



LATEST NEWS: BUSH: "BETTER DAYS" AHEAD TWO YEARS AFTER KATRINA



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Castro's tip: Clinton-Obama the winning ticket

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By Anthony Boadle

HAVANA (Reuters) - Ailing Cuban leader Fidel Castro is tipping Democratic candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama to team up and win the U.S. presidential election.

Clinton leads Obama in the race to be the Democratic nominee for the November 2008 election, and Castro said they would make a winning combination.

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"The word today is that an apparently unbeatable ticket could be Hillary for president and Obama as her running mate," he wrote in an editorial column on U.S. presidents published on Tuesday by Cuba's Communist Party newspaper,

Granma.

At 81, Castro has outlasted nine U.S. presidents since his 1959 revolution turned Cuba into a thorn in Washington's side by building a communist society about 90 miles offshore from the United States.

He said all U.S. presidential candidates seeking the "coveted" electoral college votes of Florida have had to demand a democratic government in Cuba to win the backing of the powerful Cuban exile community.

Clinton and Obama, both senators, called for democratic change in Cuba last week.

Castro has not appeared in public since intestinal illness forced him to hand over power to his brother Raul Castro in July last year.

He has turned to writing dozens of columns and essays, but rumors that his health is worsening or that he may even be dead have swirled through

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the Cuban exile community in Miami in the last two weeks.

Castro's only reference to U.S. President George W. Bush in his latest essay was to say that he "needed fraud" to win Florida's electoral college votes and the presidency in the fiercely contested election in 2000.

Castro said former President Bill Clinton was "really kind" when he bumped into him and the two men shook hands at a U.N. summit meeting in 2000. He also praised Clinton for sending elite police to "rescue" shipwrecked Cuban boy Elian Gonzalez from the home of his Miami relatives in 2000 to end an international custody battle.

But even Clinton was forced to bow to Miami politics and tighten the U.S. embargo against Cuba in 1996, using as a "pretext" the shooting down of two small planes used by exile groups to overfly Havana, Castro wrote.

He said his favorite U.S. president since 1959 was Jimmy Carter, another Democrat, because he was not an "accomplice" to efforts to violently overthrow the Cuban government.

Sixteen years after Dwight Eisenhower broke off diplomatic ties with Cuba, Carter restored low-level relations in 1977 when interest sections were opened in each country's capital.

Castro made no mention of Republican Cold War victor Ronald Reagan, or of John F. Kennedy, whose Democratic administration launched the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion by CIA-trained Cuban exiles in 1961.

One of the most dangerous moments of the Cold War came a year later when Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev faced off for 13 days over Soviet missiles that Castro allowed Moscow to place in Cuba.

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