

No rush to judgment

OUR OPINION: PROPERTY CLAIMS AN ISSUE FOR A FUTURE CUBA GOVERNMENT

Opinion
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Revived interest in claims for property confiscated in Cuba is understandable given the renewed hope for ending Cuba's tyranny. People whose firms and holdings were expropriated may have meritorious claims. Yet any remedy for such claims will be a long time coming. Ultimately the rules for property claims and compensation will be determined by a future democratic Cuban government.

More important now is to lay the groundwork for an orderly transition to such a Cuban government. One critical step is to counter the propaganda drilled into Cubans on the island for decades: the fear that exiles will return to kick people out of homes. The truth is that most Cuban Americans wouldn't dream of taking anything from people who already have suffered so much under communism.

To make a property claim, there has to be some kind of transition government in place -- and there's no sign of one yet. The recent report by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba emphasized that the U.S. priority will be to provide humanitarian assistance, such as food and medicine, once a transition government requests help. The United States would also "reassure the Cuban people" that the U.S. government will not support any arbitrary effort to evict them from their homes.

A U.S. government registry lists 5,911 claims, most of them from the 1960s, by U.S. citizens for confiscated property totaling \$1.8 billion. It will be the job of a future Cuban government to decide how to resolve those claims, as well as any other claims that Cubans inside and outside the island might have. The decisions likely will be tied to economic policy and the need for foreign investment. For many, the issue will be charged with emotion -- as is usually the case when reconciling grievances and rebuilding a nation.