

The American Friends of Hugo Chavez: Dial 1-800-4-TYRANT

By Ana Maria Ortiz and Matthew Vadum

Summary: Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez, like his friend Fidel Castro, has earned a place in the pantheon of the modern American left. Chavez—who famously denounced President George W. Bush as “the Devil”—understands public relations, and his policies have earned him the admiration of leftist nonprofits and activists, including a famous member of the Kennedy clan. The Americans supporting Chavez, who has aligned himself with America's terrorist-sponsoring enemies abroad, hope to rekindle their romance with revolution.

Venezuela's Marxist strongman Hugo Chavez is the kind of anti-American that certain kinds of American leftists swoon over. In September 2006 he stood before the United Nations General Assembly in New York City to insult President George W. Bush, who had stood at the same podium the day before. He called Bush “the Devil” and made the sign of the cross, adding “and it smells of sulfur still today.” Chavez held up *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*, a book by the famous linguistics professor Noam Chomsky, a radical critic of U.S. foreign policy, and urged his audience to read it. Within days the book had jumped to the top 10 in sales at the Amazon and Barnes & Noble websites, and its publisher, Henry Holt, ordered a reprinting.

Chavez's U.N. speech followed a six-week round-the-world trip to a dozen countries. Venezuela's president met with Belarus dictator Alexander Lukashenko and called for a strategic alliance between the two countries. He met with Vladimir Putin and purchased \$3 billion in Russian arms, including fighter jets, military helicopters, and 100,000 Kalashnikov rifles. He also visited Iran, where he voiced



A strongman and his comrades (clockwise from upper left): Joe Kennedy; Hugo Chavez; activist Cindy Sheehan; entertainers Harry Belafonte and Danny Glover.

support for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Iran-financed Hezbollah, the Lebanese terrorist group; Vietnam, where he fondly reminisced about its struggle against the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s; Cuba, where he held hands with an ailing Fidel Castro who sent thousands of Cuban doctors and teachers to Venezuela in exchange for oil at much-reduced rates; China, where he struck yet more

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deals; and Syria, where he promised another strategic alliance to free the world of U.S. domination. The speech in New York was a high point in Chavez's campaign to bait the United States and elevate his own world profile.

Revolutionary Leader

Chavez fancies himself a revolutionary leader, protégé and presumptive successor to Castro, who announced last month he was stepping down after nearly a half-century in power. A leader of the anti-imperialist cause, "Chavez is the piper leading the most strident anti-Americanism to parade through Latin America since the Bay of Pigs invasion," notes Venezuelan writer Ibsen Martinez.

Since becoming president in 1999, Chavez has called for political upheaval in Latin America and flirted with violent anti-government guerrilla movements in neighboring Colombia, with which Venezuela shares a porous 1,300-mile border. He has given tacit support to the communist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN) and angered Colombia by urging it to stop calling FARC "terrorists." Calling FARC and ELN "true armies," Chavez described them as "insurgent forces that have political and Bolivarian goals, and here [Venezuela] that is respected."

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Periodically Chavez proposes to mediate FARC disputes with Colombia and has offered to negotiate the return of hostages that FARC has seized. Colombia says FARC is currently holding some 750 people hostage (including three Americans). Recently Chavez helped negotiate the release of two hostages, but the government of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe asked him to stop. "Any person who openly aligns himself with one of the parties could not be a mediator," Colombia's defense minister, Juan Manuel Santos, told



Amigos: Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro

the Financial Times. Chavez also has threatened neighboring Guyana, making claims to three-quarters of its territory.

Experts estimate that FARC may take in from \$200 million to \$400 million annually from the illegal drug trade, but Chavez refuses to allow U.S. drug surveillance flights in Venezuelan airspace. However, he has allowed Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas terrorists to open offices in Venezuela's capital, Caracas.

In Latin America Chavez has vigorously promoted a new coalition of anti-American governments. He is urging left-wing governments in Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, and the Caribbean island nations of Antigua, St. Vincent, and Dominica to join Venezuela and Cuba in an alliance he calls the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. This grand design is an alternative trade agreement meant to challenge the hemispheric free trade agreements negotiated by the United States. Chavez also urges investors to withdraw their funds from U.S. banks, and last month he acted on his promise to curtail oil supplies

to the U.S. by ordering government-owned Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PDVSA) to cut off crude oil sales to ExxonMobil, which is fighting his regime's seizure of its assets. In retaliation, ExxonMobil won U.S. and British court orders freezing \$12 billion of the Venezuelan company's worldwide assets. Reacting to the Bush administration's support for ExxonMobil, Chavez lashed out: "Take note, Mr. Bush, Mr. Danger. If the economic war continues against Venezuela, the price of oil will reach \$200. Venezuela will take up the economic war and more than one country is inclined to join us."

Chavez calls capitalism "savagery" and rejects free market prescriptions to lift less-developed nations out of poverty. Instead he preaches the gospel of redistribution, promising to build a workers' utopia similar to the supposed paradise created by his friend Castro, to whom he reportedly speaks daily by telephone. Last year he nationalized firms in Venezuela's petroleum, communications, and electricity sectors, and last month he vowed to have the government seize food producers and distributors that "hoard" products to sell at "inflated" prices. He demands that banks contribute a percentage of their profits to his social programs and threatens to seize any that fail to make loans at favorable rates for homes, farms and small businesses.

Chavez likens himself to Simon Bolivar, the great liberator who led the movement to free Latin America from Spain in the early 1800s. Chavez even renamed the nation the "Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela" when he took power, and he retains power by mobilizing support from among poor, black, and indigenous Venezuelans, holding out the promise that they are key elements in a new national culture he is creating. Chavez rejects what he considers the materialism of American culture, and he promotes abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, and fatty foods. He is planning to slap massive taxes on alcohol and tobacco, along with luxury cars and art.

His socialist reforms are wreaking economic havoc. The World Bank ranks Venezuela as the second-worst country in the Americas

For frequent updates on environmental groups, nonprofits, foundations, and labor unions, check out the CRC-Greenwatch Blog at www.capitalresearch.org/blog

for the control of corruption, above only Haiti. Venezuela's more than 22% inflation rate is the highest in the Western Hemisphere. Its currency has lost half its value in the past year and given rise to a thriving black market for dollars. To stem the hemorrhaging, Chavez prohibited overseas money transfers and has ordered his nation's media outlets not to mention the underground currency market.

Leftists Love Chavez

Clearly, Hugo Chavez is a man only American leftists could love – and they do. U.S. activists such as anti-war campaigner Cindy Sheehan say Chavez is a well-intentioned idealist who wants to help the poor, and that he is indeed a modern-day Bolivar.

In early 2006, Chavez met in Caracas with Cindy Sheehan, whom he calls “Mrs. Hope.” Following a photo opportunity-filled visit, Sheehan urged the world to help bring down “the U.S. empire” and declared she would rather have Chavez in the White House than President Bush:

“Hugo Chavez also wants to finally realize Simon de Bolivar’s vision of a united South America which can be together stronger to live more peacefully with the U.S. and stand in solidarity against the constant meddling of all of our regimes in their affairs... George [Bush] is a reverse Robin Hood and even steals from our grandchildren’s future to further enrich the already obscenely rich of the present. I would rather live under a president like Hugo who tries to improve living conditions in his country than someone like George who is demolishing our social structures and making the poor, poorer.”

Of course Bolivar was no socialist, notes James M. Roberts: “Bolivar would be embarrassed to see Venezuelans being oppressed by the same kind of Latin American *caudillo* (strongman) from which he fought to free them two centuries ago. Bolivar championed a unified South America and strong constitutional government to provide the same freedom, equality, and prosperity that he saw developing in North America.” The real Bolivar “opposed precisely the type of one-party, personalized, dictatorial rule that is embodied by Hugo Chavez.” (“If the Real Simon Bolivar Met Hugo Chavez, He’d See Red,” by James M. Roberts, Heritage Foundation Background #2062, August 20, 2007,

available at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/LatinAmerica/bg2062.cfm>)

It’s also hard to imagine Bolivar condoning the Venezuelan president’s attacks on civil liberties and the free press (it is now illegal to “practice” journalism in Venezuela without joining the National College of Journalists and holding a journalism degree). These acts of repression have stirred up opposition from the country’s middle and professional



Anti-war poster child Cindy Sheehan embraces Chavez in 2006

classes, including university students, artists and intellectuals and small and large business owners who protest his rule. In December voters pushed back, handing Chavez a startling defeat by rejecting in a 51% to 49% vote changes to the constitution that would have increased the president’s power. But that has not dampened the enthusiasm of some Americans for Hugo Chavez.

Sheehan is only one of the many Americans who eagerly voice their support for the “Bolivarian revolution.” They all seem to find their way to Caracas for meetings and photos with Chavez:

*Brenda Stokely, president of AFSCME Local 215 in New York City, addressed a rally in Caracas in 2004. “President Chavez is trying to provide poor people with health care, education and decently paid jobs... Anyone opposed to that either has their head under a rock or has no respect for human beings that live in poverty.”

*After visiting Venezuela, Oakland, California community organizer Mamie Chow said, “You can’t question what’s happening here. It’s so uplifting.”

*“Venezuela has become a major source of interest for social visionaries in the United States,” said Larry Birns, director of Council on Hemispheric Affairs in Washington, a leftist advocacy group.

The magazine *Mother Jones* thought it worthwhile to interview British journalist Richard Gott, who declared that the U.S. government’s assessment of Chavez’s dictatorial rule was “entirely invented.” When

asked in 2005 what Chavez’s Venezuela would look like 10 years hence, Gott, a hard leftist alleged to have been a KGB “agent of influence,” gushed:

“Venezuela will be a model for the rest of Latin America—a society that’s come to terms with its black and indigenous poverty-stricken populations, and where those populations participate fully in the democratic process. Because it’s a new generation it’s a little open-ended as to what will happen, but Chavez recognizes that. He says ‘Let the people decide,’ and I think he means it.”

Many U.S. lawmakers buy into the idea that Chavez is a social democrat. Senator Chris Dodd (D-Connecticut) has defended Chavez as a democratically-elected president (although he did call Chavez’s UN comments about President Bush “inappropriate,” explaining that they were overreactions to Bush’s preoccupation with Iraq and Afghanistan and neglect of Latin America). When coup-plotters briefly ousted Chavez from power during a 48-hour period in April 2002, Dodd blamed the Bush administration for not denouncing them. Judiciary Committee member Representative John Conyers (D-Michi-

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gan) and 12 other Democrats in Congress wrote a letter to Bush the following year complaining that the United States was not doing enough to protect Chavez.

In 2004, Representative Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) signed another joint letter endorsing Chavez's re-election and calling on President Bush and Congress to look upon Venezuela "as a model democracy." Other signers included Rev. Jesse Jackson, actor Ed Asner and the Marxist writers Howard Zinn and Naomi Klein. In 2006 Representative Brad Sherman (D-California) reminded the international terrorism panel of the House Committee on International Relations that Venezuela traditionally had "a strong free press and respect for important freedoms." But in May 2007 Chavez pulled the broadcast license of Radio Caracas Television and the popular cable TV station went off the air despite mass protests in Caracas. Sherman, who became chairman of the House subcommittee last year, admits to being troubled by Chavez's actions and his association with sponsors of terror, but says the U.S. government must be patient in dealing with him.

Chavistas in Hollywood

Then there's the Hollywood glitterati.

Chavez's regime enjoys enthusiastic support from actors Danny Glover, Kevin Spacey, Sean Penn, Ed Asner, singer Harry Belafonte,



Simpatico: Sean Penn goes for a drive with Chavez during a 2007 visit to Venezuela

and supermodel Naomi Campbell, whom South American newspapers report is having a romantic affair with Chavez (a claim Campbell denies). Campbell speaks of her "amazement" at the "love and encouragement" that Chavez pours into social welfare programs. Spacey, who won Academy Awards for roles in *American Beauty* (1999) and *The Usual Suspects* (1995), praises Venezuela's support for film-making. A \$13 million government-owned movie studio provides Venezuelans a valuable opportunity to "make films about their own country and their own culture," said Spacey. "I think every country should have this."

Last year Chavez's compliant Congress returned Hollywood's favor by approving \$20 million in financing for two films by Glover,

the *Lethal Weapon* (1987) star who has had business dealings with Chavez for years. One of the movies is *The General in His Labyrinth*, about Simon Bolivar. Glover is a frequent visitor to Venezuela. On a trip there two years ago he said he was "excited to get back to the United States to talk about what is happening [in Venezuela], knowing that you are in a transformative stage and that you are the architects of your own destiny."

Co-chairman of far-left Vanguard Public Foundation in San Francisco, Glover also serves on the advisory council for La Nueva Televisora del Sur ("The New Television Station of the South"), also known as teleSUR. Aiming to be a (more) left-wing alternative to CNN, the station has been broadcasting from Caracas since 2005. Representative Connie Mack (R-Florida) observes that teleSUR, "the Chavez-funded network...has teamed up with Al-Jazeera to spread anti-democratic messages across Latin America."

Of course, no survey of left-wing celebrity can fail to take notice of singer Harry Belafonte and the actor Sean Penn. After making a pilgrimage to Venezuela in 2006, Belafonte observed: "No matter what the greatest tyrant in the world, the greatest terrorist in the world, George W. Bush says, we're here to tell you: Not hundreds, not thousands, but millions of the American people...support your revolution." Penn took a look at the Chavez-crafted constitution of Venezuela, which gives the president the power to rule by decree, and concluded that it was "a very beautiful document."

Chavez seems to have only one vocal detractor in Tinseltown, and she hasn't been in any box office smashes lately. Cuban-born actress and singer Maria Conchita Alonso, whose family left Cuba when Castro seized power, says Chavez is "a totalitarian dicta-

THE GREAT PHILANTHROPISTS
And the Problem of "Donor Intent"
Martin Morse Wooster

GOOD DEEDS, SQUANDERED LEGACIES

A cautionary tale first published in 1994, this third edition by Martin Morse Wooster testifies to the continuing importance of the issue of donor intent. It contains new material focused on the ongoing *Robertson Foundation v. Princeton University* case and an update on the tragic battle over the Barnes Foundation. An Executive Summary is also included.

Wooster, senior fellow at Capital Research Center, tells a cautionary tale of what has gone wrong with many of this country's preeminent foundations. But he also shows that other foundations, such as those established by Lynde and Harry Bradley, James Duke, and Conrad Hilton, safeguard their founders' values and honor their intentions.

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tor” who has long plotted to make himself President for Life. The former Miss Venezuela is producing and starring in a film, *Two Minutes of Hate*, about the events of April 11, 2002, when Chavez sent snipers to crush a peaceful protest march. “Nineteen died, and more than a hundred were hurt,” she says. And Alonso, who starred in *Predator 2* (1990) and *Moscow on the Hudson* (1984), takes issue with press reports, which she says understate the financing Danny Glover is receiving from the Venezuelan government. “The word in Venezuela is that Danny got \$30 million, not 20, and that there are three movies they will shoot,” she told TV’s “Hannity and Colmes” last May. Chavez is “the biggest actor there is, much better than Danny Glover, so he has a way of making people believe that he was elected democratically and that he cares for the poor.”

1-877-JOE-4-OIL

Chavez can cause trouble around the world because he controls one precious commodity—oil. Venezuela is the world’s fifth-largest oil producer. Oil generates 80% of the country’s export revenue and half of the government’s income. And more oil is likely to be discovered in the country’s interior. Some experts think Venezuela eventually could rival Saudi Arabia in total oil reserves.

As the world price of oil has soared to \$100 a barrel Chavez has enjoyed windfall profits that he is lavishing on government social programs, which reinforces his political support among the country’s poor. Venezuela’s state-owned oil company is required to spend 10% of its investment budget on social programs, an estimated \$7 billion in 2005.

The state-owned Petroleos de Venezuela SA has been described as a “black box” because it is believed to also fund Chavez’s overseas political ambitions. Oil exports revenues fuel Chavez’s petro-diplomacy. They make possible political overtures to China and Iran, which have been invited to invest in oil exploration and refining in Venezuela. They allow Venezuela to take the lead in structuring regional Latin American trade agreements that undermine U.S. efforts to promote free trade. And they support a Venezuelan foreign aid program that purports to help poor Americans who live in 16 of the United States. The real target of this ingenious program of “public diplomacy” is George W. Bush.

The agent of Chavez’s foreign aid program

to Americans is former Representative Joseph P. Kennedy II (D-Massachusetts). Born in 1952, he heads a nonprofit called Citizens Energy Corporation, which he founded in 1979 to provide discounted home heating oil to low-income people in Massachusetts. Kennedy was subsequently elected to Congress for six terms (1987-1999), occupying the seat previously held by his uncle, John F. Kennedy (1947-1953), and Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill (1953-1987). Joe Kennedy returned to Citizens Energy full-time in 2002



A rare Hollywood *antichavista*: Maria Conchita Alonso will star in an upcoming film about a 2002 massacre ordered by Chavez.

after his plan to run for governor of Massachusetts fizzled in the wake of what can politely be called marital difficulties.

Citizens Energy Corporation (2005 assets: \$58.3 million) has undertaken a number of social ventures to raise funds by marketing energy, but it is best known for the charitable help it gives eligible families, providing them with an annual one-time delivery of 100 gallons of heating oil, the principal fuel used in New England to heat homes. Kennedy’s group has won praise for working with heating oil dealers and state and federal agencies to provide fuel delivery to those in need. But, starting in 2005, the group became a tool of Chavez’s efforts to win public support from ordinary Americans for his regime.

Kennedy rarely mentions Chavez publicly, but the television and radio messages that advertise his charitable program are paid for by Venezuela by way of the CITGO oil company, which also provides most of the discounted heating oil. The Boston Globe reported that Representative William Delahunt, a Massachusetts Democrat, helped broker the deal. In the ads, Kennedy invites those who need help to call 1-877-JOE-4-OIL, and

he thanks “our good friends in Venezuela” for helping shivering Americans. In one ad, Kennedy pontificates:

“...Yet our own government cut fuel assistance. And the Big Oil companies with oil and money to burn all said ‘no’ when we asked for help. All but one. CITGO, owned by the Venezuelan people, is donating millions of gallons to non-profit Citizens Energy...Some people say it’s bad politics to do this. I say it’s a crime against humanity *not to* because no one — *no one* — should be left out in the cold.”

Now in its third year, the CITGO-Venezuela Heating Oil Program expects this winter to have delivered 112 million gallons of fuel at a 40% discount to 224,000 U.S. households and 250 social service charities.

How is CITGO connected to Hugo Chavez? Houston-based CITGO Petroleum Corporation is a U.S. corporation once known as Cities Service. It was purchased by Occidental Petroleum in 1982, which sold it to the Southland Corporation, the owner of the 7-11 convenience store chain, in 1983. In 1986 Southland sold a 50% share of the company to the national oil company of Venezuela, which bought the other half in 1990. By the late 1990s, CITGO was refining and distributing oil and operating almost 15,000 retail gas stations in the U.S., more than any other company. No one much cared about the company’s ultimate owner.

But in 1999 Hugo Chavez, who had tried to seize power in a failed 1992 coup attempt, managed to be elected president of Venezuela on the strength of his demagogic attacks on the faltering then-government. As president, he visited CITGO’s Lake Charles, Louisiana refinery and Houston offices in 2000, where he explained how his government would handle Venezuela’s national oil company. The Oklahoma-born head of CITGO and the Venezuelan civilian running the parent company were fired. Their replacements would be Venezuelan army generals. Chavez offered Houston’s rattled oil men soothing words, urging them not to worry and reminding them that George Washington and Simon Bolivar were generals too.

The Kennedy charity is another public relations ploy. It’s designed to win sympathy for Chavez, and it’s working, at least in some quarters. For instance, media critic Jeff

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Cohen, founder of the watchdog group Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR), urged Americans to buy CITGO gas to back up “a democracy with a president who was elected on a platform of using his nation’s oil revenue to benefit the poor.” That’s the same argument Kennedy used when he berated a Wall Street Journal reporter who inquired about the motives behind the heating oil deal. Kennedy has said he is impressed that Chavez is socializing his nation’s oil profits and alleviating poverty, a claim refuted by prominent researchers in Latin America who conclude that poverty has been reduced a mere 0.1% (and that government help is often conditioned on support for the Chavez regime).

We’ll never know what Kennedy’s father, the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy, a man who called communism “a tyranny that holds its captives in a vice-like subjugation,” might think of his son’s collaboration with Chavez, an admirer of Fidel Castro. As a young man Senator Kennedy was an anti-Communist who had worked for Senator Joseph McCarthy on his anti-subversion subcommittee. The two were so close that RFK made the famous Red hunter godfather to his first-born child, former Maryland Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend.

Revolutionary Tourism

The heating oil deal with Kennedy is but one example of Venezuela’s “public diplomacy” campaign in the U.S. Public diplomacy is the effort to generate favorable public opinion by ostensibly non-political means and Venezuela’s efforts seem to compare



Joe Kennedy to the rescue! The Citizens Energy head delivers heating oil to the freezing masses in one CITGO-sponsored TV commercial.

favorably to the U.S. While the Clinton administration shut down the U.S. Information Agency in 1999, Chavez was opening the Venezuela Information Office (VIO) in Washington, D.C. in 2003.

According to John J. Miller in National Review (December 15, 2004), VIO moved aggressively to improve Venezuela’s image, contracting with the firm Patton Boggs for lobbying help, buying ads in the Economist, New Yorker and Roll Call, and hiring staff from Global Exchange, the far-left activist group responsible for violent demonstrations at the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle in 1999. VIO’s decision to hire a communications consultant named Michael Shellenberger provides a very strange

example of Chavez’s attempts to shape American public opinion. As author Ron Arnold reports in his new book, *Freezing in the Dark: Money, Power Politics and the Vast Left Wing Conspiracy* (Merril Press, 2007), Shellenberger ran several energy advocacy groups (the Apollo Project, Americans for Energy Freedom) and earlier worked with Global Exchange as well as with Fenton Communications, the stellar public relations firm that promotes liberal advocacy groups. (For more information on the firm, see “David Fenton: Media Maestro of the Left: A New Left Alumnus Finds Success as a Scare Specialist,” by John Gizzi, *OrganizationTrends*, December 2004). In a controversial paper *The Death of Environmentalism* and a recent book on global warming entitled *Breakthrough* (both co-authored with Ted Nordhaus) Shellenberger argues that environmentalist political strategies are too shrill and shallow to significantly influence U.S. public opinion. What’s needed is a new transformative post-modern anti-globalization politics. When Shellenberger joined VIO for six months in 2004 as a \$60,000 for-hire strategist in media relations (while also registering as a foreign agent for Venezuela with the Justice Department) was he touting a similar pie-in-the-sky philosophy? Or was something more substantive and sinister in play?

It’s unclear how being an agent for Venezuela promotes a new philosophy of conservation. But if Hugo Chavez thinks he can exorcise George Bush by waving around a book by Noam Chomsky, anything is possible.

Global Exchange seems to be spearheading much of Venezuela’s U.S. propaganda cam-

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“The crowd went wild in solidarity” at a 2006 pro-Chavez rally in a Caracas stadium, Global Exchange/Code Pink co-founder Medea Benjamin (at right) wrote at the Code Pink website. The banner reads “Women Say Bush Must Go.”

paign. In 2008 it will be offering 13 “reality tours” of Venezuela. Lasting from 10 days to two weeks, the tours are on such topics as “Women’s Rights and Leadership in the Bolivarian Revolution,” “Community-Based Organizing and the Bolivarian Revolution,” and “Afro-Venezuela: The San Juan Cultural Festival.” According to Global Exchange, “Venezuela is at the center of a new, progressive model of socioeconomic development that is shaping Latin America’s future.” For between \$800 and \$2,500, an American can see Chavez’s revolution in action. On the group’s website, a young American man gushes: “The faith that they have in their government and the faith that the government has in them is something that is really beautiful and is something that I’ve never seen before and I didn’t really know it existed.”

An indication of the Global Exchange outlook is evident in the views of JoJo Farrell, who directs the Reality Tour Program. In an op-ed last fall he applauded the Chavez government for not renewing Radio Caracas Television’s broadcast license. The false story that “Chavez was silencing the station due to their opposition to his policies” continues “to be perpetuated in the U.S. media today,” Farrell observed. The real reason according to Farrell: the station’s “role” in the attempted 2002 coup against Chavez.

Farrell isn’t the only American who thinks the American public isn’t getting the real story about what’s going on in Venezuela. Princeton professor Cornel West, who makes a living denouncing his native land as racist and patriarchal, said reality tours are essential because, “We in the United States have so many lies about President Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution.” West said he visited in 2006 “to see the democratic awakening taking place.”

Established in 1988, Global Exchange reported assets of \$1,561,689 and income of \$4,173,190 in 2005. Its funding comes from foundations and from organizing reality tours to places like Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, and North Korea. Since 1998, the group has taken in almost \$3.3 million in grants. Donors include the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (\$388,000), James Irvine Foundation (\$385,000), Ben & Jerry’s Foundation (\$250,000), the far-left Tides Foundation (\$223,191), Wallace Global Fund (\$145,000), and Schumann Center for Media and Democracy Inc. (\$140,000).

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Let no one assume that Global Exchange is led by well-intentioned dupes. Its founding director is Medea Benjamin. Born Susie Benjamin to an affluent family, she changed her first name to that of the enraged woman in the Greek tragedy who seeks revenge against her husband by murdering her children. Benjamin’s own vengeance against America has led her to support murderous dictators across the globe. She is an ardent pro-Castro advocate, having once lived in Cuba and married a pro-Castro Cuban. For years she led guided tours to Cuba. After returning from her first trip to Cuba in the early 1980s, Benjamin told the San Francisco Chronicle that Cuban life “made it seem like I died and went to heaven.” In the 1980s Benjamin helped form the Institute for Food and Development Policy (IFDP), which sent aid to the Marxist Sandinistas ruling Nicaragua. Benjamin is also a co-founder of Code Pink, the anti-war feminist group that disarms critics by frivolously dressing in pink, which disguises its deadly serious political ideology. (For more information, see “Code Pink: The Women’s Anti-War Movement,” by John J. Tierney, *Organization Trends*, December 2006.)

But Global Exchange isn’t the only U.S. nonprofit in the reality tour business. Founded in 1983, Witness for Peace grew out of leftist opposition to President Ronald Reagan’s support of Nicaragua’s anti-communist Contras. On its website, the group boasts that during the civil war in Nicaragua, it sent U.S. citizens “to accompany the Nicaraguan people in war zones and to document the ‘human face’ of the Reagan Administration’s military policy.”

The group began sending “delegations” to Venezuela in 2006 because it was committed “to stand with people of the Americas seeking justice when faced with U.S. government aggression.” It costs \$1,300 to delegate yourself to the group’s upcoming 11-day Health Care and Public Policy tour which departs March 24. For \$1,200, you can join the 11-day delegation that departs June 12. It allows participants to “move beyond the rhetoric from Washington...[and] research U.S. policy of funding opposition groups and statements aimed at delegitimizing the Chavez administration.”

Witness for Peace, which received a \$22,000 grant from the Tides Foundation in 2004, reported assets of \$308,534 and income of \$806,280 in 2006.

Conclusion

It may seem far-fetched to expect a revival of revolutionary Marxism either at home or abroad. All eyes today are focused on terrorism and radical Islam. By contrast, the American friends of Hugo Chavez seem caught in a time warp, spouting foolish left-wing rhetoric to justify the buffoonish behavior of their hero. But Venezuela’s head of state is no fool and his country’s main export is not bananas. We do well to pay attention to his schemes and devices.

Ana Maria Ortiz graduated with a bachelor’s degree in government and international relations from the Universidad Externado de Colombia. She was an intern at Capital Research Center in 2007 under the auspices of American University’s Washington Semester Program. Matthew Vadum is Editor of Organization Trends.

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BrieflyNoted

A Philadelphia-based think tank, the **Institute for Law and Economic Policy**, does research on class action lawsuits—and, no fooling, its trustees and funders are plaintiffs' attorneys. The most prominent are **Bill Lerach** and his former firm, **Milberg Weiss**, which have been fantastically successful in filing cases against corporations and their executives. They've also been indicted for kick-backs and racketeering related to their successes. Prosecutors say the firm "paid \$11 million in kick-backs to plaintiffs they recruited to bring more than 150 lawsuits that netted the firm at least \$200 million," according to Washington Examiner editor **Mark Tapscott**.

Liberal cultural critic **Camille Paglia** points favorably to a new website, climatedebatedaily.com, that fairly covers the global warming debate. The website presents the latest information on the issue in two adjoining columns: "Calls to Action" and "Dissenting Voices." Paglia says the site's "lucid dual format is exactly what has been needed to shed scholarly light on this heavily politicized battle, which has been very difficult to follow for everyone but fanatical true believers."

Last month a federal judge re-issued a January injunction blocking the U.S. Navy's use of active sonar in anti-sub training off southern California, claiming it violates existing environmental laws and might harm whales and dolphins. "Everyone loves Flipper and Shamu. But our sailors need this critical training before heading out on extended (six- to nine-month) deployments to East Asia and the Middle East, where they could come up against potential adversaries' submarines," writes **Peter Brookes**, a Senior Fellow for National Security Affairs at the **Heritage Foundation**.

AARP, **Business Roundtable**, **Service Employees Union (SEIU)**, and the **National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB)** have formed a group called **Divided We Fail** to push for a Big Government solution for health care issues. The group claims to be interested "in finding bi-partisan solutions to ensure affordable, quality health care and long-term financial security – for all of us."

The California State Assembly has approved AB 624, a bill forcing private, corporate, or public operating foundations with assets over \$250 million to collect and disclose to the public the racial, gender, and sexual-orientation composition of the board of directors or trustees, foundation staff, and the number of grants awarded to specified organizations serving ethnic minority, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered communities. The bill, introduced by Assemblyman **Joe Coto** (D-San Jose) at the behest of the Berkeley-based **Greenlining Institute**, aims to correct a perceived lack of diversity in the world of foundations. The **Council on Foundations** says the bill, now before the state Senate, is unnecessary and could violate privacy rights.

A bill sponsored by California state Senator **Joe Simitian** (D-Palo Alto) would require that future science textbooks approved for California public schools deal with the issue of climate change, reports the (San Jose) Mercury News. **Christine Bertrand**, executive director of the **California Science Teachers Association**, thinks it's a fabulous idea. "I don't think there's any reason to talk about politics... There's no argument that there is climate change. The argument is how much is caused by the activities of mankind." After the state Senate passed the bill, SB 908, in January by a 2-to-1 margin, the bill is currently before the state Assembly.

In other Left Coast news, a feminist group called the **Guerrilla Girls** is demanding affirmative action for art, the New York Times reports. The group sent an open letter to philanthropist **Eli Broad** saying that the Broads had not included enough female and minority artists in the exhibition at the Broad Contemporary Art Museum at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and in Broad's private foundation's art collection. "As a civic leader in a city as diverse as L.A., you must feel terrible about this!!!" says the letter posted on the group's website. A museum spokeswoman said 33% of the works in the exhibit are by women.