



MARIN INTERFAITH
TASK FORCE ON THE AMERICAS

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Sanders for President
Campaign 2016

October 20, 2015

Dear Senator Sanders (Bernie):

As director of the Task Force on the Americas (www.taskforceamericas.org), I am writing on behalf of our staff, board and community members to express our displeasure with your scornful reference to President Hugo Chavez as a "dead communist dictator." We were saddened and disappointed that you could make such a cruel and inaccurate statement. We would like you to disavow or retract the statement as soon as possible.

The Task Force on the Americas is a 501c3 non-profit whose mission is to educate North Americans about the role of the United States in the Americas. We began in the 80s during the civil war years in Central America opposing the interventions of then-President Ronald Reagan. Since then we've become active around U.S. policies throughout our entire hemisphere, including immigration. For example, we oppose Free Trade agreements, like NAFTA and CAFTA; the embargo of Cuba; and military funding of governments guilty of committing human rights abuses, such as in Colombia, Honduras and Mexico.

Many of us felt that your and our values were similar regarding these issues; hence, we were shocked at your remarks regarding Venezuela's fallen leader. Hugo Chavez was a hero to many in the U.S. solidarity movement, and he was almost a religious figure to many Venezuelans. The majority of the citizens of the Bolivarian Republic loved and idealized him and still do, not only for what he said but also for what he accomplished. Poor people all over the hemisphere benefited from his international policies, including Vermont, when you accepted heating oil from Citgo.

When President Chavez took office in 1989, the poverty rate was 80 %. It has now been reduced to 30-35%. Illiteracy has been wiped out, health care and university education are free, and many poor citizens have benefitted from a generous housing program. Participatory democracy begins at the community level with community councils that receive direct funding from the central government for projects that they deem necessary. The entire country participated in drafting a new Bolivarian Constitution in 1999, in which all the values that you promote are enshrined.

My organization has been leading educational and solidarity delegations to Venezuela since 2004. Despite the U.S. State Department's and mainstream media's denial and/or failure to mention Venezuela's accomplishments, we have witnessed them ourselves and know them to be true. We are well aware that Venezuela is

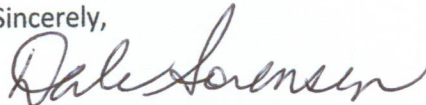
currently experiencing economic challenges due, in part at least, to an overly aggressive opposition which is fueled by the United States.

Hugo Chavez was no dictator. He and members of his party were elected numerous times in perhaps the most inclusive and transparent election system in the hemisphere – the best in the world, according to Jimmy Carter. We urge you to investigate for yourself. Talk to members of the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry in Washington DC, and don't rely solely on the New York Times or the Department of State for information about Venezuela. For an in-depth understanding of Hugo Chavez and his vision for Venezuela, please read Bart Jones' *Hugo: The Hugo Chavez Story From Mud Hut to Perpetual Revolution*.

While many of us, as individuals, were looking forward to actively participating in your campaign for President of the United States, we are now on hold waiting for some signal from you that your statement was in error or that you fell victim to the Clinton Campaign strategy (which is by no means a viable excuse).

We would like a response to this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dale Sorensen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dale" being more prominent and the last name "Sorensen" written in a continuous script.

Dale Sorensen Director
Task Force on the Americas