

Transfer shows Castro's hand is in everything

Fidel Castro's temporary ceding of power revealed his deep involvement in governmental details.

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WASHINGTON - If there was ever any doubt about Fidel Castro's single-handed control of Cuba, his proclamation temporarily handing over his governmental, political and financial powers should put that to rest.

Castro delegated to his brother and officially designated successor Raúl his top-ruler functions as first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, commander in chief of the armed forces, and president of the Council of State and Government.

But perhaps more tellingly, he also passed on his control of the island's "national and international" health, education and energy programs -- and specifically passed his power over the purse strings to those programs, keystones of Cuba's domestic and foreign policies.

Cuba has tens of thousands of medical personnel working abroad -- an estimated 20,000 in Venezuela alone -- and receives energy subsidies from President Hugo Chávez estimated by the U.S. State Department at \$1 billion.

He passed on to Health Minister José Ramón Balaguer his functions as "principal promoter of the national and international program of public health."

Similarly, he delegated to José Ramón Machado and Esteban Lazo Hernández, both members of the Communist Party's ruling Political Bureau, his role as "principal promoter of the national and international program of education."

His functions as "principal promoter of the national program of the energy revolution in Cuba" was passed on to Vice President Carlos Lage, also a member of the Political Bureau.

His statement added that the government funds for those programs "must continue to be managed and prioritized, as I have been doing personally," by a commission that includes Lage, Central Bank President Francisco Soberón Valdés, and Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque.

Overall, the statement confirmed Castro's single-handed power over most if not all of the key sections of his government and his personal control over governmental funds through what are known in Cuba as "the *comandante's* accounts."

In March, Castro received a delegation of U.S. energy experts and academics to discuss energy issues and spoke to them for eight hours. At one point, he read aloud Cuba's hour-by-hour energy consumption, commenting on specific spikes and the reasons behind them.

And a military physician who defected and now lives in Miami recently said that when the Cuban armed forces needed hard currency money to buy a CAT scan machine, Castro "loaned" the hospital \$1 million.