

# How Sen. Rick Scott Became Big Oil's Point Man on Venezuelan Regime Change

By [Dan Cohen](#)

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*The US oil cartel has given Florida's Rick Scott 500 million reasons to be one of the Senate's most fanatical cheerleaders for toppling Venezuela's leftist government.*

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While **National Security Advisor John Bolton**, **Secretary of State Mike Pompeo**, and Florida **Senator Marco Rubio** have helped drive the Trump administration's maximum pressure-style campaign against [Venezuela](#), Rubio's counterpart, **Senator Rick Scott**, has been every bit as fanatical about regime change in Caracas.

Speaking to a packed house of former government officials, oil executives, and lobbyists at a June 20th Atlantic Council event entitled "Russian Influence in Venezuela: What Should the United States Do?," Scott launched into a tirade against Venezuelan **President Nicolás Maduro**.

Watch [@SenRickScott](#) rail against Venezuela and call for a possible US military strike at the NATO-funded Atlantic Council. Scott's hundreds of millions of dollars are largely tied to oil, and his campaign was financed by oil corporations seeking regime change in Venezuela. [pic.twitter.com/TZf0dzMYPO](https://pic.twitter.com/TZf0dzMYPO)

— Dan Cohen (@dancohen3000) [June 25, 2019](#)

"There is clearly genocide happening in Venezuela right now," Scott declared. "Tens of thousands are dead, and it's clearly genocide and it's in our hemisphere."

Scott wasn't referring to the tens of thousands of Venezuelans that have died as a result of the [crippling US sanctions](#) regime since 2017. He was pointing instead at Venezuela's president.

"We are watching little children like my grandson Eli starve to death, intentionally!" Scott bellowed. "And there is one person that's primarily responsible for it, and his name is Nicolás Maduro... I think we have to be very clear, whether it's President Putin, President Xi or the Castro regime or Iran, they are part of killing little children."

In August 2017, as the United States launched the opening salvo of its [economic assault](#) on Venezuela, American oil and gas corporations who poured huge sums into Scott's electoral campaign colluded in an attempt to suffocate the country's energy sector.

At the same time, Scott – whose oil-heavy investment portfolio stood to grow as a result of the prospective coup – led the way in the halls of power in Washington.

Scott's donors in big oil have a clear interest in toppling Venezuela's government. Since 2007, when President Hugo Chávez nationalized the assets of [Venezuela's national oil company](#), Petroleum of Venezuela (PDVSA), companies like [ExxonMobil](#) have been cut out of the country's market.

“They will never rob us again, those bandits of ExxonMobil; they are imperialist bandits, white collar criminals, corruptors of governments, over-throwers of governments, who supported the invasion and bombing of Iraq and continue supporting the genocide in Iraq,” Chávez [thundered](#) that year on his weekly TV show Alo Presidente.

**Rex Tillerson**, who was CEO of ExxonMobil at the time, sued Venezuela in international arbitration court, demanding the full \$10 billion in lost assets. Tillerson was initially awarded \$1.6 billion, but the compensation was reduced to approximately \$188 million before a US appeals court [blocked](#) the award altogether.

In 2017, Tillerson became Trump's first secretary of state and initiated the administration's push for regime change in an apparent attempt at revenge.

When Rick Scott launched his first campaign for Florida governor, he relied on heavy donations from the same US-based oil titans seeking to retake Venezuela's oil wealth. As the wealthiest person to serve as Florida's governor, Scott also dipped into his \$500 million family fortune to fund his campaign. But those assets were also heavily tied up in oil industry investments.

### **Big oil fills Scott's stock portfolio and stuffs his campaign coffers**

During his 2018 campaign for the Senate, Scott raked in tens of thousands of dollars from oil and gas industry political action committees, many of which had previously been customers of Venezuela's national PDVSA oil company.

[FEC records](#) show Scott received \$7,500 from Marathon Oil Corporation in 2018 through its PAC. Marathon had long anticipated the rounds of sanctions against Venezuela and had weaned itself off of the country's crude in preparation.

Prior to the January 2019 sanctions that made importing fuel from PDVSA illegal, Marathon [slashed](#) its imports by 90 percent.

“We saw this coming a long time ago,” [Marathon CEO](#) Gary Heminger said. “Five years ago [sanctions] would have had impact.”

As president of Sunshine Gasoline Distributors, Cuba-born **Maximo Alvarez** [contributed](#) \$38,500 to political action committees (PACs) supporting Scott's run for Senate, while

[funneling](#) a joint total of \$66,200 in individual contributions with Sunshine Vice President Sandra Reuss.

Alvarez currently owns more than 300 gas stations in south Florida, maintaining gasoline contracts with Marathon, CITGO, Chevron, Exxon Mobil, Shell, BP, and Texaco.

Valero Energy Corporation was the top purchaser of Venezuelan oil until the US embargo choked off the country's exports. When Scott ran for Senate, this oil titan's PAC [contributed](#) \$5,000.

Scott's campaign bragged that companies supported Scott because of his hard-line stance against Venezuela's leftist government.

"Those who contribute to the campaign do so to support his candidacy, which includes calling for an end to the Maduro regime," a spokesperson told [Politico](#).

Chevron's PAC [gave](#) Rick Scott \$10,000 in 2018 after it had cut Venezuelan oil imports by 27 percent, and Exxon's PAC had contributed \$5,000 to the campaign as well.

Scott and his wife [owned](#) as much as \$30,000 in Chevron stocks and \$65,000 in ExxonMobil stocks at the time the companies were funding his campaign, putting the couple in prime position to reap profits from regime change.

By 2014, Scott had a stake of \$528,032 in Phillips 66. This [oil giant](#) was the fourth-largest importer of Venezuelan crude oil until 2017, and stopped importing Venezuelan oil altogether when the country was placed under embargo the following year.

As governor of Florida, Scott was the driving force behind his state's decision to prohibit investment in Venezuela in 2017. A year later, he [led](#) the charge to enshrine that measure into state law.

### **Begging for an invasion**

From the [Atlantic Council](#) podium, Scott opened up the floor for new ideas on attacking Venezuela's economy.

"I tell people every day, 'If you have an idea, I will see if I can make it happen,'" the senator remarked, gazing out at the audience.

As the event transitioned into Q&A, a fresh-faced young Venezuelan emigre named **Daniel DiMartino** rose nervously from the crowd to deliver a plea for the US to wage a military assault on Venezuela.

During Q&A, Indiana-based Venezuelan high school graduate [@DanielDiMartino](#) read a prepared question asking what it would take for the US to attack Venezuela. He's an underling of [@MariaCorinaYA](#), the US-govt funded oppo figure who was implicated in an alleged plot to murder Maduro [pic.twitter.com/uFqGdyuk0L](https://pic.twitter.com/uFqGdyuk0L)

— Dan Cohen (@dancohen3000) [June 25, 2019](#)

“I think this is just what every Venezuelan is asking right now,” DiMartino declared insistently, “and I think the most important question here is what will it take from the United States to give a real threat of military action to free Venezuela and actually follow through on that threat?”

While DiMartino sought to portray himself as an average Venezuelan, he was, in fact, a member of the hard-line Vente Venezuela (Come On Venezuela), an opposition party founded in 2012 by [María Corina Machado](#).

One of Venezuela’s most extreme right-wing rabble rousers, Machado was implicated in an alleged plot to assassinate President Maduro in 2010. This January, when the US-backed coup was put into motion, Machado’s party introduced a call for the US military to enact the “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine, a thinly veiled call for invasion.

DiMartino is also an intern for Republican Indiana **Sen. Todd Young**, and a regular [guest](#) on Fox News and CNN, where he [implores](#) the US to invade Venezuela, just as he did at the Atlantic Council.

But his call fell on deaf ears.

“We in the United States don’t have a lot of public support for a military intervention in Venezuela, or anywhere else for that matter, at the moment,” former Pentagon official Evelyn Farkas lamented.

Farkas might have been as hawkish as anyone on the stage. She oversaw the Obama administration’s Russia policy until 2015 and proposed sending offensive weapons to [far-right militias in Ukraine](#), a plan that was shelved until the Trump administration approved it in 2017. But even a hardliner like her understood that an invasion of Venezuela was a recipe for political and military disaster.

With Maduro still entrenched in the Miraflores presidential palace and firmly in control of PDVSA, Rick Scott may have to wait a while for his Exxon stocks to skyrocket.

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