



Venezuela's president just gave every government worker Fridays off—but nobody's happy about it

Mariana Atencio

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Faced with a worsening nationwide power crisis, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has ordered all public employees to take off every Friday for the next two months.

We're not just talking about a couple of people here. In country where the state oil company is the engine of the economy and the government tries to resolve unemployment problems by creating new ministries (32 in total, including a Ministry of Supreme Social Happiness), public sector employees make up nearly 3 million people, or 10% of the population.

So will giving a huge chunk of the workforce every Friday off work alleviate the power shortages and blackouts? Nope. Not even in the short term. That's because people are likely to go home and turn on their lights and air-conditioners, if they can afford it.

The long-term consequences are more severe. Maduro's decree signals a shutting down of Venezuela. Last one out, turn off the lights.

The new emergency vacation measure comes on the heels of the government's decision to give workers a full week off during Easter to save electricity. In February, the government cut the hours of more than 100 shopping malls across the country.

We don't know what will happen with hospitals and schools. My sister-in-law told me her two year old's preschool was closed until further notice. One of the most notable private hospitals in Caracas, *Centro Médico Docente La Trinidad*, sent the following memo to its patients:

"Due to the lack of water, we're faced with the need to restrict visits to patients who are hospitalized to one per person...For that same reason; we won't be offering medical services such as checkups, labs or elective surgeries. We will only treat emergencies..."

My friend's mother in-law got turned back at the hospital this morning, after being told to get there at 6 a.m. for radiation to complete her cancer treatment.

You can't even pass the time by having safe sex, due to the shortage of condoms. The political party "Un Nuevo Tiempo" has warned there won't be any antiretroviral medication to treat HIV after July. Then there's Zika. Young mothers are petrified to get pregnant. Some have terminated pregnancies as late as 17 weeks.

There's no excuse for this to be happening in a country with the largest oil reserves in the world. But what makes everything much worse is the socialist government's backward handling of all problems.

Yesterday, Maduro urged Venezuelans to make "small changes" to their routines, like using clotheslines instead of driers. He urged women not to blow dry their hair.

"I always think a woman looks better when she just runs her fingers through her hair and lets it dry naturally. It's just an idea I have," he said. Not exactly words you want to hear from your president.

Earlier this year, the country's Healthy Minister, Lusiana Melo, said toothpaste was scarce in Venezuela because people were brushing their teeth three times a day due to a campaign promoted by "savage capitalism" and "malicious dentists." Brushing your teeth once a day is "more than enough," she concluded.

If all this sounds familiar, it's because it is. This is the legacy of late President Hugo Chávez. When an electricity crisis loomed in 2009, the erstwhile president told Venezuelans they needed to bathe in under three minutes.

"Some people sing in the shower, in the shower for half an hour. No kids, three minutes is more than enough. I've counted, three minutes, and I don't stink," he said during a televised Cabinet meeting.

Chávez then went on to label baths and jacuzzis as anti-communist.

It's no surprise that for the third year in the row Venezuela was found to be *the most miserable* nation in the *world*, according to the Cato Institute. The inept, communist-inspired government continues to shut down Venezuela. A three-day weekend isn't going to fix those problems.

Venezuelans want to brush their teeth three times a day.

They want to have safe sex. They want to have babies.

They want to sing in the shower. And even blow out their hair.

And they want to work on Fridays.

In short, they want to live in a normal country where the president isn't counting how long people are in the shower, how often they're attending to dental hygiene, or how many hours they're trying to work in a week.