

Remarks by Senator Doug Jones
Iranian Human Rights Conference
July 10, 2021

Thank you to all of the organizers and sponsors and the tens of thousands of people from around the world attending the 2021 Iran Human Rights & Democracy Conference. And I want to give a special thank you to my friends at the Organization of Iranian American Communities for asking me to be part of this historic event. I am honored to participate, to demonstrate my support for and to stand with each of you and the Iranian people in their quest for a Secular, Democratic and Non-Nuclear Republic of Iran.

And as you all are well aware, the recent activity in Iran was not an “election,” where the people of Iran duly elect their next president, but in reality, a “selection” by Iran’s Supreme Leader of a loyalist, Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi, whose rise to power has been marked by repression and injustice and the execution of literally thousands of political dissidents dating back to the 1988 Massacre which you are all too familiar with. Many who are in attendance at this conference are the mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, and children of the fallen at the hands of the regime and Raisi.

But know this: The people of Iran did speak in this past election. They spoke with their silence. They spoke by refusing to vote in an election where the outcome was pre-ordained and not reflective of the will of the people. By refusing to participate in such a sham, the people of Iran, not the regime, can claim victory.

And know this as well: The speakers at this conference are here because we are with you. The 242 bipartisan co-sponsors of HR 118 and others who support it in the United States Congress are with you. I am with you.

And there is hope. Iran’s election this year is vastly different than those that have gone before it. This year’s so-called election comes at the regime’s most precarious time as its prospects for survival are being questioned from both inside the regime and outside by freedom seeking people in Iran and across the globe. That vulnerability has been on full display since the last Iranian election with a series of successive uprisings each year since 2017.

Whether it is the global economy, military security, climate change, racial and social justice or healthcare and the fight against a worldwide pandemic, democracy represents more than just a form of government, it is an idea and a set of values grounded in the dignity and value of every single human being. It is a theme that President Biden campaigned on and a theme he has stressed since becoming President.

Significantly, the United States Congress, through House Resolution 118, is speaking out. The resolution highlights the desire of the Iranian people to achieve the freedoms they so rightly deserve as evidenced by the repeated rounds of protests in cities throughout Iran, and urges the Biden Administration to

make ending the Iranian regime's reign of terror and human rights abuses while providing unwavering support for the Iranian people's struggle for freedom and a democratic, non-nuclear Republic of Iran, the centerpiece of U.S. policy toward Iran. The resolution is also a message to the global community to not let up, to work together in a unified effort to hold Iran accountable for breaching diplomatic privileges and targeting tens of thousands of Iranians calling for the universal right to vote, free elections, gender, religious and ethnicity equality, a foreign policy based on peaceful co-existence and a non-nuclear Iran. The point is you have friends in and out of the United States government.

But change will not and should not come to Iran because other countries want it or even demand it. No my friends, change must come – and I believe will come – from you and the people of Iran. You are the source and instrument of change. You are the inspiration for change. As the late Senator John McCain said to you just a few years ago,

“You are the example to the world that those people who are willing to fight and sacrifice for freedom will achieve it.”

The people of Iran are demonstrating time and time again, year after year, that they are willing to make the sacrifices for freedom. In particular, the youth of Iran, the students and younger generation of Iran, are leading the efforts for a more inclusive society. A society where all are treated equally. One that does not discriminate based gender, ethnicity or class. These young people see the value to the world of an Iranian society that freely allows the Persian people to showcase their talents in business and science and the arts. As with all countries, but particularly Iran, the future lies in its youth.

The power and strength of young people are especially significant for me. I grew up in a period of unrest in America, where the youth of America demanded civil rights and equal opportunities for American citizens of all races. And I am proud to say that it was the youth of my city - Birmingham, Alabama - that became the shining example and inspiration for America's civil rights movement some 60 years ago.

Today, it is the youth of Iran that is also a beacon of hope. Time and time again it is Iranian students and youth that are leading the way for freedom in Iran. Major uprisings in December 2017 signaled that regime change is within reach. January 2018 protests dispelled the false narrative that there was a struggle between hardliners and moderates within the regime. The November 2019 uprising encompassed nearly 200 cities and towns resulting in even harsher repression by the regime. And in January 2020 nationwide protests were triggered by a cover up orchestrated by the regime after the IRGC shot down a Ukrainian airliner. As happened in Birmingham some 56 years earlier, students and others took to the streets demanding change.

But change – true change, lasting change – does not come quickly or easily. True change, lasting change will come only through continued determination, ongoing commitment and lasting sacrifice – characteristics possessed by all freedom loving Iranians. It was the same determination, commitment and sacrifice seen and heard during America's civil rights movement as time and time again demonstrators sang the lyrics of one of the many great freedom songs:

Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round, turn me 'round.

Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round

I'm gonna keep on walking, keep on talking

Marching up to freedom land.

The challenges for a secular, democratic and non-nuclear Iran still lie ahead. So my charge to you as this conference concludes is to never give up, never lose sight of the quest for freedom,

to keep on walk-in'

keep on talkin'

Keep on marching toward freedom land

....and in so doing, don't let nobody turn you around

Thank you!