

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 3, 2023

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Juan Gonzalez
Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere
National Security Council
Washington D.C., 20500

Dear Mr. Gonzalez:

On September 22, 2023, I cautioned you against easing sanctions on Venezuela in exchange for mere assurances from the Maduro regime that Venezuela will hold a “free and fair” presidential election.¹ Nicolás Maduro uses his government to commit crimes against the United States and his own people.² He gains nothing from relinquishing his authority to a legitimate presidential challenger. Concerned by reports that you were negotiating further sanctions relief, I asked you to brief my office before easing any restrictions, “as this strategy appears to have been largely ineffective and dangerous.” You failed to honor my request. Instead, the Biden Administration eased restrictions “in response to [Venezuela’s] new agreement to allow free elections next year.”³ This act signaled to the world that the Biden Administration believed Maduro would honor democratic processes in Venezuela. No doubt in reliance on this assurance, millions of voters registered for the opposition’s primary election.

One week later, Venezuela’s high court suspended the opposition’s entire primary elections process, ratified Maduro’s ban on three candidates running for office, and ordered the organizers to turn over documents identifying registered voters.⁴ Now, Nicolás Maduro—a man known for arbitrarily detaining and torturing his dissenters—has a list identifying his opponents by name. This is far from a “free and fair” presidential election. Please provided the following explanations by November 30, 2023.

1. Please explain what sanctions, if any, the Biden Administration intends to impose or re-impose against Venezuela, and the projected timeline for doing so.

¹ Letter from Senator Charles E. Grassley to Juan Gonzalez, Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere National Security Council, (Sept. 22, 2023) (attached).

² See, e.g., *Venezuela Events of 2022*, Human Rights Watch (Accessed Oct. 31, 2023), <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/venezuela>.

³ Ben Lefebvre, *Biden Eases Sanctions on Venezuelan Oil and Republicans Howl*, Politico (Oct. 18, 2023), ["Beyond absurd": GOP savages Biden easing of Venezuelan oil sanctions - POLITICO](#)

⁴ Regina Garcia Cano, *Venezuela’s High Court Has Suspended the Opposition’s Primary Election Process, Including Its Result*, Associated Press (Oct. 30, 2023), [Venezuela's high court has suspended the opposition's primary election process, including its result | AP News](#)

2. Please explain what steps, if any, the Biden Administration is taking to ensure opposition party organizers and voters are not in danger because of their participation in the elections process.
3. Please detail any negotiations the Biden Administration is undertaking with the Maduro regime.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley

cc: Jake Sullivan
National Security Advisor