

NWX-WOODROW WILSON CENTER

**Moderator: Drew Sample
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10:00 am CT**

Coordinator: Thank you for standing by. Today's conference is now being recorded. You may begin.

Drew Sample: Thanks. Okay well this is Drew Sample from the Wilson Center.

I just want to welcome everyone and say thank you for joining today. I know we're all calling in from a lot of far-flung places. So I like - I appreciate that everyone's called in this morning.

And with that I think let's go ahead and start off. We have Cindy Arnson, Director of the Latin American Program here from the Wilson Center, and Eric Olson, the association director of our Latin American Program, on the line to answer press questions.

And (Luis) and (Doria) if you want to go ahead and start things off with whatever questions you have please feel free to jump in.

(Doria): Well I wanted to find out exactly -- I mean, not exactly -- I wanted to find out what you think about this looking towards the future more than the past

because everybody seems to say that Capriles will run again -- and he didn't do that bad in October, I think he got 6 million votes -- and that his adversary will be (Ernito de Chavez) whoever that is.

It's not clear whether it's going to be Maduro or someone else. And we're mentioning some military person.

So I wanted to know if you have any reading of what we should expect and if indeed there will be elections in 30 days.

Cindy Arnson: (Doria) I'll start with that. I think there will be elections in the 30-day period. And the question is really when that clock starts ticking whether it's from the date of his death, from his burial, whatever. But I think that I don't have any - I find it hard to believe that they wouldn't convene new elections.

I also find it hard to believe that there would be anybody other than Capriles representing the opposition or Maduro representing Chavismo. I mean, he was, you know, sort of officially designated, given the blessing over with Chavez, you know, last December as the person that Chavez put forth before the, you know, Venezuelan public as his successor.

And I just think that it would be very, very difficult for the Chavistas to win by putting forward a real - a kind of an unknown character, an unknown face.

So I think the showdown will be between Maduro and Capriles. And again the 30-day period is I think a real liability for the opposition because it's not a lot of time to organize a national election. But even more so the emotion around the loss of Chavez and the desire to continue the revolution in the name of the Comandante is very, very strong.

Capriles did better in October than any other opposition candidate had done, but he still lost by 10 or 11 percentage points. And again Maduro is not Chavez. If this election were taking place in two years I think it would be a very different story.

But, you know, Maduro will have that huge benefit of being, you know, personally designated by Chavez as his successor. And this is the continuation of the Bolivarian Revolution. And I find it really hard to believe that the opposition would be able to win in those circumstances.

(Doria): Yes. Yes that's probably the case. And this guy Maduro he seems a little - also very - I mean, his press conference yesterday where he accused the United States of implanting cancer to Chavez, I mean, that's really whacko. That's just going over the hill.

Who is Maduro anyway other than just he's...

Cindy Arnson: Yes let me just address that statement because I think that - I mean, I found it really surprising. There had been, you know, indications that there were conversations between Assistant Secretary Roberta Jacobson and Maduro over the phone in attempt I think by particularly the US government to reach out and see whether there might be the possibility of putting, you know, the bilateral relationship on a more normal course.

And the indications were that although I don't think the State Department ever officially confirmed that those conversations had taken place there was a sense that perhaps Maduro is a more pragmatic person, you know, would be amenable to exchanging ambassadors again or, you know, trying to deal with some of the thornier issues on the agenda.

The statement yesterday I think threw a huge bucket of cold water on those hopes. It's a deeply paranoid statement that the United States, you know, was responsible for causing Chavez's cancer. I don't know whether people in the Venezuelan - in the Chavista leadership actually believe that or are using this once again to rally supporters against, you know, the foreign imperial enemy.

But it was surprising I think in terms of the timing because the rallying of the people takes place around the death of Chavez. They did not need to inject that kind of - you know, that level of hostility towards the United States into this particular moment.

So the question is, you know, who is it really a message for. Was this - you know, and again I found it really, really surprising.

(Doria): Yes so you have no idea why did he do this? Because as you say, I mean, the rally of the people were already happening around the Chavez almost dying. Everybody sort of knew in the beginning of the week that he was probably in his last days.

But then this all of the sudden comes out of the blue. I was...

Cindy Arnson: Right. The only, you know, explanation I can think of -- and again this is truly speculation -- is that, you know, it's directed internally, you know, to the various factions within Chavismo as an indication of, you know, to people who may be considered more hardliners that there is no softening of the position of the government that things will continue on the same course and, you know, you can expect more of the same.

So I think it was, you know, directed, you know, to internal leadership. But the timing of it certainly was bizarre.

(Doria): And (then) he follow up -- or I don't know if it was before -- expelling these two military people. What has been so far the reaction of the US on that?

Cindy Arnson: I think - I'm not sure that they have responded specifically on the expulsions other than to say that - you know, than to maintain that there was nothing that would have warranted the kind of expulsion.

I think it was more a gratuitous gesture. And perhaps as, you know, military (unintelligible) or Air Force (unintelligible) they had had some contact with the Venezuelan military. That's what (unintelligible) - that's what they do.

They try to maintain, you know, service-to-service contacts and that would have been seen or characterized as threatening or as, you know, some attempt to foment (positions) or a (coup) or what - you know, again it's an extremely paranoid scenario.

So I have no idea that there was any such contact whatsoever. But, you know, had there been it would have been totally routine. And again it's just I think an attempt to, you know, throw the fist in the air and say that we are as anti-imperial, you know, as Chavez was, you know, during his lifetime and, you know, have no doubt about where we stand.

And the only reason - you know, I guess the surprise element comes because there had been some indications that there would be a softening or a relaxation, you know, of that degree of hostility. And this really sets it back.

(Doria): Okay.

(Luis): Okay I would like to ask something if I can.

Man: Sure.

(Luis): Thank you. Well it seems like nobody has been able to corroborate any information provided by the Venezuelan government on Chavez health since day one.

Do you think that will set any barometer? I'm talking (originally) on the - in the - on the hemisphere. Do you think this will serve as a model this kind of - I don't want to call it manipulation, but at least a lack of transparency? Do you think this could set a precedence in the way other governments in the region can handle similar issues on the health of the rulers of...

Cindy Arnson: Yes well again I think that the allies of Venezuela -- you know, Ecuador, Nicaragua, you know, Bolivia, possibly even, you know, Argentina in a sort of different degree -- already have had very sort of difficult if not openly hostile relationships with the press. And, you know, there is not a commitment to the free flow of information in the way that one would expect in a representative democracy.

How much this will set a precedence, you know, for other leaders beyond the attitudes that they've already taken I think is anyone's guess. But it will set a precedence, you know, for those leaders that are already, you know, similarly inclined.

(Luis): And in that scenario you described earlier that victory by Maduro is almost certain what are the implications of that? What would that mean having Maduro in power?

Cindy Arnson: Yes well I guess I would rephrase it a little bit. I don't see it as almost certain. I just - I see it as the most likely outcome, you know, of, you know, the elections.

But I think, you know, he - no one in the Chavista movement is Hugo Chavez or, you know, has his level of charisma or his levels of control not only the personal connection, you know, with the people, but also the ability to maintain, you know, sort of discipline and unity among the various personalities and factions of the government.

So I think that what will emerge are, you know, more and more cracks in divisions and Chavismos will become much more apparent and to a certain degree public.

In time, you know, the economic difficulties are mounting. The internal citizen security challenges have been what they are for a long time. And I think that it's going to be very, very difficult for someone other than Hugo Chavez to, you know, paper over, you know, these kinds of issues.

All that said the real wild card, the real game changer is the price of oil. And if the international price of oil should fall substantially and thereby cut into the government's ability to maintain the huge subsidies that they, you know, only expanded, you know, during the electoral period in 2012 that that is, you know, potentially very destabilizing.

But there are no new elections until, you know, for another six years. So I would imagine it's going to be a very difficult period that Venezuela is going into even with oil prices still high.

(Luis): And when you say it will be very difficult would it be only for Venezuelans or you think that will repercussions out of the country?

Cindy Arnson: Well the impact of the devaluation is going to be felt principally in Venezuela. The oil subsidies to Petrocaribe for example I think, you know, will continue as long as the price of oil is high and the government has the ability, you know, to spend what it needs to spend and still send the subsidized oil.

If there are cutbacks in Petrocaribe I think, you know, the first to go will be the people who are sort of non-ideological allies. But I don't really want to speculate about that.

I think that there will be a continuation. Nicolas Maduro is very close to Cuba. And, you know, that lifeline to the Cuban economy is not going to disappear and I think there will be a lot of continuity again (unintelligible).

(Doria): Hello?

(Luis): Hello?

(Doria): Hello? Who's there?

Eric Olson: This is Eric Olson. I don't know. Cindy are you still there?

(Doria): We lost Cindy.

(Luis): No she's...

(Doria): It's (on) Mexico.

((Crosstalk))

Eric Olson: Hello Cindy?

(Doria): (Unintelligible).

Eric Olson: ((Spanish Spoken 0:15:11.9))

Janell Ross: I think we did lose her. This is Janell Ross from the Huffington Post. I think it sounds like she dropped off the line.

Eric Olson: Drew are you still there?

Drew Sample: Yes I'm still here. I'm not exactly sure what happened to Cindy, but she said she didn't have any trouble connecting earlier. So I imagine she'll hop back on the line here in a few minutes.

(Luis): So Eric if I can ask you while Cindy comes back what are the - in the scenario that Capriles will lose a second election in such a short time in six months what are the prospects for him as a political leader?

Eric Olson: Well he just won reelection of Miranda State. And Miranda is the largest state population-wise in Venezuela, very important. It surrounds Caracas.

So he has a base of political support of his own and he's got now a mandate to govern that state for a period of time. He's also 40-years-old, so quite young in terms of political experience.

You know, I think if he loses in 30 days maybe it's not a fatal blow to his political career because people understand that this is an unusual situation. It's very difficult in 30 days to...

Cindy Arnson: (Okay).

Eric Olson: But, you know, I think the - it will be - there's also, you know, in the opposition going forward they will have to think about, you know, how they want to stay united, how they want to pick new candidates, all that sort of thing.

The backdrop for them of course is they lost a lot of state governors in December. So I think the rethinking underway within the MUD, the MUD, and - but that's off, you know, in the future. And in the short run I think there's a lot of incentive like Cindy said for them to remain united behind Capriles.

(Luis): Okay.

(Doria): I want to ask - is Cindy back?

Cindy Arnson: Yes I'm back. I'm back. The call just dropped.

(Doria): Just a quick question on at this point (unintelligible) conjuncture. What should be the best approach by the United States government, by the Obama administration, for Venezuela?

Cindy Arnson: Well I think, you know, to stay out of things is the best policy. And, you know, I think that over these past year the Obama administration has tried very hard to not make itself the issue in Venezuelan politics knowing that anything that it says, you know, against the government, in favor of the

opposition, any comment whatsoever would be used, you know, by the Venezuelan government, you know, as demonstration of imperial intervention and aggression, you know, against Venezuela.

So they have I think, you know, played it very smart in refraining from making comments, you know, calling on all, you know, political actors to, you know, engage in, you know, respect for the electoral process and that kind of thing.

You know, if things get - you know, if there's, you know, possibility for greater instability in Venezuela I think, you know, they'll continue to just play it, you know - well make sure that they don't say anything that could inflame, you know, a situation call for dialogue, call for, you know, peaceful, you know, conflict resolution mechanisms, all that kind of stuff and maintaining, you know, the integrity of the electoral process.

But I think the policy thus far of strict neutrality has been, you know, the right one and is likely to continue.

(Mimi Whitefield): Hi this is (Mimi Whitefield). I just jumped on the line. So excuse me if you already answered this.

But I was wondering about the loss of Hugo Chavez as an ideological figure in Latin America, what the implications of that might be.

Cindy Arnson: Yes well, you know, (Mimi) I think there was a time early in maybe early 2000 when Chavez was really trying to mobilize, you know, an explicitly anti-US, anti-imperial coalition. That's what ALBA represented.

And probably the high-water mark of that process was the (summit) America that took place in (unintelligible) when there were just sort of huge demonstrations, you know, against Bush and, you know, an outpouring of support.

But I think, you know, in Latin America in general Hugo Chavez is one of the most unpopular leaders in the entire continent. You know, the Latino (unintelligible), you know, have him near the bottom whereas Barack Obama is at the top.

And I think that for certain sectors of the Bolivarian left, you know, the loss of Hugo Chavez is a terrible loss. But I think that, you know, this notion that he was leading throughout the region, you know, some kind of, you know, strong movement, you know, really ceased to be the case several years ago.

Hello?

(Doria): Hello?

Cindy Arnson: Hello. I'm still here.

(Doria): Where's Cynthia?

Cindy Arnson: I'm here. You - is that (Doria)? Yes I'm here.

(Doria): I think everybody's gone.

(Luis): No, no, no. I'm here.

((Crosstalk))

(Doria): Have you heard Eric of Cindy who's going to represent the US government as the many days of (unintelligible) funeral that they're going to have and ceremonies? Because they don't have an ambassador down there, no?

Cindy Arnson: No they don't. I have not heard. I have not heard.

I think it would be a wise gesture to send someone from Washington, you know, at the reasonably decent level. But...

(Doria): (Unintelligible).

Cindy Arnson: ...I have not heard that.

(Doria): Joe Kennedy the former Congressman he made a very pro-Chavez statement this morning (unintelligible).

Cindy Arnson: Right. Well, you know, Joe Kennedy was, you know, on US television a lot, you know, thanking the Venezuelan people, you know, for the provision of oil. Chavez, you know, was kind of a propaganda move, but it was, you know, also something that concretely benefited in the Northeast of the United States that were suffering from the huge increases (of home) heating oil.

So, you know, the provision through CITGO of home-heating oil, you know, to low-income people in US cities was, you know, very welcome in the Northeast concretely.

And I think Joe Kennedy was the most prominent, you know, face of that effort and, you know, for many years has been on commercials, you know,

television commercials, for CITGO, you know, thanking the Venezuelan people for its support of low-income people in the Northeast.

(Doria): Yes. Yes he said 2 million people had benefited (in that).

Cindy Arnson: Right, right.

(Luis): If...

Cindy Arnson: Anybody else?

(Luis): ...after the election decides to increase the price of gasoline -- and there are so many rumors about it -- and (all the) economic measures that could be unpopular and harsh on especially low-income, how likely you see a (commotion) scenario in Venezuela given this political -- I don't (it's) crisis -- but this political transition jointly with the economic challenges?

How likely you think there is violence or disorder caused by economic measures?

Cindy Arnson: Well let me get to the point of violence sort of (first-hand). I mean, you know, Venezuela is definitely going to feel, you know, the harsh effects of this devaluation. There are already, you know, widespread shortages of basic food (stuffs).

But there have been actually for many, many, many years. I mean, the joke always was that it's easier to find whiskey in Venezuela than milk.

The price of gasoline is already so low -- it's like 5 cents or 6 cents a gallon -- that, you know, an increase in the price of gasoline, you know, may not, you know, trigger, you know, protests.

But I think if the shortages, you know, continue and cut into, you know, other basic consumer goods there is going to be a lot of unrest. There already are - you know, there already is a lot of protests and there's certainly the possibility, you know, that opposition and protests, you know, would take a violent turn.

But I'm not sure that I'm, you know, willing to predict that necessarily at this point. But I do think that it's going to, you know, become increasingly difficult as the effects of the devaluation sink in over time.

Did I lose everybody again?

(Doria): No.

(Luis): No, no, no.

Drew Sample: We're all here.

Cindy Arnson: Oh okay. You're all writing away or something. All of a sudden there's like dead silence and I think the call's dropped.

((Crosstalk))

(Doria): (Unintelligible)...

Drew Sample: Any further questions? Is Carol on the line?

Carol Williams: Yes I am.

Drew Sample: Did you have a chance to ask any thing that you needed to get in?

Carol Williams: Well I'm sure you've already covered it. I was joining fairly late in the discussion.

I would like to know what you see unfolding in terms of the presidential election. I mean, is (Cabeo) likely to challenge Maduro? Or will he step back and let Chavez's chosen successor move forward?

Cindy Arnson: Let me just jump in. Drew how do you want to handle this? Because I'm happy to stay on the line a little bit and answer that because it is definitely something that we've been over. Maybe (Luis) or (Doria) or whoever or (Mimi) you have other questions. And then we can go back to the - who was it that joined us just now?

Carol Williams: Carol Williams with the Los Angeles Times.

Cindy Arnson: Yes Carol I think I'd be happy to stay on the line with you for a little bit, but not necessarily just repeat everything that we've already gone over.

Man: Yes.

Cindy Arnson: Does that sound reasonable? Any other questions? And then we can go back to Carol.

(Doria): Cindy I don't have any more questions and I've actually got to get ready for the radio. So I think I'm going to say goodbye or bye and thank you so much for your answers...

Cindy Arnson: Great. All right thanks for joining (Doria).

(Doria): Bye.

Cindy Arnson: ((Spoken in Spanish 0:27:55.0))

(Doria): Bye Eric.

Eric Olson: Bye-bye.

((Crosstalk))

(Luis): I have no more questions. So I...

Janell Ross: This is Janell Ross from Huffington Post. If you don't mind I will also stay on because I think I missed the beginning of the call.

Cindy Arnson: Not a problem. Any - (Luis) anything else or (Mimi)?

(Luis): No, no. I'm fine. I have no more questions. Many thanks for your time. This is very helpful.

Cindy Arnson: Okay. Thanks (Luis). Thanks for joining.

(Luis): Enjoy Mexico. Take care.

Cindy Arnson: Thank you (unintelligible).

(Luis): Bye Eric. Bye-bye. Bye...

Eric Olson: Bye-bye. Bye (Luis).

(Luis): Have a good day.

Man: Bye-bye.

Cindy Arnson: Okay who's still there?

Carol Williams: Yes I am. This is Carol.

((Crosstalk))

(Mimi Whitefield): ...still on.

Carol Williams: ...start, but I didn't know about it until it was too late to get in here in time.

Janell Ross: And also Janell Ross from the Huffington Post.

Drew Sample: Yes...

Cindy Arnson: Great. Okay.

Drew Sample: ...Carol. It's a bit of a mad scramble on our end. But I'm glad that you all could make it.

So yes I guess we can go ahead and go back to those - to your questions Carol and Janell.

Carol Williams: I guess, you know, in general what I would like to know is whether you think -- and I'm sure you covered this already -- but Chavismo can continue in the absence of Chavez. Or is the, you know, populous program orientation likely to dissipate with the new leader?

Cindy Arnson: Chavez is very much going to continue without Chavez, but it will never be the same. And I think that, you know, what we talked about earlier was that the -- and Eric and Drew (unintelligible) so we're just sort of repeating ourselves here -- but, you know, Chavez (had a) a singular ability to keep the movement unified, to keep a direct connection with his mass base and to make decisions.

And there's really no leader -- not Maduro, not (Cabeo), not anyone else -- who has, you know, all of those qualities.

So Chavismo will definitely continue with controls all of the institutions of government. But all of the cracks and fissures and divisions I think will become much more apparent certainly in the medium term. In the short term there will be a great effort to stay unified.

I think part of the hostile statements about the US and the expulsion of the ambassador was just an attempt, you know, to keep the movement together internally. And, you know, the sense is that any time there's a division, you know, as there was in 2002 it provides an opening for the enemies of the revolution to come in and attempt to undermine it or destroy it.

So in the short term, you know, they will very much stay unified. Everybody will campaign, you know, behind the candidate. I find it almost, you know, impossible to imagine that it won't be Nicolas Maduro and, you know, who has the - you know, is the only person in the Chavista leadership, not the only

aspirant, you know, to the Miraflores Palace, but the only person who has been given officially the blessing of Chavez as the person to kind of carry on his legacy.

So again I, you know, I guess never say never. But I find it very difficult to imagine that he will not be, you know, the candidate once the elections are called.

Janell Ross: This is Janell Ross with the Huffington Post. And then along these same lines I am curious about how you see the opposition holding together both inside Venezuela and outside in terms of the Expat community now that this sort of central figure is gone.

Cindy Arnson: Well let's see. Internally, you know, after the defeat in October as with any political movement or political party -- I mean, there's lots of recriminations, lots of finger-pointing, criticism that Capriles had, you know, tried to run his own show and had squeezed out the traditional parties particularly, you know, (opcion democratica) -- these kinds of - this kind of finger-pointing I think almost always happens, you know, after a defeat.

And I think Capriles is probably, you know, the only person who, you know, has enough of a national reputation at this point to mount, you know, a reasonable candidacy in an electoral period that's going to be 30 days. I'm sure there are other people who would prefer that there be a new face, but you can't introduce a new person to the country, you know, in a 30-day window.

So I think, you know, there are lots of divisions. There is I think a sense - you know, there have been criticisms of the arrogance of Primero Justicia and the - in the attempt to show that this was a fresh face and not just the old parties

from the past coming back. You know, I think he tried to distance himself and that obviously caused, you know, some degree of resentment and discomfort.

At the same time, you know, if the opposition doesn't realize that without unity they don't even have, you know, the vaguest prayer of success, I mean, I think they will stay unified (at) the - I think the contest will be Capriles versus Maduro.

Janell Ross: Okay.

Carol Williams: Cindy do you think that the devaluation will be sort of blamed on Chavez? Or was that done during this period of transition when, you know, the successors can sort of hoist it off in the consequences as, you know, not their doing and not their legacy?

Cindy Arnson: Yes well it's really - I mean, (I'm not) - you know, something about the economy, not a lot about the - I mean, just in general about economics.

You know, the - I think one of the major explanations for the need for the (degradation) was a huge increase, you know, in social spending that (unintelligible) in the run-up to the October elections -- you know, lots of new (unintelligible) that were created and just, you know, I haven't - I'm not sure any of (unintelligible) are very reliable, but, you know, just millions and millions and millions of dollars being spent, you know, in anticipation of the election.

And but the economy has been one of the worst performing in Latin America for a long time in terms of all different kinds of indices. I mean, it has the highest rate of inflation of any country in the region, second or third in the world, I mean, up there in the league with (de larus) and others.

And the inflation, you know, is very much a product of this, you know, kind of single-sourced economy that runs on oil exclusively and, you know, the income from oil.

So you're exporting a lot of oil. You're sending a lot of oil abroad. You're putting money in people's pockets, but you're not producing, you know, goods, you know, at a commensurate rate.

You're (guiding) the private sector. So levels of domestic production of everything from, you know, manufactured goods to food, you know, has plummeted, you know, rise in imports.

I mean, just the level of macroeconomic instability, you know, is enormous. And there's just no way you can hold that together, you know, without oil and without having oil at a very high international price.

So I think the real (bidding) is going to come, you know, should the international price of oil fall. I mean, you know, in our lifetimes, right, just in the last couple of decades it's been, you know, at \$10 or \$15 a barrel. It's not \$100 plus.

You know, you could only imagine what that would do, you know, to have a kind of a shock of some kind. I'm not predicting that it's going to fall again, but, you know, all commodities, you know, all commodity prices are subject to these cycles of booms and busts. And, you know, oil has just been consistently high, you know, for a long time.

Carol Williams: But do you think the majority of the population recognizes that this is the consequence of the pre-election spending spree? Or will they consider the new

leadership to be responsible for their declining living conditions and rising prices?

Cindy Arnson: Well I think, you know, things are going to get harder economically in the coming months. And whoever is in the government is going to, you know, pay the price for that, you know, politically.

There will be I think, you know, more discontent. But again if they are able to maintain, you know, the rates of subsidies and the promise that they will get something, you know, giving people the coupon that say, you know, that your house is being built and will be available in X time.

I mean, as long as they can maintain expectations and maintain the kind of, you know, basic level of spending I think they will avoid, you know, major upheavals.

Eric Olson: This is Eric. Can I add something to that?

You know, I think there's underway a real attempt not surprising to elevate Chavez's mess beyond what it is already. And so nobody is going to blame Chavez for much of anything. And the opposition has been trying to make these elections about a referendum of Chavez and what he's done very unsuccessfully.

So I think the challenge is really going to be for the opposition to frame the election not around Chavez but some - you know, what the future holds and how they'll deal with the challenges that are coming post-Chavez. And but blaming, you know, the devaluation on Chavez is not going to happen from either side I don't expect because they don't - it's not worked in the past.

Carol Williams: So neither of you see much risk of there being, you know, a rethinking of the populous path and the, you know, excessive social spending that...

Cindy Arnson: None whatsoever. None whatsoever. None whatsoever.

Carol Williams: Doesn't that kind of tie the hands of the next leadership if the popular expectation is for continuation of the missions and, you know, the deep social spending? This isn't really sustainable in the long run given the...

Cindy Arnson: Well I'm not sure I would use the phrase ties their hands. I mean, I think that there's just, you know, a broad-based commitment, you know, to doing something, you know, for poor Venezuelans who, you know, over the many years of Venezuelan democracy, you know, did not benefit economically from the country's vast oil wells.

So I think that that is, you know, a longstanding commitment, you know, of the movement. And that's not going to change.

What will change is, you know, depending on the degree of economic difficulty the ability, you know, to maintain things at the rate that they have been put out there.

So there is - I think there is the risk. But again, you know, if oil prices remain where they are that is going to provide them an enormous cushion, you know, for whoever, you know, takes the office of the president.

Carol Williams: How much of Chavez's legacy do you think Maduro inherits? I mean, because Chavez anointed him before he went to Cuba for his last treatment is that going to, you know, create a sort of given in terms of his winning the election and carrying on the programs that Chavez initiated?

Cindy Arnson: I certainly think it does. I mean, I find it, you know, incredibly difficult to imagine that there will be a Chavista candidate other than Nicolas Maduro given the explicit, you know, expression, you know, by Chavez that this is the person that he was anointing as his successor. That's a very powerful symbol.

And, you know, in this short period of 30 days the campaign will be based, you know, on the legacy and on continuing, you know, and deepening the revolution.

So there will be no (unintelligible) campaign, you know, any change of course on the contrary. You know, it will be about Chavez and continuing and deepening what Chavez has tried to accomplish.

Carol Williams: I'm sure you already addressed this, but what are the likely consequences for the other countries in Latin America that Chavez was providing, you know, subsidized oil to - through the Petrocaribe program? Is that likely to be continued? Or do you think there'll be some domestic pressure to focus the resources on Venezuelans?

Cindy Arnson: Well again I think it's likely to continue. I think it's certainly likely to continue in the (case) of Cuba which is the largest beneficiary, you know, of Petrocaribe.

And, you know, it would really take a dramatic decline in the price of oil to alter I think the equation. There may be some cutbacks, you know, at the margin.

But there's also a real ideological component, you know, to this kind of foreign policy and solidarity, you know, with foreign countries and oil-

importing countries. And that, you know, is an ideological component that will be very difficult, you know, to drop.

Drew Sample: All right...

((Crosstalk))

Carol Williams: I was going to say I don't think I have any other questions. But thank you very much for taking the time. It was very helpful.

Cindy Arnson: Yes and...

Drew Sample: Great.

Cindy Arnson: ...thank you also.

Woman: Great.

Man: (Unintelligible).

Cindy Arnson: Okay thanks and thanks to Drew for setting it up.

Drew Sample: Yes and thanks to Cindy and Eric for participating, providing expertise and to everyone else who called in. Everybody have a good day and we will talk to you all soon.

((Crosstalk))

Carol Williams: Bye-bye.

Cindy Arnson: Take care. All right thanks a lot. All right see you. Bye-bye.

END