

AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE
TO H. RES. 259
OFFERED BY MR. DUNCAN OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Strike the preamble and insert the following:

Whereas in Venezuela, President Nicolas Maduro controls the Presidency, a majority of the municipalities, the Supreme Court, the military leadership, and the leadership of Petr6leos de Venezuela (PDVSA), and has gutted the National Assembly of the power it constitutionally holds;

Whereas in late October 2016, Venezuela's state courts and National Electoral Council, which are comprised of political allies of President Maduro, halted efforts to hold a referendum pursuant to provisions of the Venezuelan constitution to recall President Maduro, thereby denying the Venezuelan people the ability to pursue a democratic solution to Venezuela's crisis;

Whereas Venezuela's National Electoral Council postponed elections for governors and mayors scheduled for December 2016 and has not set a date to reschedule these elections;

Whereas there have been several attempts at dialogue between President Maduro and the opposition over the past year, which have all failed to achieve results;

Whereas a political solution is the way to provide sustainable change for the Venezuelan people, but the dialogues up until now have not been successful;

Whereas the Government of Venezuela continues to silence its citizens through political arrests, with more than 180 political prisoners currently in jail, including opposition leader Leopoldo López;

Whereas Joshua Holt, a United States citizen, remains imprisoned in Venezuela awaiting a trial, with five postponed hearings to date;

Whereas police and military raids have led to widespread allegations of abuse, including extrajudicial killings, mass arbitrary detentions, torture in prisons, forced evictions, and arbitrary deportations;

Whereas Venezuela is immersed in a deep economic crisis, with the highest inflation in the world and current inflation estimated to top roughly 1,600 percent in 2017, according to the International Monetary Fund;

Whereas in July 2016, President Maduro handed over control of the food supply system to the military, which has enabled corruption, fraud, and food trafficking by the military contributing to food shortages, a scarcity of basic goods, and political discrimination in the distribution of food and basic goods;

Whereas deteriorating conditions in health care persist, with the World Health Organization estimating that there are shortages for 75 percent of necessary medications and medical supplies, up from 55 percent in 2014 and 67 percent in 2015;

Whereas a recent survey – conducted jointly by the Central University of Venezuela, the Andrés Bello Catholic University and the Simón Bolívar University – found that almost 75 percent of Venezuelans lost an average of at

least 19 pounds in 2016 as a result of a lack of proper nutrition amidst the country's economic crisis;

Whereas the country is facing increasing outbreaks of malaria and diphtheria, previously eradicated diseases in Venezuela;

Whereas the Health Ministry in Venezuela published an epidemiological bulletin in May 2017 (the first since 2015), showing a 30 percent increase in infant mortality, a 66 percent rise in maternal mortality, and a 76 percent increase in malaria cases;

Whereas the country has experienced an increase in emigration, evident by the over 18,000 asylum requests from Venezuelans seeking to enter the United States in 2016, which according to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services was the highest number of requests made by any nationality last year;

Whereas the Government of Venezuela has expanded its powers to regulate media and reduce the number of dissenting media outlets, including CNN en Español after CNN broadcasted a report alleging that Vice President Tarek El Aissami was directly linked to passport fraud involving members of Hezbollah;

Whereas, on February 13, 2017, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control designated Tarek Zaidan El Aissami Maddah as a Specially Designated Narcotics Trafficker pursuant to the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act for playing a significant role in international narcotics trafficking, and imposed sanctions on Mr. El Aissami and froze his assets in the United States;

Whereas, on March 14, 2017, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, issued a second report on the crisis in Venezuela following his May 2016 report, documenting an altercation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter by the Government of Venezuela and calling for free, fair, and open elections and the release of political prisoners without delay;

Whereas, on March 23, 2017, fourteen OAS Member States published a joint statement calling for the Government of Venezuela to hold elections, restore the constitutional powers of the National Assembly, and release political prisoners;

Whereas, on March 28, 2017, the OAS Permanent Council agreed by a vote of 20 in favor, 11 against, 2 abstentions, and 1 absent/nonvoting Member States to move forward in discussing the situation in Venezuela;

Whereas, on March 28, 2017, the Supreme Court of Venezuela stripped opposition leaders of the National Assembly of their parliamentary immunity and began to take steps to consider prosecuting them for treason;

Whereas, on March 29, 2017, the Venezuelan Supreme Court seized power from the democratically elected National Assembly and nullified the legislative branch's ability to function;

Whereas, on March 31, 2017, in the first major break of a sitting Venezuelan public official, Venezuelan Attorney General Luisa Ortega Díaz affirmed the Supreme Court's actions "had broken constitutional order";

Whereas, on March 31, 2017, Venezuelan citizens took to the streets protesting the Supreme Court's breach of power;

Whereas, on April 1, 2017, during an emergency meeting of the Mercosur countries, the foreign ministers of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay released a statement urging the Government of Venezuela to follow its constitution and guarantee “the effective separation of powers”;

Whereas, on April 1, 2017, the Supreme Court reversed its earlier decisions taking over the National Assembly’s legislative powers and stripping the legislators of their parliamentary immunity;

Whereas, on April 26, 2017, the Government of Venezuela announced its intent to withdraw from the OAS;

Whereas on May 1, 2017, President Maduro announced a national vote to create a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the Venezuelan Constitution of 1999 which was an attempt to distract the country’s citizens and the international community from the country’s political and economic crisis;

Whereas the OAS Permanent Council voted to hold a Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which is scheduled to occur on May 31, 2017, to consider the situation in Venezuela;

Whereas peaceful protests by Venezuelan citizens in March, April, and May of 2017 have been met with violence from Venezuelan authorities that has caused over 40 deaths and over 1,600 imprisonments;

Whereas, on May 17, 2017, the United Nations Security Council met to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela; and

Whereas, on May 18, 2017, the Department of the Treasury announced United States sanctions against eight Ven-

ezuelan Government officials, all members of Venezuela’s Supreme Court, pursuant to Executive Order 13692, for their responsibility in issuing a number of rulings that “interfere with or limit the National Assembly’s authority” and that “limit the ability of the National Assembly to conduct its constitutional duties”: Now, therefore, be it

Strike all after the resolved clause and insert the following:

1 That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) condemns the decisions by the Venezuelan
3 Supreme Court on March 28, 2017, and March 29,
4 2017, stripping the opposition legislators of their
5 parliamentary immunity and seizing power from the
6 National Assembly, nullifying all legislative actions;

7 (2) recognizes the decision by the Venezuelan
8 Supreme Court on April 1, 2017, to restore the op-
9 position legislators’ parliamentary immunity and the
10 National Assembly’s legislative powers;

11 (3) urges the Government of Venezuela to heed
12 the calls of the international community without
13 delay to hold free, fair, and open elections, release
14 all political prisoners, including United States citi-
15 zens, respect the rights of the National Assembly,
16 and accept international humanitarian assistance
17 through nongovernmental organizations;

1 (4) urges Organization of American States
2 (OAS) Member States to continue all efforts to sup-
3 port the Venezuelan people, regardless of Ven-
4 ezuela's intent to withdraw from the OAS, if the
5 Government of Venezuela fails to hold free, fair, and
6 open elections and release all political prisoners in a
7 timely manner;

8 (5) recognizes the strong leadership of OAS
9 Secretary General Luis Almagro in building a coali-
10 tion of OAS Member States in support of the rights
11 of the Venezuelan people; and

12 (6) encourages the President of the United
13 States to prioritize a resolution of the political, eco-
14 nomic, social, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela
15 through both multilateral cooperation with partners
16 in Latin America and the Caribbean at the OAS and
17 in the United Nations, and through targeted sanc-
18 tions against individuals in the Government of Ven-
19 ezuela responsible for the deterioration of democratic
20 institutions and the rule of law in the country, as
21 well as human rights violations.

