

U.S. Cuban Refugee Program Split by Reports of Director's Political Activity

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MIAMI, May 8—The United States Cuban Refugee Program, founded 15 years ago as a non-partisan social agency, has been involved in the last four months in a bitter and divisive political controversy.

The dispute, here and in Washington, is centered on the program's director, Ricardo Nuñez, a 43-year-old Cuban-born Republican.

The program, part of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, is the largest and costliest refugee assistance effort ever undertaken by the United States Government.

Over \$1.1 billion has been spent so far on assistance to some 600,000 Cuban refugees, the overwhelming majority of

whom have adjusted well into the American economy.

Currently, the program has a budget of about \$90 million a year, even though very few new refugees are arriving in the country.

There are no plans for terminating the program, whose headquarters are in Miami. Rather, under the direction of Mr. Nuñez, the Ford Administration is trying to establish closer ties with present and past recipients of program aid. Critics contend this is being done for political reasons.

Census of Refugees

Mr. Nuñez is making a census of all refugees in the United States to create a "nationwide information bank." He has traveled extensively around the country, urging Cubans to take

part in the political process to "fill the leadership vacuum."

He has hand-picked his own all-Cuban advisory board, a move which H.E.W. Under Secretary Marjorie C. Lynch described as unauthorized by department regulations.

According to program employees, however, the board has met on a number of occasions in Mr. Nuñez's offices.

The group has reportedly drawn plans to create a new national Cuban organization, headed by Mr. Nuñez.

Cubans and Americans here have repeatedly charged that Mr. Nuñez has directly and indirectly intervened in the local and national political races since he became director of the program.

The Mayor of Miami, Maurice

A. Ferré, said that Mr. Nuñez was grooming a surrogate candidate, Rodolfo Nodal-Tara-Rafael Villaverde, head of Litfa, in an effort to oust him from office. There are reports in the Cuban community that Mr. Nuñez is considering challenging Representative Claude Pepper, a Democrat, in whose district many Cuban-Americans live.

In addition, according to several Spanish-language publications in Miami, Mr. Nuñez has created jobs for associates, has promised to reward friends with service contracts and has caused acrimonious dissension within a refugee professional association that the program subsidizes.

"Nuñez has stained the program with a stigma of politick-

ing and favoritism, which never existed there before," said the Havana, a social agency supported by state, local and Federal funds.

Mr. Nuñez declined to respond to a reporter's queries about the matter. Mrs. Lynch, in a telephone interview, said, "I'm sure that he knows what the Hatch Act is all about." The act forbids direct involvement of Federal officials in partisan politics.

In a series of recent interviews, civil servants here and in Washington have expressed dismay over what they perceived as the new political orientation of the program under Mr. Nuñez's direction.

Aides to Senator Edward M.

Kennedy, who heads the Subcommittee on Refugees of the Senate Judiciary Committee, are closely monitoring Mr. Nuñez's activities.

Senator Kennedy is said to be particularly disturbed over the transfer of the program's deputy director, Philip A. Holman, who was removed from his post last month reportedly over policy disagreements with Mr. Nuñez.

A number of Florida politicians interviewed in the last few weeks said that Mr. Nuñez took active part in the March 9 Presidential primary in Florida, although they disagree about the extent of his involvement.

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