

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama, U.S. Leaders Meet to Tackle Immigration Reform.....	1
Secretary Clinton Meets with Haitian President-Elect Martelly.....	1
U.S. May Give \$25 Million in Nonlethal Aid to Libyan Rebels	2
U.S. Announces Initiatives for Electronic Vehicles.....	2

President Obama, U.S. Leaders Meet to Tackle Immigration Reform

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama met with a broad group of elected officials and leaders in law enforcement, business and religious groups at a White House conference on immigration reform.

The president was convening experts from across the domestic political spectrum to hear their ideas on how best to tackle immigration reform to meet anticipated economic and security needs, the White House said in a statement on the April 19 conference.

“The president listened to stakeholders describe a variety of problems that result from the broken [immigration] system, including: educating the best and brightest but then shipping that talent overseas; concerns over the ability of businesses to reliably hire and retain a legal workforce; and the need to level the playing field for American workers by ending the underground labor market,” the White House said.

Law enforcement officers expressed concern that without immigration reform, enforcing federal immigration laws becomes a critical distraction from public safety and crime fighting mandates to keep local communities safe, the White House statement said. It added that faith leaders have stressed the damage to communities when families are separated, including parents who are taken away from their U.S.-citizen children.

Obama reiterated his commitment to comprehensive immigration reform.

“The president made it clear that while his administration continues to improve our legal immigration system, secure our borders and enhance our immigration enforcement so that it is more effectively and sensibly focusing on criminals, the only way to fix what’s broken about our immigration system is through legislative action in Congress,” the White House said.

Obama pledged to continue to work to forge bipartisan consensus and said he will intensify efforts to lead a civil debate on the issue in the coming weeks and months. He urged meeting participants to take an active role by leading a constructive public dialogue on how to fix the immigration system and stressed the need to bring the debate to communities around the country and to involve many sectors of American society “in insisting Congress act to create a system that meets our nation’s needs for the 21st century and that upholds America’s history as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants,” the statement

said.

The president and his Cabinet have committed to following up with each participant to maximize the outcome of the talks in order to highlight the immigration debate.

Secretary Clinton Meets with Haitian President-Elect Martelly

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Haitian President-elect Michel Martelly expressed their mutual hope for Haiti’s future April 20 in their first meeting since Martelly, known as Sweet Mickey to fans, clinched his election in March after two rounds of voting.

Clinton congratulated Martelly, a musician and radio host, on his election, and she also congratulated the people of Haiti for navigating a difficult election that she predicted will strengthen the nation’s democratic foundations.

“This election offered the people of Haiti the opportunity to give voice to their dreams for their country’s future. Now, it’s up to Mr. Martelly and his government to realize those dreams.”

An earthquake, a hurricane and a cholera epidemic created a triple-decker disaster in 2010 that Haitians rose above to hold elections, which began with a round of voting in November and finished with a runoff election in March.

The island nation has barely begun to recover from the January 2010 earthquake that left an estimated 316,000 people dead and 680,000 displaced from their homes, according to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Beyond the losses in life and property, Clinton said, Haiti must also work to develop stronger institutions to lift itself from poverty and join the global economy.

She said that streamlining business licensing and registration will be key in attracting more investment to fuel economic growth. Further, the Haitian people deserve a more humane judicial system, she said, with updated criminal codes and modern judicial processes.

These are among the reforms that Martelly advocated in his campaign. Clinton expressed optimism and enthusiasm about what he will be able to achieve for his country. “This is not only a goal for our foreign policy, but it is a personal goal for me, my husband and many of

us here in Washington," she said.

Martelly said the prolonged election process "demonstrated the fierce determination of the Haitian people to build its own democracy." Speaking through an interpreter, the president-elect acknowledged the challenges before him and his responsibility to develop an action plan. Restarting the economy will be a "fundamental necessity" for his government.

Martelly said he plans on "working relentlessly ... to give new life to the business sector and to develop the capabilities of government institutions and of civil society." The president-elect echoed the secretary of state's call for justice reform and cooperation in combating drug trafficking and corruption.

"Our discussions focused on the urgent need to ensure that the aid will be effective for our citizens and to avoid waste," Martelly told reporters present for the emergence of the two leaders from their talks.

U.S. May Give \$25 Million in Nonlethal Aid to Libyan Rebels

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the United States is moving to authorize up to \$25 million worth of nonlethal assistance to Libya's Transitional National Council as part of its effort to protect civilians and civilian-populated areas from forces loyal to Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi.

Speaking in Washington with Haitian President-elect Michel Martelly April 20, Clinton said the assistance includes medical supplies, uniforms, boots, tents, personal protective gear, radios and halal meals that will be "drawn down from items already in government stocks that correspond with the needs that we have heard from the Transitional National Council."

Clinton said the U.S. action "is consistent with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, which among other actions authorized member states to take all necessary measures to protect civilians and civilian-populated areas."

She also said officials in the U.S. State and Defense departments are working closely with other countries to help coordinate "who among the international community can provide which goods and services."

She noted that Libya's opposition began as a spontaneous response to Qadhafi's rule, consisting mainly of "business people, students, lawyers, doctors, professors who have

very bravely moved to defend their communities and to call for an end to the regime in Libya."

The group was not an organized militia when protests began in February, but has "held its own against a brutal assault by the Qadhafi forces," the secretary said. She said the United States will continue to take actions that are consistent with the U.N. authorization in order to fulfill the international community's commitment to the Libyan people.

State Department spokesman Mark Toner said April 20 that Chris Stevens, a former official at the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli, has been in Libya talking to members of the opposition to assess their needs and relay them to U.S. officials in Washington.

Stevens "has allowed us to get a better sense of what kind of nonlethal assistance we can provide to them ... in a relatively quick fashion," Toner said.

"We are getting a better sense of their command structure, of their coherence as an entity, and that's helping us ... make better decisions about how we can help them," he added.

"There's an urgent situation here and they need our help," Toner said.

U.S. Announces Initiatives for Electronic Vehicles

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu has announced two initiatives to help meet President Obama's goals of reducing oil imports and putting 1 million electric vehicles on the road by 2015.

"First, the department is partnering with Google, private industry and our National Renewable Energy Labs to collect and make available the location of charging stations around the country," Chu said in a conference call with reporters April 19. He said this collaboration will provide the public with more accurate and reliable information on the location of charging stations.

"Second, we're making \$5 million available to support community programs, plants, electronic vehicle infrastructure and charging stations," Chu added. He said this will help to pave the way for installation of both home and public chargers nationwide.

The secretary said the Energy Department is also taking steps to meet the president's goal of reducing U.S. oil imports by one-third by 2025.

"This will require us to do several things: to improve the efficiency of our vehicles; to develop a new generation of cleaner alternative fuels; and deploy advanced vehicle technology like electric vehicles," Chu said.

To meet these goals, the Obama administration is partnering with local communities and cities across the country.

"Working together, we can reduce our dependence on oil, save families and businesses money and put the United States in control of our energy future," Chu said.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood also participated in the call. He said the Transportation Department is partnering for clean energy through efforts to set higher gasoline standards, to employ more high-speed rail systems and to work with the automobile industry to promote more battery-powered cars.

"These alternative forms of transportation are the answer" to carrying out the president's vision for energy independence, LaHood said.

Chu said the latest initiatives will build on the success of the Energy Department's Clean Cities initiative, which brings together federal, state and local governments, the auto industry, private-sector fleet operators and community leaders "to help communities use less oil and gasoline to power their vehicles." The public-private partnership has saved nearly 3 billion gallons of gasoline since its inception in 1993, according to the Energy Department.

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