

Venezuela presidential candidate vows to halt oil aid to Cuba

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CARACAS, Venezuela -- Venezuelan presidential candidate Henrique Capriles on Monday said he would end the country's shipments of subsidized oil to Cuba, while at the same time referring to acting President Nicolas Maduro as a puppet of Havana.

"The giveaways to other countries are going to end. Not another drop of oil will go toward financing the government of the Castros," Capriles said.

"Nicolas is the candidate of Raul Castro; I'm the candidate of the Venezuelan people," Capriles said during a speech to university students.

He said halting cheap oil sales to Cuba would free up resources to boost public employee salaries by 40 percent.

Venezuela provides close to 100,000 barrels per day of oil to Cuba in exchange for a range of services, including doctors that run free health clinics in slums and rural areas.

Supporters say it has helped expand access to health care, while critics call it a mere subsidy to the Castro government.

Although focusing primarily on Cuba, Capriles's remarks about ending "giveaways to other countries" are not likely to bring much comfort to a number of Caribbean governments that have come to rely on cheap oil from Venezuela under the PetroCaribe agreement created by former president Hugo Chavez.

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