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U.S. Asks Cuba To Keep Airlift

WASHINGTON — (AP) — The United States has asked Cuba to continue the six year old Cuban refugee airlift, but there appears scant prospect Premier Fidel Castro will say yes.

Havana's intent to shut down the U.S.-financed shuttle flights from Varadero to Miami was announced yesterday. Still awaiting Cuban approval for travel to America are some 100,000 Cubans with relatives in the United States.

State Department officials said the Swiss Embassy, representing the United States in Havana, has urged the Castro government to keep the airlift going until all who want reunion with their families have left Cuba.

Called Success

If the twice-a-day flights end, a unique chapter in the history of large-scale immigration to this country will be closed.

A total of 246,000 Cubans have flown here under a 1965 understanding designed to bring in from Cuba relatives of refugees already in the United States.

Washington has spent some \$600 million on the refugee program, including about \$1 million a year for the airlift. U.S. authorities rate it an outstanding success.

They say the refugees generally have adjusted well and work hard in their new lives in America; that one in nine here is on relief, and that of 12,800 college education loans

to the Cubans, only 150 are delinquent.

First 1000

State Department spokesman Robert J. McCloskey said that Cuban authorities had informed the Swiss Embassy in Havana that the airlift would be interrupted for several weeks starting today.

During this period, the Cubans said, they will be processing the final 1000 names of 33,000 who are registered to leave under a previously agreed U.S.-Cuban master list but have not yet come out.

After these have left, the Cubans said, the airlift will end. It has been ferrying 3000 to 4000 refugees a month.

Why Castro is stopping the flights is a matter of conjecture here, but his public posture does not indicate he is about to change his mind.

Some believe the Cuban chief does not want so many able members of his work force to leave the island. He has complained publicly of a dearth of skilled workers. He has rebuffed past U.S. efforts to include the 100,000 names for airlift processing.