, we only had one self-employed person, myself. Today we are talking in terms of 97 people who are self-employed, including owners and workers. And this has helped us to promote a dynamic I'd like to share with you as to how my community has been creating a chain of economic benefits and also a chain of social benefits. I am convinced that social benefits make economic benefits even more greater. When you work in a micro-company and you work for the future of society, that's where the future of society lies.

The person (inaudible) values of economics. That's why we pay so much attention to social values. My economic project is also helping another project for young people who want to learn to become barbers. Today we have 10 deaf girls who are being taught how to be hairdressers so that in the future they can work. I'm so happy because alliances have allowed us to grow. By

alliances I mean alliances between the private and state sector, among people, and so on.

I think it is also very important to see how we are creating a synergy, and in the end, we all win. I'll also say it's so important that in the end I will not be able to fix the world, but I can fix my little piece of land where I live. And I think that a very few littles will make a big thing up.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, first of all, Papito, I know that my barber is very important to me. And Michelle's hairdresser -- if she had to choose between me and her hairdresser, I don't know, it would be a close call. (Laughter.)

But in the United States, a barbershop, a beauty salon, that's oftentimes the center of the neighborhood and community life, and that's where people meet. And so congratulations on not only starting your business but also seeing it as a social enterprise that can help to contribute to the wellbeing of the community as a whole.

One of the things we're excited about is the fact that even though it's starting small, and you're self-employed, you're now about to build up a business and people can see you as a role model and as an example. The next step obviously is for you potentially to be able to expand. And in the United States -- I don't know about barbering here -- but in the United States, oftentimes people start

off, they just have one chair in the barbershop, then they get five chairs. Young barbers come in and initially they rent a chair from you, but over time, once they've gotten regular customers, maybe they go off and they branch off, and they start their own barbershop. And in that way, you see a number of businesses start to grow, even though it started just from one.

And one of the issues that hopefully the cuentapropista movement can begin to develop is the capacity to take these small businesses that have just started and begin to expand them. That's not going to happen overnight, but that's part of what we'd like to see encouraged. And I think that that's going to require government feeling comfortable with that process, but it's also going to require entrepreneurs like you, as role models, so that people can see how successful it's been.

I will say, there was an interesting conversation that I had with President Castro around this issue, and I know that U.S. companies will relate to this, because he pointed out that as people start getting more of their own income, owning their own property and starting their own businesses, the question starts coming up about paying taxes. And President Castro pointed out, rightfully, that nobody likes paying taxes, especially if they're not used to paying taxes. And I assured him that was a universal trait. That's true in America, just as much as it is in the United States.

But that gives you a sense of how some of these institutions are going to have to evolve over time because they're still relatively

new. But certainly these are the kinds of initiatives that will start building new habits and new possibilities for people throughout your country.

So, congratulations. If I hadn't just gotten a haircut, I'd stop by your shop. (Applause.)

MS. O'BRIEN: The next person I'd like to introduce is Idania del Rio, and she's a graphic designer. And she has been in the past part of an exchange program to the United States.

Q (As interpreted.) Thank you, very much. Good afternoon. I am a designer, illustrator. And with two women, we funded Clandestina, which is a design brand intending to define work by as done by Cuban young designers, and in general to have a bigger design market in Havana to begin with. So we are trying to establish a chain between creation, production, and sales for the benefit of Cuban designers.

The concept behind Clandestina's work is to change the concept of Cuban souvenir idea. We have products like rum and tobacco and cigars, which are practically commodities, but there is a whole market of new products from new initiatives of creation which are not as well established as those products. And design is a quite interesting field in any modern society where much value can be generated for society itself. Clandestina began a year ago.

What started as a t-shirt shop has become a project with 14 employees, and it is creating over 25 products. So we are very, very happy -- most of all, our girls, which is also very cool. And thanks to some things that have been happening -- we have been invited to participate in WEAmericas, which is a State Department project. And because of those things of life, we entered the Columbia Business School. So we've been having business training, and that's essential for us. That has changed our lives and the way we think of our own project, which began as a project and now is a company. We do have many expectations for the future and for what we can do with young people in our township in Old Havana also.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MS. O'BRIEN: What would you like to happen between Cuba and the United States that could be helpful to you and the young women that you serve?

Q Basically, what has been discussed here. Specific regulations, information about those regulations, what will happen with imports and exports, what will happen with Cubans as to whether they might be having companies in the United States or selling their products there. Could they trade online? And that Cuban state information and U.S. government information would be valuable for us. This information is what we need most, I think.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, I need some information on where I can buy a couple of t-shirts. (Laughter.) Did you bring some samples? I'm not going to take yours. But we'll see if we can get a couple. I think Malia and Sasha might want a couple. And I still have some pesos to spend before I leave.

But I tell you, you're absolutely right about the need to make sure that young people who have ideas are not restricted to just the traditional exports where you're not that high up on the value chain. And this is true around the world, including in the United States. You have global markets -- they're competitive. If all you're doing is selling commodities, then it's very hard to spur significant economic growth, and you're also vulnerable in the world marketplace if there's a downturn in the economy and people need less raw materials.

So if China's economy slows and suddenly they're not buying as much oil or as much minerals, or what have you, then suddenly the economy of that country is very vulnerable. And so you want a diversified economy and you want to make sure that skills, design, software, products of intellectual work and not just raw materials and commodities, that that becomes a critical part of the overall economy.

Now, Cuba already has an example of that in its outstanding medical profession. The doctors and the nurses are essential exports for Cuba because they're highly skilled, they're highly

trained. They're at a global standard. And as a consequence, they can sell those services essentially when they work elsewhere in the world. But there's no reason to think that the same ingenuity that exists when it comes to medicine shouldn't be true in fashion as well, or in software, or in engineering, or a whole host of other potential occupations that people provide.

And so you're starting to lead the way. But I'll talk to you afterwards about that t-shirt.

MS. O'BRIEN: The next person we'd like to hear from is Brian Chesky. You mentioned him earlier. He is the founder of Airbnb, and they have 2 million listings in 190 countries.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. It's an honor to be here. This is a historic week for diplomacy. And I want to just talk for a moment about maybe another kind of diplomacy, and that is people-to-people diplomacy. We launched, with your help, one year ago. In that period of time, we've had Americans come from all 50 states in the country, and they've stayed with hosts here in Cuba. And we estimate now about 20 percent of all Americans that are staying in Cuba are staying in a home with a Cuba host. What they say is that they come here with 50 years of questions, and they have three days to ask them. But I think it's been an amazing experience and unbelievable story.

We just got the word from the White House that, a day ago, we were going to be allowed to have not just Americans stay with a Cuban host, but guests from all over the world. I mentioned this to a Cuban host, and then she actually started crying. And she explained to me that this would allow her to finally be able to complete paying the bills for their family and fix up her home.

I met another host last night, and she said, "We open our doors, we open our hearts, and what we care most about is not just the money we make, but the friendships we make." And they used to say that they had lots of misconceptions about Americans, and it's hard to have misconceptions about Americans when you actually host them in your homes. And the same thing is true with Americans and I think people all over the world. There's hundreds of thousands of new friendships that are possible if we can bring people together. (Applause.)

PRESIDENT OBAMA: I just want to brag on Brian just for one second. First of all, for those Cubans who are not familiar with Brian, you can see how young he is. The company that he started, Airbnb, basically started as an idea with his co-founder who is also here. How long ago did you guys start, Brian?

MR. CHESKY: Eight years.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Eight years. And what's the valuation now?

MR. CHESKY: Twenty-five --

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Don't be shy.

MR. CHESKY: \$25 billion.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: \$25 billion? With a "B"? Okay. But I use Brian as an example. He's one of our outstanding your entrepreneurs who had an idea and acted on it. And in this global economy, it can take off -- if it's a good idea and it's well executed. But I also think Brian is a good example of the power of the Internet and why having an Internet infrastructure is so important. Because essentially, Airbnb is using social media and the Internet in order to create a buyer and a seller and a market that is safe for those buyers and sellers that didn't previously exist. I mean, it used to be if an American or a German or anybody wanted to come to Cuba, they could go to a hotel, and that was it. Now, suddenly, there are thousands of potential sellers of a great experience here in Cuba, and they themselves become small business people.

But it's only possible because somebody in Germany can look up online and see, okay, that's a house, that looks nice, there's a nice picture. There's been a good rating of the host. They found out that when you get there, the room actually looks like the room

on the Internet. The person who's inviting somebody into their home, they can check and they've seen that, okay, the person who's using this has a good credit rating. And if they've stayed at Airbnb before, they haven't completely torn up the house.

And so it's a tool to build trust and allow this transaction to take place. But if you imagine what could be done with broader Internet access and service here, Brian, I think, gives you a good example of the potential that could be unleashed. But it requires an infrastructure and an investment in order to make it work.

Thank you for sharing your story, Brian. (Applause.)

MS. O'BRIEN: Up next is Abelardo Alvarez Silva. Mr. Silva, I should say, is the president of the Cooperative of Credits and Services, an association of small farmers.

Q Good afternoon, Mr. President. I'm a farmer, president of a credit and service cooperative, a social and economic unit which has autonomy in its management. I cover expenses with the income. There are 192 associates. There's a general assembly, the top organ of the cooperative. It has an area of 638 hectares -- 500 are arable land with fruits, grains, et cetera; 28 owners and 25 (inaudible). We produce all of our production, around 9,000 tons. For social consumption, we sell to the population directly. With the industry, we sell seeds to hotels.

One of the positive impacts of our cooperative at the social level, our cooperative takes care of women homes, children with oncological problems. That is the positive impact of the cooperative. We supply them. We are located in Artemisa, Havana Matanzas area. It's a productive area under irrigation, with a system created by farmers with an advanced experience in all the crops. However, we have not been able to find all the potential because of the absence of new technology. Our machinery are very backward -- irrigation system that prevents us from finding the development and the top productivity of our work.

What is our message? To give us an opportunity to meet two objectives. One, to produce food for the people more efficiently. And second, in the immediate future, to contribute to the world. And we continue with our land growing it and harvesting it. (Applause.)

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Let me just ask you a quick question -- pregunta. What's your -- you said you grow grain and fruit. Let's get a translation. I'm just curious, first of all, what are the products that you've been most successful in growing? What's your major seller? And also, when it comes to equipment, what are the specific things that you're looking for at this point? Is it basics, like tractors, or is it more sophisticated irrigation systems? What are the main needs of the cooperative at this point?

Q (As interpreted.) We have several crops. We produce potatoes, plantains, and sweet potatoes. Those are the most productive items. And in vegetables, we're high producers in carrots, tomato, beet root. They're the main ones -- although we grow them all. And fruits -- guava, papaya. Those are our main crops. Fifty percent are vegetables, thirty-five in fruits, fifteen in grains, and five percent in foods.

When I spoke about the obtainment of the equipment, we need machinery -- irrigation machinery. Our machinery is very old, and no spare parts do we have. Those parts that we need today, it's hard to buy them. So the irrigation system are actual furrows, and that's not used anymore. It brings about erosion. And we have substituted with organic maneuver. But still, we're under the productivity.

When we have all that machinery, things will be done in less time, less expensive. Not so much use of water. Better protection of the soil -- to find the top productivity of the land. Also, the resources which we need are indispensable, and sometimes they don't come.

Because of the main costs, as you know, we don't receive those inputs at the time required and when we don't really need it.
Thank you.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: My Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, joined me in this delegation. I don't know if he's here today. But I know that he's been meeting with Cuban government officials about how we can accelerate cooperation between U.S. farmers and Cuban farmers. We have programs all around the world that are designed to advance technologies, specifically for small farmers, not just for big farmers -- because the truth of the matter is, the U.S. agricultural industry, which is the largest in the world, oftentimes may have systems that are not perfectly adapted to smaller-scale cooperative farming. On the other hand, what you're seeing in terms of agriculture in the United States is a greater and greater interest in what's called organic farming -- less inputs, less chemicals, fewer mono-crops, and more vegetables and fruits that can go directly to the table. And this is part of the First Lady's emphasis on healthier eating.

And the fact that Cuba is so close to the United States means that if you develop fruits and vegetables here, the ability to ship them and immediately get to markets where they can be purchased would be something that could make a big difference in terms of farm incomes here in Cuba.

So this is an area where, again, it's not going to happen overnight, but our hope is that as relationships between the two countries advance and develop, hopefully we'll be getting you some new equipment sometime in the future.

Q Muchas gracias.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Muchas gracias. (Applause.)

MS. O'BRIEN: Dr. Miriam Portuondo Sao is with the health system. She's a specialist in the genetics clinic. Welcome.

Q (As interpreted.) Welcome. For us, it's a pleasure to share with you a little bit on the experience in the field of medical collaboration. I am doctor -- a doctor in medical science, especially in clinical genetics, and professor of the university. And we have had the opportunity to share the medical collaboration, the international one. As you know, it reaches 138 other countries. Over 3,700 health professionals have participated.

And this field of medical collaboration, there are several fields. And you know the recent experience we had and the struggle against the Ebola experience in the countries of Western Africa. From there on, we have had other working lines in which we have cooperated, like the miracle operation that has returned vision to over 2 million people in the rest of the world. We have a special program -- research and action of disability. We have already one experience of handicap people, which we had in our country. We want to collaborate with the ALBA countries, and this research we want it to be conveyed. Once we research each person with all the disabilities that show up, then we know the true reality of that person. And in those sectors that should be taken care of in a personalized manner, we provide them with a medical special program. And other programs have been developed, like the

development of genetics. And community genetics, rehabilitation, those are programs which go from the research and action.

We also have the possibility to establish collaboration lines, joint ones. And we have possibilities that the health medical services have 17 programs. They are world-class in the country. And we can receive patients if they are sent. And we have lines, like attention and the certification of addiction -- lines which are already dealing with very specific matters for certain regions, and where we could establish other fields of cooperation -- research, academic services, development, clinical trials, especially on cancer, for instance, that could contribute in this link with the pharmaceutical industry. Vaccines, which have already been tried, that shall improve the quality and prolong the life of patients that are limited at this moment. We're willing to cooperate in all these spheres. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. O'BRIEN: You mentioned collaboration. And I'd love to know what could the United States and doctors and the medical profession here in Cuba be working on together.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, as I said, Cuba has world-class doctors and nurses. And the field that the doctor mentioned, the transformation that's taking place as we started understanding genetics, mapping the human genome, understanding at a cellular level, the nature of diseases, means that we're in a position in the very near future to start personalizing treatments, because a cancer cell that develops in me may not be the same as one that develops in you, and may require different

treatments. But that's just one example of a wide range of areas where collaboration could be very fruitful.

So with the Cuban government, we have agreed to establish and develop over time more and more scientific and research collaborations in the medical area. And one of the things that I've always believed is that knowledge should be disseminated everywhere. And the basis for scientific advancement is the sharing of information and data sets, and our ability to test hypotheses and discoveries and treatments and diagnoses across borders -- because ultimately, regardless of our political and economic systems and our differences, the diseases are the same because we're the same creatures. And we want to make sure that if there's a cure or a potential line of research here in Cuba, that that can go global, in the same way that if in the United States, we find a potential ability to diagnose or treat, that we can spread that around the world.

One specific example that I mentioned to President Castro today is the work we're doing on Zika. It's just not Zika; it's also dengue and some other mosquito-borne diseases that are becoming more common because people are traveling more. Many of these are actually fairly simple viruses. But it's just because they used to be very isolated, the major drug companies and scientific research didn't devote a lot of attention to them, and now suddenly they're spreading very quickly. The faster we can get diagnoses and potential vaccines, the more we can help guard against what appear to be some correlations between this disease and abnormalities in newborns.

But you're seeing this spread so fast across the Americas, this is a natural place where the U.S. and Cuba should be working together. Because it really doesn't matter whether it's an ALBA country or a U.S. ally, the mosquitos don't care about borders. They're biting everybody. And the women who are fearful because it may affect their pregnancy, they're not concerned with ideology, they're interested in making sure that their children are protected.

So that's a good, specific, concrete example of how our collaboration can advance.

MS. O'BRIEN: Our last speaker is Indhira Sotillo Fernandez. She is the founder of IslaDentro, which is sort of the Yelp of Cuban. Business, artist, cultural guide of the Internet. Certainly has been challenging here. So why don't you tell us a little bit about your business and how you'd like to see it develop.

Q Good afternoon. My name is Indhira. I represent IslaDentro. It's a guide of vistas for the state and private sector. I am from the private sector and I think I am an entrepreneur. This was a project that came to my hands almost from the air. It just came to me. And in time, I have been transforming it. We have modified until we have reached to this state. If you want to walk around Havana, you should install it in your phone. It includes everything you need, you require. We have restaurants, cafeterias, beauty

parlors, and mechanics of almandrones, the old cars. All sorts of services are in that type of guide.

My experience in that work, when I began I knew nothing about programming. All I do is empiric. I began to design in an empiric way. I have a very good team that backs me and perfectly understands this, and they put it into practice.

One, I want to be the guide of Cuba. I want to be the one representing Cuba abroad -- the guide for all those who come here and move around inside the whole island with the application. To become the guide that represents Cuba, abroad especially. And of course, to have thousands and thousands -- right now, I have hundreds of active profiles in the application, and thousands would be much better.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: What's going to be the one or two things that are going to be most important to you as you develop your business over the next several years, and how can the dialogue between the United States and Cuba be most helpful? Is it capital? Is it having access to international markets? Is it making sure that the Internet is widespread? Is it having trained personnel? Is it your knowledge of how to expand your business and make sure that it actually is generating revenue? What are the things that you think are going to be most important to you?

Q A little bit of all you have mentioned. A little bit of all we're going to need. Of course, to open up -- if the Internet is opened up, it will be faster so that abroad they will know what we're doing inside, and it will be easier for anyone arriving, any foreigner, coming with information. That is one of the things. Also, to train ourselves better, it would be another of the urgencies to take into account. A little bit of everything you said.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, here is the thing I will say, that Malia and Sasha -- Malia is soon 18, Sasha will soon be 15 -- if they go anywhere, they don't have a book. They don't have maps. Everything is on their phone. And that's true of young people internationally. And so as more and more visitors come to Cuba, I think that the potential for this app is going to be enormous. And so I know that you have the right idea. It's just going to be a matter of execution. And hopefully, with some of the changes that are taking place in terms of government policy, and your own drive, and some of the work that we're doing, for example, where Cisco is training more people in terms of online skills, and maybe some entrepreneurial advice that we're able to obtain through the exchanges that have taken place between our two countries -- when they come here five years from now without me, they'll know how to find the best restaurant and the best music. They'll be going to your app.

So, good luck. (Applause.)

Q Gracias.

MS. O'BRIEN: I'll just throw out some questions, as well. Where do you think -- I mean, clearly she talked about wanting to learn about entrepreneurship, in addition to capital and all these other things. What do you think is going to be the thing that changes Cuba over the next two, three years that will really help entrepreneurs in this country?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, ultimately, it's going to be young people like some of the ones that we've heard who are going to use their own imaginations and ideas to help develop and expand the Cuban economy.

Obviously, the United States has a long history -- we were built on entrepreneurship and on market-based principles. And it has produced wealth that's unmatched in the history of the world. I think Cuba, in part because of its history and seeing some of the inequalities that emerged in the old system, have been concerned about what a market-based economy does to the social fabric and to equality and to making sure that the progress that's been made in health care and education, that that's not eroded, and you don't start seeing some of the patterns of inequality that existed before coming back.

And I understand those concerns. I will say this, though, that in the 21st century, in a knowledge-based economy, in a global economy, for Cuba to grow it's going to have to find ways to link itself with that global economy. And that's going to require some

reforms internally here in Cuba. And what I said to President Castro was, given some of the history of mistrust between the United States and Cuba, given the fact that our embargo at the moment is still in place, it may be that it's not the United States that is giving them the technical advice they need in terms of how to make some of the changes and reforms in a way that is not overly disruptive. But there are other countries that have done this and made these transitions. There are countries that have a more mixed economy but that have been able to develop strong entrepreneurs and a business class.

And so Cuba should take ideas, steal ideas from wherever you see something working. Now, my advice would be don't steal ideas from places where it's not working. (Laughter.) And there are some economic models that just don't work. And that's not an ideological opinion on my part. That's just the objective reality that there's some economies that have had great difficulty in how they operate, and it gets harder and harder as time goes by.

So I think that some of what's going to have to happen will be internal to Cuba. And that's not going to be determined by the United States, that's going to be determined by the Cuban government and the Cuban people. What I can say is that the business leaders -- the U.S. business leaders who are here and the American people are not interested in Cuba failing. We're interested in Cuba succeeding. We're interested in Cuba being a partner with us.

We're interested in a situation in which businesspeople who are in Miami right now are taking a half hour, 45-minute flight, or however long it takes, and suddenly they're in a thriving Cuba where they're partnering with Cuban businesses. Young people like the ones we've met today, they're developing their own business on their own terms. They may have international partners, but they're not being dictated to. They're, in fact, the ones who are guiding their own models and their own prosperity. That more and more Cubans are seeing the concrete benefits of economic growth, and that that economic leadership, which I believe can be compatible with good education and good health care and equal pay for equal work, and all the principles that President Castro talked about at his press conference -- that's our hope. That's our desire.

When I initiated the change in policy, one of my arguments was that if something is not working for 50 years you stop doing it and try something new. (Applause.) And that applies to what the United States is doing. That also applies to what Cuba is doing. (Applause.)

And so we both I think are in a time when we should be examining new ideas. But the one thing that this gathering and hopefully my visit should have communicated is the Cuban people have nothing to fear from the United States. And I've said to the American people, we have nothing to fear from Cuba. And if we can build that trust, and let these young people develop their talents without fear, then I'm confident that the future of both countries and the cooperation between the two countries is going to be very promising.

So, thank you very much, everybody. (Applause.)

END

5:28 P.M. CST

Fuente: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/03/21/remarks-president-obama-entrepreneurship-and-opportunity-event-havana>