

Candidate accuses Chávez, Castro of 'meddling' in race

MIAMI HERALD
MAY 23, 2006

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and Cuban leader Fidel Castro are meddling in Nicaragua's upcoming elections by orchestrating fertilizer giveaways and deeply discounted oil deals for leftist politicians, a leading presidential candidate charged Monday.

Speaking in Coral Gables at a function arranged by the University of Miami's Center for Hemispheric Policy, presidential candidate Eduardo Montealegre said Chávez and Castro are looking to help Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista party.

"Castro has always had his hands in Nicaragua over the years. What he hasn't had in many years is a lot of money," Montealegre said. "Now he's found himself with Chávez's oil, which he is using like an open checkbook to support Daniel Ortega."

Montealegre, a former finance minister, will face off against the Sandinista Ortega in a November election packed with three other candidates. Ortega served as president throughout the 1980s but has lost the past three presidential elections.

Montealegre has portrayed the race as a fight of the past against the future, saying the election of Ortega, whose term in office was marked by civil war and hyperinflation, would lead to the nationalization and expropriation of private property.

The Sandinista Front has signed a 25-year deal with Venezuela for discounted oil, which will leave plenty of money for the Sandinistas to fund their campaign - monies that would be paid off for decades by Nicaraguans, Montealegre said. Chávez also has promised tons of fertilizer to be handed out among Nicaragua's rural poor.

"Make no mistake: Chávez and Castro plan to merge Nicaragua into their bloc of countries that are against democracy and freedom," Montealegre said. "Their plan is simple: directly intervene in Nicaragua's electoral process, supporting their candidate, Daniel Ortega."

