US Senator Marco Rubio Introduces Bill to Allot $20M Toward Regime Change in Venezuela

*This week's bipartisan **Venezuela Humanitarian Assistance and Defense of Democratic Governance Act** not only seeks to pump US$10 million to Venezuela as part of a "humanitarian assistance" package but also looks to provide millions to efforts to undermine the government of President Nicolas Maduro.*

The bill also allots an additional US$10 million for 'democracy promotion,' including "US$500,000 to carry out the activities … with the Organization of American States to ensure credible international observation that contributes to free, fair, and transparent democratic electoral processes in Venezuela" and "US$9,500,000 to carry out the activities … directly, or through nongovernmental organizations to defend internationally recognized human rights … support the efforts of independent media outlets … facilitate open and uncensored access to the Internet … and to combat corruption."

As part of the 11 section plan, the legislation aims to support the move by the head of the Organization of American States, OAS, Luis Almagro, to invoke the "Democratic Charter" against the country. The bill states that Maduro's government and Venezuela's Supreme Tribunal of Justice have "carried out systematic efforts to undermine, block, and circumvent the authorities and responsibilities of the Venezuelan National Assembly as mandated by the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela."

President Nicolas Maduro

The bill, introduced by U.S. Senators Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Ben Cardin (D-MD), also plans

to instruct the U.S. Secretary of State to use the U.S. Permanent Mission to the OAS to "take additional steps" to help Almagro, who has had a **hostile obsession** with the Maduro government **while turning a blind eye** to human rights violation by right-wing regimes in the region, continue with his attempts to throw out Venezuela from the organization.

In April, Venezuela announced that it would become the first country to officially withdraw from OAS, because of what it claimed were continued attacks against its government.

A deadline of 180 days would be given to the secretary of state to hand down a report to show the involvement of senior Venezuelan government officials for their alleged involvement in corruption and the illicit drugs trade, a witch hunt that has already been used by the Trump to target them with sanctions.

Venezuela's Vice President Tareck El Aissami, accused by the U.S. government of aiding drug traffickers and Middle Eastern terrorists, has his assets frozen by the United State. El Aissami however, has denied the allegations as slander.

Other parts of the bill, focus on U.S. economic interests, particularly in regard to Venezuela's role as a regional energy power. As part of a wider international effort, the U.S. would leverage the Caribbean to respond to the crisis, where many Caribbean countries "which depend largely on high cost imported fuel for electricity generation, and many of which have benefited from preferential treatment by Venezuela."

The bill plans to strengthen the U.S.-backed Caribbean Energy Security Initiative, as well as financially support regional investment energy diversification across the Caribbean and Central America.

The legislation also evokes Russia fear mongering, detailing concerns over Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA and its transactions with Rosneft, Russia's state oil company. Fearful that PDVSA could default on its US$4 and US$5 billion loans from Rosneft, regardless of Venezuela steadfast debt repayments, the bill warned that Rosneft could come into control of PDVSA's U.S. subsidiary, CITGO Petroleum Corporation, which "controls critical energy infrastructure in 19 States in the United States."

The bill states that therefore U.S. President Donald Trump "should take all necessary four steps to prevent Rosneft from gaining control of five critical United States interstate energy infrastructure."

The bill so far has the backing of Republican Senators John McCain, Dick Durbin, John Cornyn, and their Democratic colleagues Bob Menendez, Bill Nelson, Tim Kaine and Chris Van Hollen.

Despite repeated calls by the Venezuelan government for peaceful dialogue and negotiations with the opposition, large protests have continued in the streets, with more radical elements employing violence in efforts to force an ouster of Maduro.

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