

**Remarks by Governor Steve Bullock**  
**2021 Iran Human Rights and Democracy Conference**  
July 10, 2021

Thank you to the organizers of the 2021 Convention for a Free Iran for inviting me to join you today.

As the former Governor of Montana, a state located in the rural West of the United States along the border of Canada, I recognize we may have many differences when it comes to our upbringings, our experiences, our cultures and more. Yet no matter those differences, I believe there are many areas of common ground that unite us; most significantly through our shared hope for a world that could *and should* be.

A world where all humans – no matter their beliefs, their gender, the color of their skin, or where they live – are treated equally and feel safe. A world where the basic pillars of human rights are respected, and freedoms protected. A world where the people may take part in their governments, in a democracy, with equal protection of the law.

These universal norms of dignity and respect, and justice and peace – formally established in the Universal of Declaration of Human Rights – are a fundamental part of what makes us human. They are the values we share together in the United States, in Iran, and all across the globe. They are standards formed both through a long human history and through our commonalities regardless of varying religions, political systems, and cultures.

That's because whether you live in Tehran Iran, Manhattan New York, or Manhattan Montana – population 1,549 -- we all value and want the same things. We want a roof over our heads, access to education and a decent job. We want our rights to life, liberty and security protected. We want to be productive members of a civil society and take part in governments that are free from corruption and oppression. We want the unwavering belief that we can build a better life for our kids and grandkids.

And what makes us part of the fabric of a civil society is the unshakable determination to work toward a world that realizes these universal norms.

Every nation's people fight their own battles in the path toward achieving human rights and democracy. Here in the United States of America – in our 245-year-old experiment called representative democracy – we have faced many attempts to dismantle our democracy, even recently. Over 160 years ago, the results of an election pushed our nation into a deadly civil war. To this day, we continue the march toward strengthening civil and voting rights.

Not a single country has been without a history of struggle or with a straight line to progress. Each nation's struggles are unique, and some far more oppressive than others. But no matter the hurdles, where and when progress is made is through a common thread: a determined people.

Determined people are unwilling to be deterred despite the obstacles. Determined people understand they can make a difference – not just now, but in ways that will impact future generations to come.

The Iranian people, in the battle for a free and democratic Iran, are a determined people.

You refuse to accept the status quo, never settling for less. You refuse to allow discrimination and violence against women and girls, and among the many minority populations. You refuse to stand by while prisoners and political dissidents are subjected to inhumane conditions, torture, or disappearances. You refuse to let fear, retribution and terrorism overcome opportunity for peace.

Most importantly, you refuse to give up hope. For it is hope that keeps alive the determination of the Iranian people to exercise the rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly to hold the Iranian regime accountable.

Americans support the Iranian people in their desire for change. We recognize the contributions of the people of Iran, stemming from a vibrant history of art, architecture, literature, science, and medicine that reached across the globe. And we share in the hope for a better life for all Iranian people.

It's not so often that the United States Congress comes together to agree on something in a bipartisan manner, when the two political parties echo the same message. House Resolution 118 is one of those moments. Over 240 elected officials representing states spanning across a diverse America, "[recognize] the rights of the Iranian people and their struggle to establish a democratic, secular, and nonnuclear Republic of Iran."

It is the people of Iran that will create this democratic, secular and nonnuclear nation. Iranian people *are* looking for a change. Real durable change comes from within, not reliant on outside nations to lead in action. And we hear you, we see you, and we are behind you.

During the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa, Nelson Mandela stated: "I have walked that long road to freedom. But I have discovered that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vistas that surround me, to look back at the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended."

The people of Iran have witnessed and summited many of the hills before them. Hills of state sponsored terrorism, of human rights violations, of torture of dissidents. The hills of the suppression of ethnic and religious minorities, of discrimination against women and girls. The people of Iran have witnessed the hills of elections that are anything but democratic, free and fair. And yet, you dare not linger.

The path to a free and democratic Iran may be long and winding, but it is a path that moves forward. As Americans, we are behind the Iranian people as they walk in their path forward to freedom. As humans, we know that our differences are small compared to what unites us, and we bond together in our hope for the world that could be – the world that ought to be – and the world that will be.

Thank you, again. I sincerely hope that this conference fills you with hope and inspiration for your future ahead.