



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on May 28, 2018

U.S. Citizen Joshua Holt Released by Venezuela, Welcomed Back by Trump

When Utahn Joshua Holt [met with President Donald Trump](#) at the White House late Saturday night, he said he was “overwhelmed with gratitude” over his release on Friday from two years in a filthy Venezuelan prison. Accompanying Holt (shown) to the White House were his parents Jason and Laurie Holt, his Venezuelan wife Thamara, and her daughter Marian.



Two years ago Holt, who is a member of the LDS church, flew to Venezuela to marry his Mormon sweetheart, whom he met over the Internet while trying to improve his Spanish. Within hours of his wedding, the thuggish regime of Maxrist dictator Nicolas Maduro arrested both of them on phony illegal weapons charges and put them into a detention center known as El Helicoide. There they stayed without being allowed even a preliminary hearing. And there they were likely to stay without outside help.

That help came from [an unlikely and largely unknown source](#): Caleb McCarry, a back-channel operative working in Washington since 1990. He now serves as a staff member to Senator Bob Corker (R-Tenn.). His connections to the Maduro regime were established when he, along with Rafael Lacava (known among his constituents in Venezuela’s Carabobo state as “Dracula” for driving around at night in a Batmobile-like vehicle), was involved in an informal gathering known as the Boston Group. That now-defunct group was created following an attempted coup against then-Venezuelan president Hugh Chavez in 2002, to repair relations between the U.S. and Venezuela afterwards. Both had cordial relations with Maduro and both used them to bring the release by Maduro of Holt and his family on Saturday.

Senator Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) also aided in the release with a visit to Venezuela in February to see Maduro. This was followed by a visit by McCarry to discuss Holt’s imprisonment, then going on to two years, and the possibility of an exchange for two of Maduro’s wife’s nephews who had been convicted of drug trafficking in New York in 2016.

This was followed by a visit by “Dracula” to Washington in March to meet with Senators Orrin Hatch and Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), and Representative Ed Royce (R-Calif.).

There was little movement on either side until late last week, when Secretary of State Mike Pompeo briefed Corker, who had scheduled a meeting with Maduro with the help of McCarry for Friday morning. After two hours of negotiations, Maduro announced that Holt and his wife and daughter were



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free to leave.

And the rest is history. Senator Hatch took most of the credit, tweeting on Friday: “Over the last two years, I’ve worked with two presidential administrations, countless diplomatic contacts, ambassadors from all over the world, a network of contacts in Venezuela, and President Maduro himself, and I could not be more honored to be able to reunite Josh with his sweet, long-suffering family in Riverton.”

Utah Representative Mia Love gave some love to Donald Trump — who was, after all, the president while all these backchannel discussions were taking place:

So many Utah families send their sons and daughters out [on Mormon mission trips] for maybe a year and a half to two years, and they want to know if something happens to their children, that the United States will have their back.

I don’t think there’s a person in the United States right now [who] doesn’t think you [the president] have their back.

It remains unclear what Trump, Pompeo, Corker, McCarry et al may have agreed to to allow Holt and his wife and daughter to leave Venezuela, as the details of Corker’s two-hour meeting with Maduro aren’t available. At least officialy, nothing was given up. Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), privy to some of the details, tweeted that the release was “unconditional.” The White House issued a statement saying:

The release of Joshua Holt does not change United States policy. The Maduro regime must call free, fair, and transparent elections, consistent with its constitution. The election process that occurred on May 20 was illegitimate. The regime must allow all Venezuelans and political parties to participate freely in new elections and the democratic process. It must release all political prisoners, and must accept desperately needed international humanitarian aid for Venezuela’s dying citizens.

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