

## **2015 QUARTER 1 SUMMARY:**

The first quarter of 2015 resonated with coverage stemming from President Obama's announcement in Dec. 2014 of the U.S.'s intention to normalize relations with Cuba. The end of the Cold War era relationship is el tema caliente en Sur Florida.

WLRN's Latin Americas Editor Tim Padgett frequently focused on the aftereffects and emerging opportunities related to normalizing relations with Cuba. The Latin America Report covered the reaction of South Florida's Congressional delegation as well as briefings by the State Department's top negotiators regarding meetings with Cubans in Havana for the first time since 1959. Our reporting topics also included managing expectations here at home, human rights, trade and travel policy changes, and also, support and opposition within local families to the change in U.S. policy.

January 2015 also marked the 5th anniversary of the earthquake in Haiti that killed 300,000 Port au Prince residents and destroyed much of the city. WLRN-Miami Herald News examined the state of the recovery and the growing unrest and emigration efforts that situation has prompted. Our coverage also noted the country faces its first presidential election year since the disaster and political tremors relating to the botched recovery plans may well erupt this year, possibly violently.

Venezuela's prolonged economic woes caused it to be identified as the most miserable economy on Earth, a situation that continues to disturb and distress its large ex-pat community in South Florida. After Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro referenced comrade Stalin, Padgett's commentaries and stories noted similarities in their economic policies, effects on the country, and, in Venezuela's case, an inability to continue supplying oil to neighboring countries. Devalued currency, deteriorating personal safety and continuous shortages of basic goods (so that a rare package of 36 condoms cost US \$750) continue to fuel property crimes and emigration efforts.

Latin America as a whole drew more than usual media attention this quarter also. Late night talk show host Conan O'Brien broadcast his program from Havana while another network's comedian, John Oliver, noted Ecuador's President doesn't seem ready for his prime time role. From corruption scandals in Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Panama and Ecuador, Padgett noted most of the regions' countries need to be institutionalized as their governments and policies defy even the basics of healthy functioning. Journalists and prosecutors are jailed and killed while officials never seem to suffer a similar fate.

The Sunshine Economy program opened with a focus on existing trade with Cuba and likely export-related changes in light of the President's announcement of loosened trade restrictions. However, the change in the legal status of same sex marriage in Florida also topped the headlines as the new year opened with reports of multiple gay weddings and celebrations throughout WLRN's coverage area. WLRN also noted the positive economic consequences of

the ban on same sex weddings being overturned. The impact on the legal profession as well as the wedding business industry plus changes to human resource benefits programs were explored in a Sunshine Economy program early in January.

Healthcare, race, business and philanthropy were the focus in an extended discussion with Ervin "Magic" Johnson and one of his Miami business partners, Miguel "Mike" Fernandez of the Simply Healthcare insurance firm. Obamacare in South Florida and the enrollment rates in South Florida continue to be part of WLRN's coverage as we discuss participation rates and consumer experiences with a focus on Hispanics, young people, first time enrollees, costs and challenges. WLRN has become a partner with Health News Florida, which receives support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Voters overwhelmingly approved Amendment 1 in 2014, which guarantees funding from real estate transactions for environmental protection purposes. Now, what qualifies for the funds is up to the state legislature. Two Florida legislators representing opposing parties in the House and the Senate joined leaders of prominent environmental groups to discuss environmental spending opportunities and priorities.

Meanwhile WLRN's veteran political reporter Rick Stone again relocated himself in the state capital for the duration of the annual legislative session. Stone supplements WLRN's regular coverage of state government to explore this and other issues of keen interest to our audience each year during the session.

The Florida Roundup, our weekly news talk call-in and live blogging program, discussed solar power and a petition currently circulating to allow homeowners to generate their own electricity and sell it to others. The petition has reviews and other hurdles to jump before possibly making it onto the November ballot.

Winter is peak tourism season positively impacting the hotel and restaurant industry but having little effect on customer service or wages. While tourism rates rise, wages don't. WLRN addressed those trends and impacts as well as plans for the nation's largest shopping mall planned for northwest Miami-Dade County.

The first quarter of 2015 also is political season for presidential hopefuls so Florida's Marco Rubio, Jeb Bush and other potential candidates start more publicly gearing up for the race to the top position. Journalists on the Florida Roundup compared and contrasted the focus and styles of the two big GOP contenders early in the year and also noted whom to watch this year during the Florida legislative session.

Also on the political front, Florida's incumbent governor denies banning the use by state employees of the terms "climate change" and "global warming" in official documents and discourse, a purported directive that sparked derision and mocking remarks on a national as well as a statewide level. The Florida Roundup featured a discussion of the ramifications of this issue.

Events involving law enforcement and minorities shared our attention as a rising tide of police-related shooting deaths sparked outrage and protests in Miami and nationwide. WLRN's The Florida Roundup explored these issues and the news that George Zimmerman, Trayvon Martin's killer, was in trouble again but would not be charged with civil rights violations in that case.

News that North Miami Beach police were using real people's mugshots for target practice broke in the first quarter and WLRN's reporters joined other journalists to discuss that as well as the police chief's apology on The Florida Roundup program.

Inmate deaths and injuries in the state's prison system prompted calls for the Florida Dept of Law Enforcement to investigate. The pressure rose to the point where the FDLE Chief lost his job. Meanwhile, student testing emerged as another pressure point issue in Florida as well as the nation as that and vaccinations moved to center stage late in the first quarter of 2015. WLRN reporter John OConnor addressed those and more issues in his focus on education in Florida. WLRN continues to staff and maintain the StateImpact Florida website, an initiative originally created by NPR and several member stations.

As we enter the second quarter, the legislative session continues and police shootings of minorities again capture headlines, prompting police departments to look into their policies and personnel issues. WLRN-Miami Herald News' team is focused on sharing these and other issues and events of import and interest to S Florida via radio and web reporting.