Since the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, the embassy has taken charge, a shift that Consul General Brendan Mullarkey said "greatly improved customer service" and has resulted in positive feedback from visa applicants.

The political and economic section, for its part, kicked off a new human rights dialogue with the Cuban government in March and is beginning to establish working-level government contacts. "It's not business as usual yet, but officials are a lot more open to meeting with us," said Political Section Chief Justin Davis.

For Ambassador Jeffrey DeLaurentis, Embassy Havana's chargé d'affaires, two key benefits of the re-establishment of ties have been that there are now many more opportunities for cooperation with Cuban officials and that American diplomats are better able to advocate for universal values like the freedom of speech and the freedom of assembly.

"Having a normal relationship with Cuba will enable us to advocate better, to get to know the country better, and to better serve the growing number of Americans coming to Cuba," DeLaurentis said.

"HAVING A NORMAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CUBA WILL ENABLE US TO ADVOCATE BETTER, TO GET TO KNOW THE COUNTRY BETTER, AND TO BETTER SERVE THE GROWING NUMBER OF AMERICANS COMING TO CUBA ..."
– AMBASSADOR JEFFREY DELAURENTIS

As with any change, however, the reopening of Embassy Havana has also created new challenges. Following the December announcements by Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro, for example, U.S. travel to Cuba has spiked, rising 35 percent. Mullarkey and other officers noted that as the number of Americans traveling to Cuba has grown, so have demands for American citizen services.

For management officers, the chief challenge may simply be meeting an expected surge in demand for officer housing and supplies in a country where decades of economic stagnation have left buildings crumbling and store shelves poorly stocked. For years, Foreign Service officers have dealt with the nation's creaking infrastructure. Incoming shipments of household goods and vehicles often take months to clear customs, despite the proximity of the state