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U.S. Commerce Chief Heading to Cuba for Talks

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[President Obama](#) will dispatch [Penny Pritzker](#), the commerce secretary, to Cuba next week to discuss a raft of new rules easing American travel and business between the nations, the first such high-level talks since he announced he was [normalizing relations](#) with a Cold War adversary.

Ms. Pritzker will meet with senior Cuban officials on Oct. 6 and 7, the Commerce Department announced on Monday, to describe the [regulatory changes that took effect last week](#) and to hear from them on “the structure and status of the Cuban economy.” She is the second member of Mr. Obama’s cabinet to travel to Cuba since his decision last year to upend more than 50 years of American policy and re-establish diplomatic ties with Havana.

The administration announced the trip as Mr. Obama prepared to meet with President Raúl Castro of Cuba on Tuesday on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, their [second meeting](#) since they agreed to reconcile in December 2014.

Secretary of State John Kerry [went to Havana last month](#) to mark the reopening of the American Embassy there. Ms. Pritzker has also been a central player in pressing forward on the thaw because her agency is in charge of making and enforcing many of the policies that govern how Americans may do business with Cuba, particularly given that the United States embargo against Havana is still in place.

The president has called on Congress to lift the legislative bans on travel and trade with Cuba, but the White House has acknowledged that it is unlikely to happen given opposition by Republican leaders who say Mr. Castro's government is a brutal dictatorship that should continue to be isolated from the United States.

The 1996 law that codifies much of the embargo prohibits the United States from recognizing any Cuban government that includes Mr. Castro or his brother Fidel, and applies strict sanctions that cannot be lifted unless the president certifies that there is a democratically elected government in power in Havana.

Still, Mr. Obama is using his executive authority to skirt the spirit — if not the letter — of the embargo, most recently through a set of Commerce Department and Treasury Department rules that took effect on Sept. 21.

They allow cruise ship and ferry service between the United States and Cuba; permit American companies to open physical locations and hire workers there; and make it possible for the first time in decades for certain American businesses, including in the telecommunications sector, to form partnerships with Cuban firms.

Ms. Pritzker will participate in talks that are "intended to facilitate more effective implementation of new U.S. policies toward Cuba," the Commerce Department said in a statement on Monday. With the first anniversary of the normalization announcement only a couple of months away, Mr. Obama has been pressing to make as much headway as possible in breaking down barriers between the United States and Cuba.

When the rules were issued this month, Ms. Pritzker said they could help create "long overdue economic reform" in Cuba, and business leaders who had been agitating to loosen the regulations said doing so would pressure Havana to open its own markets and relax its own strictures.

At the same time, officials acknowledge that some of the changes announced by the Obama administration will yield results only if Cuba modifies aspects of its state-run economy to facilitate them. For example, while the Commerce Department lifted export restrictions on some electronic equipment and civilian aviation safety materials, such items would still be difficult to transmit unless Cuba drops rules that mandate that all imports go through a government agency.

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