

Inquiry Is Reopened on Cuban

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By GEORGE VOLSKY

Special to The New York Times

MIAMI, Aug. 14—The Federal Bureau of Investigation reopened today its inquiry into the background of a Cuban-American who was appointed last week director of the Cuban refugee program.

The F.B.I. acted after receiving information that the appointee, Ricardo Nuñez, is a defendant in a dozen civil lawsuits, the existence of which was not indicated in the bureau's original clearance.

The appointment of Mr. Nuñez to head the 15-year-old Federal agency that has an annual budget of \$90-million, has raised many protests in the Cuban community here and elsewhere.

The 42-year-old wealthy Republican, who is described here as "a protégé of a protégé" of Charles G. Rebozo, a close friend of former President Richard M. Nixon, was named to the \$39,000-a-year job by the outgoing Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Caspar W. Weinberger.

The Cuban refugee program has always had professionals in social work heading it even though the job is appointive. It is part of H.E.W.

"This is a 100 per cent political appointment made to collect money for the 1976 Presidential campaign," said Rafael Villaverde, who heads a social agency in Miami and who is a Republican.

"Mr. Nuñez has no experience in social work whatsoever. He responds to a small group of Mexican-Americans in the White House," Mr. Villaverde said.

Gramco is a defunct Bahamas-based investment fund. An international banker said today, that in the late nineteen-sixties, Gramco salesmen in many Latin-American countries used to be jailed for infringement of local currency regulations. At that time, Mr. Nuñez was a top Gramco executive in Nassau.

Suit for Legal Fees

The operations of N.B.S., a developer and general contractor owned wholly by Mr. Nuñez and his family, are being investigated by the F.B.I.

According to court records here, N.B.S. is being sued by about 30 persons for alleged nonpayment for building materials and services, which are said to total about \$300,000. In addition, several Miami attorneys are suing N.B.S. for about \$10,000 in unpaid legal fees.

The assets of N.B.S. are said to be negligible by attorneys for several plaintiffs in cases involving the company. But they say that Mr. Nuñez, who left Miami for the Bahamas

after resigning as a translator and script writer for the Voice of America, is believed to be worth several million dollars.

William S. Ballenger, chief of special projects for H.E.W., said that Mr. Nuñez's appointment had been "cleared and approved" by the White House.

He added that an original F.B.I. check had shown the Cuban-American to be "clean as a hound's tooth." There was no immediate explanation as to why the investigation did not reveal the pending lawsuits in Dade and Broward Counties. At least one judgment, involving nonpayment for building services, went against Mr. Nuñez.

The office of Fernando DeBaca, a special assistant to President Ford for Hispanic Affairs, said today that it had nothing to do with the appointment. But in an interview with The New York Times last April, Mr. DeBaca said he had "recommended" a Cuban for the post.

Mr. Ballenger, conceding that Mr. Nuñez had no experience in social work, said that his business activities "would be useful" for the job.

The opposition to Mr. Nuñez's appointment was particularly vocal among Cubans who are Republicans.

"This is unbelievable," said Dr. Fernando Penabaz, a prominent Cuban Republican leader since the early nineteen-sixties. "Mr. Nuñez was unknown in G.O.P. politics here until he got on the coattails of Manuel Casanova [a Cuban banker] and joined the Mexican clique at the White House, all of whom used to work hand in glove with Bebe Rebozo."

Nominee

White House Is Said to Support Political Figure for Cuban Post

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By GEORGE VOLSKY

By United Press International

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MIAMI, April 10 — White House aides are urging the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to appoint a Cuban political figure in this country as director of the Cuban Refugee Program, according to Cubans who work for the assistance agency. Previously the post has been held by nonpolitical specialists.

The \$39,000-a-year job became vacant last month upon the death of Howard Palmateir, the program's director since 1969.

According to the Cubans, who sked not to be identified, a number of Cuban-American Republican leaders who have close political contacts in Washington, have persuaded White House officials to take what many within the program regard as unusual interest in the technical administrative job.

The 14-year-old program, whose main offices are here, is part of H.E.W. and has a current budget of \$90-million. It has requested only \$40.3-million for the next fiscal year, beginning July 1, because its work is decreasing; very few refugees are arriving now from Cuba.

A 'Critical Problem'

Fernando DeBaca, a special assistant to President Ford who deals with Hispanic affairs; today confirmed White House intervention in the matter of a new director.

Calling the appointment a "critical problem," Mr. DeBaca said he had "recommended" to H.E.W. Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger that he "take a good look at all qualified Latin outside the department as possible candidates for the post."

William Taft, Mr. Weinberger's executive assistant, said that "several names" of Cubans had been mentioned to his office as candidates for the appointment.

"A decision about it has not yet been made," he said. "We're studying all the alternatives."

Among those mentioned as actively seeking the appointment are Armando Lacasa, head of a Federally funded manpower agency; José M. Casanova, a banker, and Ricardo Nuñez, a businessman and former top executive of Gramco, the now defunct Bahama-based investment fund. All three are Republicans.

Mr. Lacasa and Mr. Casanova head two feuding factions of Republican Latins here. Mr. Casanova, chairman of the Florida Hispanic Committee for the Re-election of the President in 1972, reportedly has close political ties with Mr. DeBaca.

Asked today whether he had heard that the three men were vying for the post, Mr. DeBaca, in a telephone interview, replied: "If someone mentioned them to me I've forgotten them."

In any event, I did not suggest any names to Secretary Weinberger and the ultimate decision is his."

In Latin circles here, there is considerable opposition to what many Cubans see as an effort to politicize the refugee program.

"The program, which has been doing a very good job for many years, must not now become a political maneuver," said a Cuban official who asked to be identified only as "a Cuban." "The program has to be a professional, who not only knows his job inside out but who is also able to speak for it before Congressional committees," Mr. Villaverde said.

Since 1961, the program, created on personal instructions from President Kennedy, has spent about \$1-billion to help 700,000 Cuban refugees adjust to life in the United States.

Currently, only about 6,000 persons, mostly elderly and unemployable refugees, receive direct financial assistance. The program also partially subsidizes some social services for 35,000 other Cubans in many states.

Since very few Cuban refugees are arriving now in the United States, the Cuban refugee program is expected to be phased out in three or four years. All qualified Cubans in this country would then be eligible for assistance through local Social Security offices.

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Notes on People by Laurie Johnston

Ricardo Nunez-Portuondo, a Miami real-estate man who went there as a refugee from Cuba, was named yesterday as the first Cuban-American to head the Federal Government's Cuban Refugee Program. He was born in New York and was the Voice of America's Latin - American editor for nine years. He is a grandson of Emilio Nunez, who was a Vice President of Cuba, and a son of Dr. Emilio Nunez-Portuondo, who served as Prime Minister and Cuba's Ambassador to the United Nations.