

Let me begin by acknowledging and thanking the Convention for a Free Iran—and of course Mrs. Rajavi—for the opportunity to speak with you today. You're at special crossroads in history; it's an honor for me to be associated, even in this small way, with your work.

Your ideas are compelling, and you've had the A-list of political figures and experts come to pay their respect and speak with you. People with deep experience and expertise in foreign relations and knowledge of Iran. I've watched the video of some of them.

My experiences have been different. I've been a Mayor and Governor out in the middle of America—in Tennessee—a long way from Washington or any other capital. I've never been a Member of Congress or worked in the Executive Branch of our Federal Government.

I don't share foreign policy expertise with many of your other speakers, but we do have a common theme that's even more basic—every one of us shares a deep belief in the dignity of every human being and in the God-given, the inalienable rights of every human being.

The presence of speakers like myself, from other experiences, other places, underlines the growing power of your movement. The awareness of the dreams and the struggle of ordinary Iranian people is moving beyond a world of insiders in the corridors of power, and into the consciousness and conscience of millions of Americans.

I support and admire your work. I'm sure everyone who speaks to you does. I also want to tell you, in my own personal terms, why I feel that way.

I have a simple and somewhat old-fashioned philosophy of life: that the big job of every grown-up is simply to make the world a little bit better for the next generation. As a governor, I worked on education and on preserving the environment as my way of fulfilling this obligation. Human progress is built on each generation standing on the shoulders of the one before.

I admire you because that's exactly what I think you're doing.

I've learned a lot about your strategies—promoting democracy, the separation of Church and State, gender equality, the rule of law. But it seems to me that the purpose, the goal, of all those strategies is to make the world a little bit better for the next

generation, to build a better society for the young people of Iran—today’s young people and those of generations yet to be born.

There are strong parallels between what you are working to accomplish today, and the birthing struggles our United States went through in the 18th century. There’s a common thread between them—a bedrock belief that we all have God-given human rights that any government must respect. And the belief that the best way to secure those rights, now and for the long term, is through a democratic, secular government. Thomas Jefferson described them—life liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The approval of our own Constitution was delayed until these rights were further enumerated in the first 10 Amendments to it—our Bill of Rights. Thomas Jefferson would feel right at home with the principles that you set down in your 10-point plan.

I’m a Tennessean, and for me there’s another connection between your movement and Tennessee’s own history. We have sent three presidents to Washington over the years, of these, far and away the most consequential was Andrew Jackson. He was

a Tennessean; his home is just a few miles from where I'm sitting right now.

President Jackson is remembered as being the President who championed the rights of the “common man” against a “corrupt aristocracy.” His six predecessors as President were from elite backgrounds, from the original colonies, anything but representative of the common man. Jackson was born a common man, trusted them. He was the first President from West of the mountains, the frontier. The Jackson presidency was an inflection point in the American experiment that permanently changed the way our democracy works and where power in it lies.

The analogy is limited: the aristocracy you are fighting is far more evil, far more corrupt than anything we've ever experienced. But what you're doing—taking power from a corrupt elite and placing it firmly in the hands of ordinary people, the common men and women of your nation, is something we Tennesseans value and respect. We can see a little bit of our Tennessee character and worldview in you.

One principle that your struggle has embraced is especially impressive to me: the principle that lasting reform must come

from within. I believe that history has shown again and again, in country after country, that you are exactly right. America, to be honest, has not always figured that out. But you've figured out that lasting, durable change in Iran will only come about when that change is driven by the Iranian people themselves. Your approach, in my opinion, is very far-seeing and wise.

I've made some comparisons between our own history here in America and what you are working toward, but there is also one fundamental difference. And recognizing that, I want to offer one final thought.

I believe you will be successful in creating the democratic, secular, non-nuclear Iran you seek. You're on the right side of history. It is apparent that the wheels are coming off the current regime. Your movement contains plenty of sophisticated, optimistic Iranians, in effect a government-in-waiting ready to step up. When this regime collapses, creating a new Iran will take a lot of outreach to former opponents and a lot of setting aside the grievances of the past. America has done this multiple times, to its credit and benefit.

However, however, we have never experienced anything like the regime now controlling Iran. The corruption, the

purposeful and calculated brutality, the crimes against humanity it has committed, have to be exposed to the world, to sunlight, and the murderers—there's no other word—that have committed these crimes be punished. This reckoning with the past must take place before you can build a new Iran, and the world will understand this.

So I salute you. You're doing what I think grown-ups are obligated to do, working to make things better for the next generation. But you're also not just any generation in a long line of them, you're in a very special time and place. Iran—and with it the whole Middle East—is at a fork in the road. One leads backward—to more corruption, more brutality, to an even darker place. The other road—the one you are trying to construct, leads to light—a better world for the young people of Iran today and for many more generations to come. To a world where your sons and daughters will finally have their own shot at “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

I support you and I respect you. Godspeed.