

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 25, 2016

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Jacob Lew
Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Kerry and Secretary Lew:

We write to urge you to take immediate action regarding the terrible economic, political, and human rights crisis in Venezuela. Despite having the world's largest oil reserves and rich natural resources, Venezuela's government has severely mismanaged the economy, undermined democracy in the country, and committed widespread human rights abuses against the Venezuelan people. Such negligence has resulted in food shortages affecting 82 percent of the people, hospitals lacking 85 percent of essential medicines, and growing social protests and violence.

People are literally starving, suicide rates are rising, and the government continues to repress its people. Lest we forget, in February 2014, the Maduro regime violently suppressed student protests, killing at least 43 people, injuring 800 more, and arresting 300 others. Since February, the government has imprisoned over 4,000 people for political purposes, including American citizens Francisco Márquez and Josh Holt. There are almost 100 political prisoners in Venezuela, and only a few weeks ago, more than 47 people were detained just for protesting for food. These continued arbitrary detentions show Maduro's utter disregard for basic democratic principles.

Today, democracy is failing in Venezuela. The Maduro regime controls the presidency, a majority of the municipalities, the Supreme Court, the military leadership, the state-owned oil company (PDVSA) leadership, and most of the media. Only the National Assembly is opposition-led; however, its ability to function has been undermined by Maduro's control of the Supreme Court, which has publicly abused its power, taken multiple actions to block the activities of the National Assembly, and engaged in constitutional and human rights violations. Even more alarming are the Maduro regime's unrelenting tactics to stall the recall referendum currently underway. This referendum is a lawful last-ditch effort for the suffering Venezuelan people to defend their democracy and fight for basic human rights.

At a Subcommittee hearing on June 22, Ambassador Michael Kozak testified that "Maduro's party has disregarded the rule of law, basic tenets of democracy, and international commitments to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms." Witnesses also testified that the U.S. has restricted visas for 62 Venezuelan individuals for human rights abuses and public corruption. In July, legislation also cleared the U.S. Congress to extend sanctions on human rights abusers in Venezuela. However, there are scores of other Venezuelan officials, including within the Supreme Court, federal judiciary, judges in various states, national and state prosecutors, and police and security officers who have reportedly directly engaged in human

rights abuses, efforts to undermine democracy, and public corruption. Many of these individuals remain free to access the U.S. financial system, so we strongly urge you to examine these reports and issue targeted sanctions against individuals who have participated in such abuses.

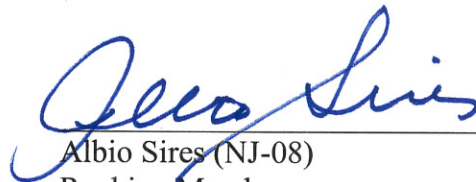
The United States since our founding has supported freedom for people all around the world. We stand in solidarity with the Venezuelan people in their pursuit of a constitutional recall referendum. Thus, before the United States takes any further steps to deepen U.S.-Venezuelan relations, we urge you to do the following: send a clear, consistent message through all available channels that the Maduro regime should hold a free and fair recall referendum by the end of this calendar year; release all political prisoners, including U.S. citizens and opposition leaders who are being held on false charges; adhere to democratic principles; permit the delivery of emergency food and medicine; and stop all government support for drug trafficking activities.

Thank you for your attention to these requests. We look forward to working with you to support democratic principles and freedom for the Venezuelan people.

Sincerely,



Jeff Duncan (SC-03)
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
House Committee on Foreign Affairs



Albio Sires (NJ-08)
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
House Committee on Foreign Affairs



Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-27)
Member of Congress



Christopher Smith (NJ-04)
Member of Congress



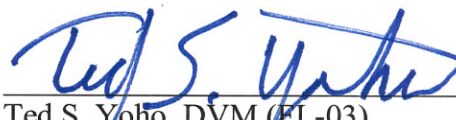
Debbie Wasserman Schultz (FL-23)
Member of Congress



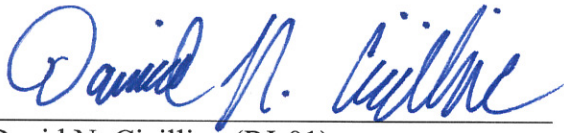
Ted Deutch (FL-21)
Member of Congress



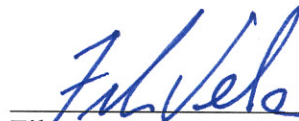
Matt Salmon (AZ-05)
Member of Congress



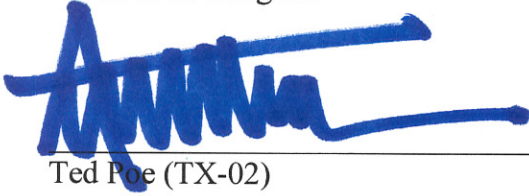
Ted S. Yoho, DVM (FL-03)
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline (RI-01)
Member of Congress



Filemon Vela Jr. (TX-34)
Member of Congress



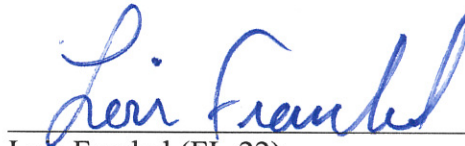
Ted Poe (TX-02)
Member of Congress



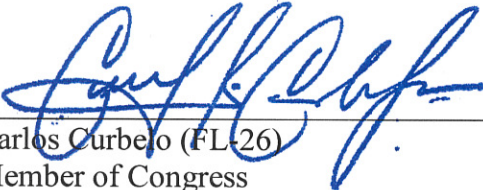
Daniel M. Donovan, Jr. (NY-11)
Member of Congress



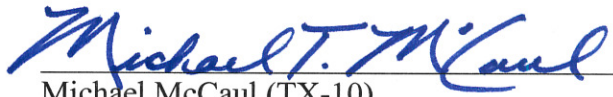
Donald Norcross (NJ-01)
Member of Congress



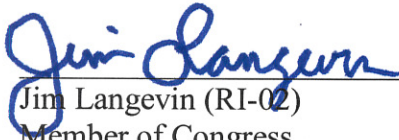
Lois Frankel (FL-22)
Member of Congress



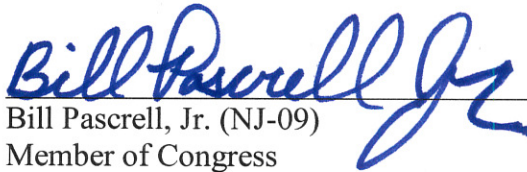
Carlos Curbeo (FL-26)
Member of Congress



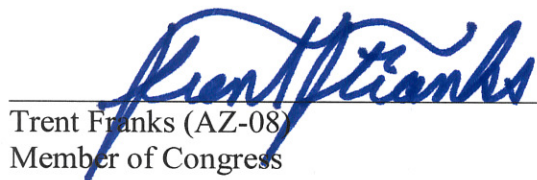
Michael McCaul (TX-10)
Member of Congress



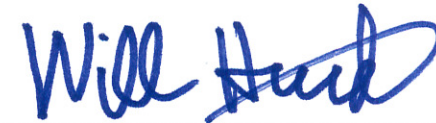
Jim Langevin (RI-02)
Member of Congress



Bill Pascrell, Jr. (NJ-09)
Member of Congress



Trent Franks (AZ-08)
Member of Congress



Will Hurd (TX-23)
Member of Congress



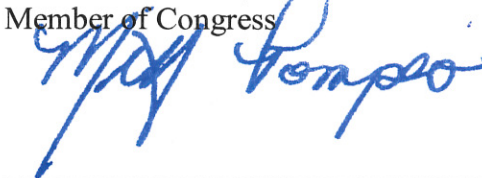
Alcee Hastings (FL-20)
Member of Congress



Frederica Wilson (FL-24)
Member of Congress



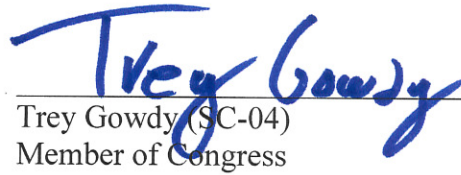
Ron DeSantis (FL-06)
Member of Congress



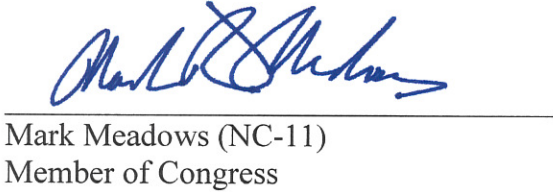
Mike Pompeo (KS-04)
Member of Congress



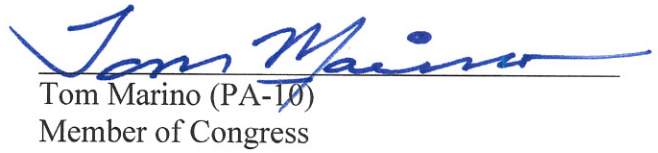
Mario Diaz-Balart (FL-25)
Member of Congress



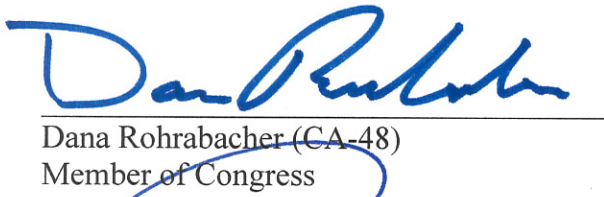
Trey Gowdy (SC-04)
Member of Congress



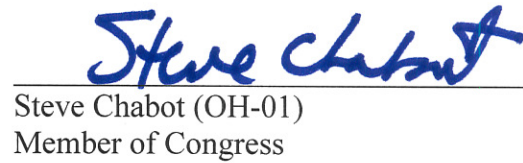
Mark Meadows (NC-11)
Member of Congress



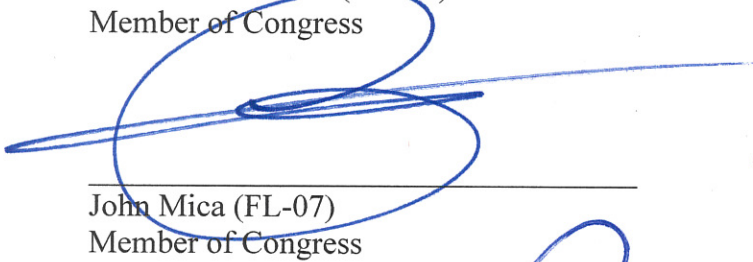
Tom Marino (PA-10)
Member of Congress



Dana Rohrabacher (CA-48)
Member of Congress



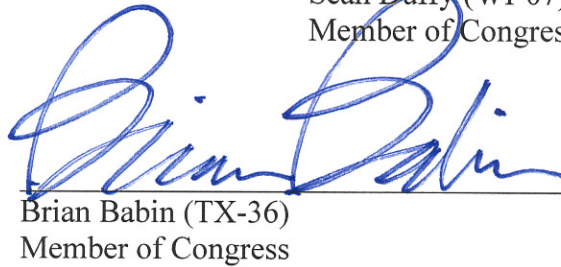
Steve Chabot (OH-01)
Member of Congress



John Mica (FL-07)
Member of Congress



Sean Duffy (WI-07)
Member of Congress



Brian Babin (TX-36)
Member of Congress