

# TV Martí boosts broadcasts to Cuba

**With Castro ailing, TV Martí has increased broadcasts to six times a week by using a civilian aircraft as part of \$10 million in funding.**

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TV Martí broadcasts to Cuba have increased to a six-times-a-week schedule by using a private aircraft, officials say, setting in motion a key component of the Bush administration's plan to accelerate a transition to democracy on the communist-ruled island.

The transmissions from the civilian aircraft, contracted by the U.S. government and flying out of Key West, come as Cuban leader Fidel Castro remained out of the public eye since he underwent surgery.

The new flights, which will take place Monday through Saturday evenings, are part of a \$10 million allotment by Congress for an airborne broadcasting project that would make it more difficult for Havana to jam the U.S.-funded TV Martí programs.

"The transmission from this plane is the fulfillment of the president's commitment to break the Cuban dictatorship's information blockade on the Cuban people, and will increase their access to timely and accurate information that they need at this critical time," Pedro Roig, director of the agency that runs TV and Radio Martí, said in a statement.

## **BLIMP WAS DESTROYED**

A U.S. military C-130 aircraft had been broadcasting the TV signals for only four hours a week since hurricanes destroyed the broadcasting blimp in Cudjoe Key. The new airplane was described only as a twin-engine G1.

"No special equipment is necessary" to receive the station's signals, said Alberto Mascaro, TV Martí's chief of staff. "It's an over-the-air signal so all that is needed is a television."

The addition of broadcasts, which had been expected at the end of the month, was speeded up because of Castro's health crisis. A statement read on Cuban TV Monday said Castro, who will be 80 on Aug. 13, had undergone "complicated" surgery to stop intestinal bleeding.

He has since been reported to be on the mend, but has not been seen in public.

"I'm very happy over these news transmissions, and I believe they are a great example of the Bush administration's compromise in the fight for liberty and freedom in Cuba," said Miami Republican Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen.

Congress last year allotted \$10 million for the new aircraft, on top of \$28 million to cover operating expenses for Radio/TV Martí. The private aircraft likely will replace a Pennsylvania National Guard Commando Solo C-130 that has been transmitting to Cuba.

## **SIGNAL JAMMED**

Cuba was largely successful in jamming the U.S. signals since the radio opened in 1985 and the TV station followed in 1990.

The new broadcast aircraft currently is being used only to transmit TV Martí, but a future generation of the plane possibly will be outfitted with an FM band transmitter for Radio Martí, Mascaro said.

"Our hope as an agency is to be able to send messages of freedom, democracy and hope," he said. "We want to provide Cubans with a free flow of media, which they do not enjoy."

Havana has long argued that Radio/TV Martí, even though it broadcasts from U.S. airspace, violates international regulations by aiming its signals at Cuba.