

Chavez Landslide Tops All In US History

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Well almost, as explained below. Hugo Chavez Frias' reelection on December 3 stands out when compared to the greatest landslide presidential victories in US history. Except for the close race in 1812 and the electoral deadlock in 1800 decided by the House of Representatives choosing Thomas Jefferson over Aaron Burr, the very earliest elections here weren't hardly partisan contests at all as the Democrat-Republican party of Jefferson and Madison was dominant and had everything its own way. It was like that through the election of 1820 when James Monroe ran virtually unopposed winning over 80% of the vote. A consistent pattern of real competitive elections only began with the one held in 1824, and from that time to the present Hugo Chavez's impressive landslide victory beat them all.

The nation's first president, George Washington, had no party affiliation, ran unopposed twice, and got all the votes. His "elections" were more like coronations, but Washington wisely chose to serve as an elected leader and not as a monarch which Federalists like Alexander Hamilton, John Adams and the nation's first Supreme Court Chief Justice John Jay preferred and one aligned with the British monarchy. They also were nationalists believing in a militarily strong central government with little regard for the rights of the separate states.

Most of them were dubious democrats as well who believed for the nation to be stable it should be run by elitists (the way it is today) separate from what Adams arrogantly called "the rabble." And John Jay was very explicit about how he felt saying "The people who own the country ought to run it." Today they do. Adams showed his disdain for ordinary people (and his opposition) when as president he signed into law the Patriot Acts (I and II) of his day - the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 to protect the country from dangerous aliens (today's "terrorists") and that criminalized any criticism of his administration (the kind George Bush calls traitorous).

Jefferson denounced both laws and called the Sedition Act an unconstitutional violation of the First Amendment right of free expression. It helped him and his Democrat-Republicans beat Adams in 1800 that led to the decline of the Federalists as a powerful opposition and their demise as a political party after the war of 1812. It meant that from 1800 - 1820, after Washington's two unopposed elections, presidential contests were lopsided affairs (except for the two mentioned above), the "loyal opposition" was hardly none at all, and the Democrat-Republicans weren't challenged until the party split into factions and ran against each other in 1824. Then Democrat party candidate Andrew Jackson beat National Republican John Quincy Adams in 1828. It's only from that period forward that any real comparison can be made between Hugo Chavez's impressive landslide on December 3 and presidential contests in the US. And doing it shows one thing. In all US landslide electoral victories from then till now, Chavez outdid them all, but you won't ever hear that reported by the dominant corporate-controlled media.

Earlier, there might not have been a basis for comparison had Washington chosen to be president for life as the Federalists preferred. If he'd done it, he could have stayed on by acclamation and those holding office after him might have done the same. Wisely, however, he decided eight years was enough and stepped down at the end of his second term in office setting the precedent of a two-term limit until Franklin Roosevelt went against tradition running and winning the presidency four times.

The 22nd Amendment to the Constitution ratified in 1951 settled the issue providing that: "No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice, and no person who has held the office of President, or acted as President, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to the office of the President more than once."

The US Constitution specifies that the president and vice-president be selected by electors chosen by the states. Article Two, Section One says: "Each state shall appoint, in a Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct, a Number of Electors, equal to the whole Number of Senators and Representatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congress." The electors then meet in their respective states after the popular vote to choose a president and vice-president.

That's how it's been done since George Washington was first elected president in 1789 with John Adams his vice-president. The method of choosing state electors changed later on, but the US system choosing presidents and vice-presidents by the Electoral College (a term unmentioned in the Constitution) of all the state electors has remained to this day, to the distress of many who justifiably believe it's long past time this antiquated and undemocratic system be abolished even though it's unimaginable a state's electors would vote against the majority popular vote in their states - at least up to now. Until 2000, it was also unimaginable that five members of the US Supreme Court would annul the popular vote in a presidential election to choose the candidate they preferred even though he was the loser - but they did, and the rest is history.

Hugo Chavez Frias' Electoral Victory Majority Greater Than For Any US President - Since 1820

Amazing but true. On December 3, 2006, the people of Venezuela voted in what hundreds of independent observers from around the world, including from the Carter Center in the US, called a free, fair, open and extremely smooth and well-run electoral process. They chose the only man they'll entrust with the job as long as he wants it reelecting Hugo Chavez with a majority 62.87% of the vote with the highest voter turnout in the country's history at almost 75% of the electorate. No US president since 1820, when elections here consistently became real contests, ever matched it or has any US election ever embraced all the democratic standards all Venezuelans now enjoy since Hugo Chavez came to office.

The Venezuelan Bolivarian Constitution Hugo Chavez gave his people states: "All persons have the right to be registered free of charge with the Civil Registry Office after birth, and to obtain public documents constituting evidence of the biological identity, in accordance with law." To see this happened Chavez established an initiative called Mision Identidad (Mission Identity) that's now a mass citizenship and voter registration drive. It's given millions of Venezuelans full rights of citizenship including the right to vote for the first time ever.

As glorious and grand a democratic experiment as the US Constitution was and is, it had and

still has lots of flaws including who's empowered to vote and what authority has the right to decide. It's the reason through the years many amendments and laws were needed and enacted to establish mandates for enfranchisement, but even today precise voting rights qualifications are left for the states to decide, and many take advantage to strike from their voter rolls categories of people they decide are unfit or that they unjustly wish to exclude from the most important of all rights in a democracy no citizen should have taken away.

It shouldn't be this way as millions in the US have lost the right to vote for a variety of reasons including for being a convicted felon or ex-felon in a country with the highest prison population in the world (greater than China's with four times the population). It exceeds 2.2 million, increases by about 1000 each week, one in every 32 adults in the country is either imprisoned, on parole or on probation, half the prison population is black, half are there for non-violent crimes, half of those are for mostly minor drug-related offenses, and most of those behind bars shouldn't be there at all if we had a criminal justice system with equity and justice for all including many wrongfully convicted because they couldn't afford or get competent counsel to defend them.

Virtually all citizens in Venezuela have the right to vote under one national standard and are encouraged to do so under a model democratic system that's gotten the vast majority of them to actively participate. In contrast, in the US, elections are especially fraud-laden today, but in the past many categories of voters were unjustly denied the franchise including blacks until the 1865 13th amendment to the Constitution freed them from slavery, the 1870 15th amendment gave them the right to vote, but it still took until the passage of the landmark Civil and Voting Rights Acts in the mid-1960s abolishing the Jim Crow laws in the South before blacks could exercise that right like others in the country could. Earlier, it wasn't until the 19th amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1920, before women got the right to vote they'd been fighting for over 70 years to get.

Back at the republic's birth, only adult white male property-owners could vote. It took until 1810 to eliminate the last religious prerequisite to voting and until 1850 before property ownership and tax requirements were dropped allowing all adult white males the franchise. It wasn't until 1913 and the passage of the 17th amendment that citizen voters could elect senators who up to then were elected by state legislatures. Native Americans, whose land this was for thousands of years before the settlers arrived and took it from them, couldn't vote until the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act granted all Native peoples the rights of citizenship, including the right to vote in federal elections. It didn't matter that this was their country, and it's they who should have had to right to decide what rights the white settler population had instead of the reverse.

In 1924, the 24th amendment outlawed discriminatory poll taxes in federal elections, and in 1966 the Supreme Court in *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections* ended poll tax requirements in all elections for the four remaining southern states still using them including George Bush's home state of Texas. In 1971, the 26th amendment set the minimum voting age at 18, and in 1972 the Supreme Court in *Dunn v. Blumstein* ruled residency requirements for voting in state and local elections were unconstitutional and suggested 30 days was a fair period.

This history shows how unfair laws were and still are in force in a country calling itself a model democracy. The most fundamental right of all, underpinning all others in a democratic state, is the right of every citizen to exercise his or her will at the polls freely and fairly without obstructive laws or any interference from any source in the electoral

process.

That freedom has been severely compromised today in the US, and unless that changes, there's no possibility of a free, fair and open democratic process here for all citizens. That happening is now almost impossible with more than 80% of the vote now cast and counted on easily manipulated electronic voting machines with no verifiable paper trail. The process is secretive and unreliable, privatized in the hands of large corporations with everything to gain if candidates they support win, and based on what's now known, that's exactly what's been happening as seen in the 2000 and 2004 fraud-laden elections.

The Six Greatest Landslide US Presidential Elections Since Contests Began After 1820

Six US presidential elections stand out especially for the landslide victories they gave the winners. Hugo Chavez's December 3, 2006 reelection topped them all.

1. In 1920, the first time women could vote in a federal election, Republican Warren Harding got 60.3% of the vote to beat Democrat James Cox getting 34.1%. This election was particularly noteworthy as Socialist Eugene Debs ran for the high office from prison getting over 900,000 votes. He was sentenced and was serving 10 years by the Wilson administration for violating the Espionage Act of 1917 that along with the Sedition Act of 1918 were the Patriot Acts of their day like the earlier Alien and Sedition Acts were under John Adams. Debs was found guilty of exercising his constitutional right of free expression after making an anti-WW I speech in Canton, Ohio. He served about 2.5 years before Harding commuted the sentence on Christmas day, 1921.

Harding capitalized on the unpopularity of Woodrow Wilson who took the country to the war he promised to keep us out of. The economy was also in recession, the country and Congress were mainly isolationist, and the main order of business was business and the need to get on with it and make it healthy again. It turned out to be the start of the "roaring twenties" that like the 1990s "roared" mainly for the privileged. It also was a time of scandal and corruption best remembered by the Teapot Dome affair of 1922 that involved Harding's Interior Secretary Albert Fall's leasing oil reserve rights on public land in Wyoming and California without competitive bidding (like the routine use of no-bid contracts today to favored corporations) and getting large illegal gifts from the companies in return that resulted in the crime committed.

Harding was dead (in 1923) and Coolidge was in the White House before everything came to a head with Fall eventually found guilty, fined \$100,000 and sentenced to a year in prison making him the first ever presidential cabinet member to serve prison time for offenses while in office.

2. In 1928, Republican Herbert Hoover defeated Democrat and first ever Catholic to run for the presidency Al Smith with 58.2% v. 40.8% for Smith. It wasn't a good year to be a Democrat, especially a Catholic one at that time. The 1920s were "roaring," including the stock market (again only for the privileged), and Republicans were tough to beat as long as, at the macro level, the economy was strong. Coolidge was president but declined a second term (fortunate for him as it turned out) and Commerce Secretary and capable bureaucrat Hoover got the nomination winning big. As things turned out, fate dealt him a bad hand as the stock market crashed less than a year into his term, but bad administration and Federal

Reserve policy turned what only should have been a stiff recession for a year or two into the Great Depression. It swept Republicans from office and ushered in the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt, who won impressively in 1932, not one of our big six, but was reelected in 1936 and included in our select group with the second greatest landslide victory ever on our list. Number one is after the FDR years.

3. The Great Depression 1930s weren't good years to be Republicans, and in 1936, Democrat Franklin Roosevelt was reelected overwhelmingly with 60.8% of the vote to 36.5% for Republican Alf Landon who had no chance to convince the electorate the New Deal was corrupt and wasteful when it was helping a lot of desperate people. Roosevelt asked for and got a mandate from the public to continue his progressive agenda that included the landmark Social Security Act (now in jeopardy in the age of George Bush) and other important measures that included establishing the FDIC, insuring bank deposits, the SEC, regulating the stock exchanges, and the NLRB with the passage of the Wagner Act that was the high water mark for labor rights. It guaranteed labor had the right to bargain collectively on equal terms with management, something that began eroding badly with the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 over Harry Truman's veto that began reversing the hard-won rights gained that now have nearly vanished entirely in a nation dominated by corporate giants and both Democrat and Republican parties supporting them including their union-busting practices.

4. In 1964, Democrat Lyndon Johnson won the greatest landslide presidential victory on our list, unsurpassed to this day. He got 61.1% of the vote to 38.5% for Republican Barry Goldwater who was portrayed as a dangerous extremist in a still-remembered TV "Daisy Girl" campaign ad featuring a little girl picking petals from a daisy in a field, counting them and then segueing to a countdown and nuclear explosion. Ironically, the ad only ran once in September that year on NBC, but it stirred such a controversy all the broadcasters ran it as a news story giving it far greater prominence than it otherwise would have gotten.

From the Great Depression through the 1960s, Republicans had a hard enough time competing with Democrats (Dwight Eisenhower being the exception because of his stature as a war hero and the unpopular Korean war under Harry Truman), and Goldwater made it worse by being a conservative before his time and a hawkish one advocating the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Vietnam at a time the war was still in its early stages but would be an act of lunacy any time.

5. In 1972, most people would be surprised to learn (except those around to remember it) Republican Richard Nixon trounced Democrat George McGovern getting 60% of the vote to McGovern's 38%. The main issue was the Vietnam war (that drove Lyndon Johnson from office in 1968), and Nixon managed to convince the public he had a plan to end it and peace was at hand. McGovern was strongly anti-war, but had to replace his running mate Thomas Eagleton after it was learned he hadn't revealed he'd undergone electroshock therapy for depression.

It proved a decisive factor in McGovern's defeat, but oddly as things turned out, Nixon was popular enough at that time to sweep to a landslide win only to come a cropper in the Watergate scandal that began almost innocently in June, 1972, months before the election, but spiralled out of control in its aftermath along with growing anger about the war. It drove Richard Nixon from office in disgrace in August, 1974 and gave the office lawfully under the 25th amendment to Gerald Ford. It made him the nation's only unelected president up to the time five Supreme Court justices gave the office to George Bush violating the law of the

land they showed contempt for.

6. In 1984, Republican Ronald Reagan won a decisive victory getting 58.8% of the vote to Democrat Walter Mondale's 40.6%. The "Reagan revolution" was in full swing, and the president was affable enough to convince a majority of the electorate his administration's large increases in military spending, big budget deficits run up to pay for it, tax cuts mainly for the rich, slashed social spending and opposition to labor rights were good for the country. Mondale was no match for him and was unfairly seen as a candidate supporting the poor and disadvantaged at the expense of the middle class.

In 1980s America, Hugo Chavez might not have stood a chance against the likes of Ronald Reagan even though Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution serves all the people while Reagan's ignored and harmed those most in need including the middle class, mostly helping instead those in the country needing no help - the rich and powerful, at the beginning of the nation's second Gilded Age, serving an empowered plutocracy that reached full fruition with the dominance of the privileged class under George W. Bush.

One Other Landslide Win for Chavez Unreported

Time Magazine just voted this writer and all others communicating online their "Person of the Year." In their cover story they asked who are we, what are we doing, and who has the time and energy for this? Their answer: "you do. And for seizing the reins of the global media, for founding and framing the new digital democracy, for working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game, TIME's Person of the Year for 2006 is you." Strange how underwhelming it feels at least for two reasons, but it must be stressed we beat the pros before they're even out of bed in the morning doing one thing they almost never do - telling the truth communicating real news, information and honest opinion on the most important world and national issues affecting everyone and refusing to genuflect to the country's power establishment.

While Time was honoring the free use of the internet, its importance, and the millions of ordinary people using it, its parent company Time-Warner has for months been part of the corporate cabal trying to high-pressure the Congress to end internet neutrality and destroy the freedom the magazine praised so effusively in their disingenuous annual award just announced. If the cable and telecom giants win their lobbying effort, the public Time calls "YOU" loses. They want to be self-regulating, to be able to charge whatever they wish, to choose wealthier customers and ignore lesser ones, to have a monopoly on high-speed cable internet so they can take over our private space and control it including, at their discretion, the content on it excluding whatever portions of it they don't want in their privatized space. They want to take what's now free and open and exploit it for profit, effectively destroying the internet as we now know it.

Time also failed to report they held an online poll for "Person of the Year" and then ignored the results when they turned out not to their editors' liking. "Time's Person of the Year is the person or persons who most affected the news and our lives, for good or for ill, and embodied what was important about the year." It turned out Hugo Chavez won their poll by a landslide at 35%. Second was Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at 21%. Then came Nancy Pelosi at 12%, The YouTube Guys 11%, George Bush 8%, Al Gore 8%, Condoleezza Rice 5% and Kim Jong Il 2%. For some reason, the magazine's December 25 cover story omitted these results so their readers never learned who won their honor and rightfully should have been named Time's Person of the Year. An oversight, likely, in the

holiday rush, so it's only fitting the winner be announced here - in the online space the magazine rates so highly:

Venezuelan President Hugo is Time Magazine's 2006 Person of the Year.

Venezuela under Hugo Chavez v. the US Under Republican or DLC Democrats Little Different From Republicans

The age of social enlightenment in the US, such as it was, lasted from the election of Franklin Roosevelt through the years of Lyndon Johnson and began heading south thereafter in the 1970s and ending with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. For the past generation, the US has been run for the interests of capital while the standard of living of ordinary working people, including the middle class fast eroding, had an unprecedented decline.

It shows in how wide the income disparity is between those at the economic top and ordinary wage earners. When Reagan was elected in 1980, average corporate CEO earnings were 42 times the average working person. The spread widened to 85 times in 1990 and skyrocketed to 431 times in 2004 as average top executive pay rose to about \$14 million a year after the election of George Bush plus enormous benefits adding to that total, including huge ones at retirement, compared to working Americans who now earn less, adjusted for inflation, than they did 30 years ago.

This disparity is highlighted in tax data released by the IRS showing overall income in the country rose 27% adjusted for inflation from 1979 to 2004, but it all went to the top. The bottom 60% of Americans (earning less than \$38,761 in 2004) made less than 95% of what they did in 1979. The 20% above them earned 2% more in 2004 than in 1979, inflation adjusted, and only the top 5% had significant gains earning 53% more in 2004 than in 1979. The largest gains of all went to the top 1% as expected - one-third of the entire increase in national income that translates to about 350% more in inflation adjusted dollars in 2004 than in 1979.

It all means since Ronald Reagan entered office, his administration and those that followed him, including Democrat Bill Clinton's, engineered a massive transfer of wealth from ordinary working people to the top income earners in the country while, at the same time, slashing social benefits making it much harder for most people to pay for essential services at much higher prices with the lower inflation-adjusted levels of income they now receive.

Especially hard hit are the 20% of workers on the bottom earning poverty-level wages - below \$11,166 a year. The IRS definition of a taxpayer is either an individual or married couple meaning the 26 million poorest taxpayers are the equivalent of about 48 million adults plus 12 million dependent children totaling around 60 million Americans in the richest country in the world with incomes of about \$7 a day (per capita) in a state of extreme destitution with the official poverty line in 2004 being \$27 a day for a single adult below retirement age and \$42 a day for a household with one child. The data excludes all public assistance like food stamps, medicaid benefits and earned-income tax credits, but since the Clinton administration's "welfare reform" Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) ended welfare payments after five years, that loss is much greater for the needy than the benefits remaining also being reduced.

It's hardly a testimony to the notion of "free market" capitalism under the Reagan

revolution, the first Bush presidency following it, and eight years under Bill Clinton governing by Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) “centrist” principles eschewing the enlightened progressive party tradition, selling out instead, like Republicans, to the interests of wealth and power at the expense of ordinary people left far behind.

It all seemed like a warm-up leading to the election of George W. Bush in 2000 characterized by outrageous levels of handouts to the rich in the form of huge tax cuts for top earners and giant corporations; larger than ever corporate subsidies (aka socialism for big corporations) at taxpayer expense; and endless wars and all the bounty from them to well-connected corporate allies, some literally getting a license to steal, that never had it so good but getting it at the public’s expense this president shows contempt for and is forced to follow the rules of law-of-the-jungle “free market” capitalism.

Today, under Republican or Democrat rule, the country is run by and for a rich aristocracy, in a rigidly structured class society promoting inequality and destroying the founding principles of the nation’s Framers. In the last generation, the great majority of ordinary working people have been abandoned and are sinking lower in their losing efforts to make ends meet and survive in a heartless society caring only about the interests of capital. This writer will explore this issue more fully in a year-end review and outlook article due out shortly.

A Different Enlightened Way in Venezuela Under Hugo Chavez

Things are much different in Venezuela under Hugo Chavez that showed up in the overwhelming electoral endorsement he got from his people on December 3. Until he was first elected in December, 1998 taking office in February, 1999, the country was run by and for rich oligarchs, in league with their counterpart dominant interests in Washington and corporate America. They ignored the needs of ordinary people that left most of them in a state of desperate poverty. Hugo Chavez pledged to his people he’d ameliorate their condition and did it successfully for the past eight years, to the great consternation of the country’s aristocracy who want the nation’s wealth for themselves and their US allies.

Following the crippling US and Venezuelan ruling class-instigated 2002 - 03 oil strike and destabilizing effects of their short-lived coup deposing him for two days in April, 2002, Hugo Chavez’s enlightened Bolivarian economic and social programs cut the level of poverty nearly in half from around 62% to where it is today at about one-third of the population, a dramatic improvement unmatched anywhere in Latin America or likely anywhere in the world. Along with that improvement are the essential social benefits now made available to everyone in the country by law, discussed below.

The Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was created democratically by popular referendum and adopted in December, 1999. It established a model humanistic social democracy providing checks and balances in the nation’s five branches of government instead of the usual three in countries like the US where currently all branches operate unchecked in lockstep under the Bush administration and will change little when the DLC Democrat-controlled 110th Congress convenes in January.

In Venezuela, in addition to the executive, legislative and judicial branches, the country also has independent electoral and prosecutorial ones. Chavez controls the executive branch, and his supporters control the four others because they democratically won a ruling majority in the legislature. They in the National Assembly have the authority to make appointments

to the other three branches independent of the executive while Hugo Chavez has no authority to appoint to or remove members from the other four branches or have any power to dictate what they do. Today in the US, George Bush has a virtual stranglehold over all three government branches that mostly rubber stamp his agenda without opposition including the most outrageous and controversial domestic and foreign policy parts of it.

In Venezuela, the Constitution also stipulates that all the people are assured political, economic and social justice under a system of participatory democracy guaranteeing everyone a legal right to essential social services and the right to participate in how the country is run. The services include free high quality health and dental care as a "fundamental social right and....responsibility....of the state," housing assistance, improved pensions, food assistance for the needy, job training to provide skills for future employment, free education to the highest level that eliminated illiteracy and much more including the full rights of citizenship for everyone including the right to vote in free, fair and open democratic elections, now a model for the world and make a sham of the fraud-laden ones in the US.

While the ruling authority in Washington systematically destroyed democracy and deprived people most in need of essential social services, Hugo Chavez built a model democracy growing stronger by enhancing already established socially enlightened policies further using the nation's oil revenue to do it. Much in the country is happening from below, and it's planned that way by the government in Caracas. Community organizing in councils has been promoted that includes all sorts of committees around the country involved in urban land development and improvement, health, the creation of over 100,000 cooperatives outside of state or private control, and the revitalization of hundreds of bankrupt businesses and factories put under worker control.

In addition, Hugo Chavez aggressively pursued a policy of putting underutilized land to use by redistributing more than two million hectares of it to over 130,000 families in a country with the richest 5% of landowners controlling 75% of the land, the great majority of rural Venezuelans having little or none of it, and Chavez wanting to change that imbalance and do it fairly. He also established over 5,000 Urban Land Committees representing almost 20% of the population (CTUs). The law governing them stipulates Venezuelans who live in homes they built on occupied land may petition the government for title to it to be able legally to own the land they live on. This is in addition to the government's goal to build thousands of new and free public housing units for the poor without homes.

These are the kinds of things going on in Venezuela in that country's first ever age of enlightenment, but it's only a beginning. Chavez wants to expand existing programs and advance his Bolivarian Project to the next level implementing his vision of a social democracy in the 21st century. His landslide electoral victory now gives him a mandate to do it, and during the pre-election campaign in September announced he wanted to move ahead in 2007 with the formation of a single united political party of the Bolivarian Revolution to further "consolidate and strengthen" the Bolivarian spirit.

Post-election in mid-December, Chavez addressed his followers and party members at a celebratory gathering at the Teresa Carreña theater repeating his September announcement calling for the establishment of a "unique (or unity) party" to replace his Movement for the Fifth Republic Party (MVR) that brought him to power in 1998, has been his party until now and will end in January. Chavez surprisingly announced the MVR is history and will be replaced by a United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) hoping to

include the MVR and all its coalition partners that wish to join. He wants it to be a peoples' party rooted in the country's communities created to win the Battle of Ideas that will move Venezuela ahead to become a fully developed social or socialist democracy for all the people.

Chavez has enormous grassroots support for his vision but faces daunting obstacles as well, not the least of which is a hostile administration in Washington committed to derailing his efforts and removing him from office by whatever means it chooses to use next in another attempt sure to come at some point.

He'll also likely get little help from the Democrat 110th Congress arriving in January with the likes of newly empowered House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a member of the US aristocracy, shamelessly calling Chavez an "everyday thug" and the US corporate-controlled media spewing the party line by relentlessly attacking him with tirades of venomous agitprop at times strong enough to make some old-line Soviet era aparachiks blush calling him an autocrat, a dictator, another Hitler and the greatest threat to US interests in the region in decades. It's the same kind of demonizing Chavez undergoes at home by the dominant corporate media that includes the country's two largest dailies, El Universal and El Nacional, and the three main TV networks - Venevision (owned by arch-Chavez enemy and 2002 coup plotter billionaire Gustavo Cisneros), Radio Caracas Television and Globovision.

The only charge against Chavez that's credible, for quite another reason, is that he's indeed the greatest of all threats the US and Venezuelan oligarchs face - a good example spreading slowly through the region inspiring people throughout Latin America to want the same kinds of social benefits and democratic rights Venezuelans now enjoy. The powerful interests of capital in Washington, Venezuela and throughout the region are determined to stop him, but the momentum in Latin America is with Chavez if it can advance it. He has the power of the people behind him and a growing alliance of populist or moderate leaders emerging in Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Chile and for almost half a century in Cuba either wanting an end to savage capitalism, Washington-style, or a significant softening of it, along with the old-style military-backed entrenched elitism that denied long-oppressed people all the rights they now enjoy or are beginning to demand.

The people in the region yearning for freedom and demanding governments address their rights and needs are in solidarity with him, a modern-day Bolivar, a hero and symbol of hope that they, too, may one day get the equity and justice they deserve like the people of Venezuela have, if they can keep it, and help Hugo Chavez fulfill his vision to take it to the next level.

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