

Changes proposed by Chávez

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Following are some of the key changes to the Venezuelan constitution proposed by President Hugo Chávez;

- * Allow unlimited presidential re-election and extend the term in office from six to seven years. Under the current Constitution, Chávez is barred from reelection when his current six-year term expires in 2012.
- * Allow the suspension of the right to information and some parts of due process during states of emergency declared by the president, for indefinite periods of time.
- * Lower the voting age from 18 to 16.
- * Describe the state and many of its goals and institutions as "socialist." For example, elections are defined as "for the construction of socialism."
- * Give the president the power to regulate by decree the transition to a "socialist" economy.
- * End the autonomy of the Central Bank. Chávez says he needs access to its money to meet the needs of the poor. Critics say Chávez would raid the billions of dollars held in reserve to spend on dubious projects.
- * Weaken private property rights, allowing the government to expropriate property even before judicial review.
- * Strengthen local "communal councils," self-elected neighborhood groups that receive public funds for projects such as fixing local roads and sewers. They would gain power at the expense of elected mayors and governors, and thus weaken potential political rivals to Chávez.
- * Create a fund to provide health care for workers in the informal economy. This measure is especially popular because about half of Venezuela's workers toil off the books.
- * Allow the president to designate military regions in any part of the country, strengthening his control over military operations.
- * Give the *misiones* -- the many health, education and social welfare campaigns launched by Chávez -- constitutional rank.
- * The president can create new provinces, territories or cities, giving him the power to rule them directly and bypass elected municipal and other governments now in the hands of the opposition.

* The president will directly administer public finances and regulate monetary, currency exchange rate and credit policies, and will set interests rates in conjunction with the Central Bank.

* The president will have the right to manage international monetary reserves at his discretion and could require that the funds be used for the development of a "socialist" nation.

* Incorporates the People's Bolivarian militia, created by Chávez, as a branch of the regular armed forces.

*Increase the number of voters' signatures required to convene referendums, including presidential recall referendums.