

Push by Chávez to Abandon Term Limits on Presidency

The New York Times
August 16, 2007

CARACAS, Venezuela, Aug. 15 — President [Hugo Chávez](#) outlined a proposed overhaul to the Constitution on Wednesday night that would allow him to remain in power indefinitely through perpetual re-elections, an intensification of his efforts to assert greater state control over political and economic institutions.

Taking aim at opponents who say he is assuming too much power, Mr. Chávez said, “I recommend they take a pill, what do they call it, a Valium.” During a meandering, theatrical speech at the National Assembly here, he said, “We have broken the chains of the old hegemonic oligarchy.”

Mr. Chávez, whose current term ends in 2012, also laid out a dizzying array of other proposed changes to the Constitution, all to be put before a congressional vote and a national referendum.

He called for a work day of no longer than six hours, the power to designate military regions for “defense reasons,” the creation of regional governing entities that would be managed by vice presidents appointed by the president, and demarcating Venezuela’s sovereignty in parts of the Caribbean by possibly building artificial islands.

The president’s opponents see such proposals as window dressing to accompany Mr. Chávez’s polemical re-election ambitions, which include expanding presidential terms to seven years from six. Manuel Rosales, the governor of Zulia State and the main opposition candidate in the presidential elections last December, said in televised comments that after Mr. Chávez’s call to abandon term limits, the other proposals were “adornments.”

Criticism of the effort to change the Constitution has sharpened around fears that Mr. Chávez, who has been in office since 1999, could use it to

diminish the power of elected governors and mayors, of which a handful in the country still oppose him.

Seemingly undeterred by the criticism, which he described as lies coming from counterrevolutionaries, Mr. Chávez delivered a speech sprinkled with references to Machiavelli and Aristotle and more recent Marxist Italian philosophers like Antonio Gramsci and Antonio Negri.

State television championed his proposals Wednesday, and supporters gathered before television cameras near the National Assembly to chant “Fatherland, Socialism or Death!”