

HEARING ON AMERICANS DETAINED IN IRAN
AND MARKUP OF H. RES. 233,
EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THAT IRAN SHOULD IMMEDIATELY RELEASE THE THREE
UNITED STATES CITIZENS IT HOLDS, AS WELL AS PROVIDE
ALL KNOWN INFORMATION ON ANY UNITED STATES CITIZENS
THAT HAVE DISAPPEARED WITHIN ITS BORDERS

HEARING AND MARKUP
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

JUNE 2, 2015

Serial No. 114-54

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/> or
<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

94-833PDF

WASHINGTON : 2015

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Publishing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512-1800; DC area (202) 512-1800
Fax: (202) 512-2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402-0001

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TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 2015

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 o'clock a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Edward Royce (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman ROYCE. This hearing on Americans detained in Iran will come to order. I am going to ask all of the members to take their seat at this time.

All four of our witnesses are close relatives of these Americans who have been away from their families now for far too long. Ali Rezaian is the brother of Washington Post correspondent Jason Rezaian, whose so-called "trial" began last week. That is a trial that began in secret. Naghmeh Abedini is the wife of Pastor Saeed Abedini. Sarah Hekmati is the sister of former U.S. Marine, Amir Hekmati. And Daniel Levinson is the son of Robert Levinson.

We deeply appreciate, I will say to all of the family members here, you being with us today to give this testimony today. The committee stands in solidarity with each of your families. We can't imagine what you are being put through. We share your anger. We share your frustration with the position that you have been put in.

Immediately after our hearing today, the committee will be passing a resolution that calls for Iran to release all detained U.S. citizens immediately and provide information it possesses regarding any who have disappeared within its borders.

And I would like to recognize the work of Congressman Huffman of California, Congressman Labrador of Idaho, and Congressman Kildee of Michigan, and of course, Mr. Deutch, is a senior member of this committee. And I know that these members have worked to represent the best interests of your families and I thank each of them for joining us here on the committee today.

This morning, we will be hearing the stories of these four Americans. Jason Rezaian is a journalist who was born and raised in California. He hoped to use his position at the Washington Post to present a greater understanding of the Iranian people. Arrested on trumped-up charges, he has been interrogated. He has been held

for over 300 days at the infamous Evin Prison. Like every other aspect of his case, his trial opened last week shrouded in secrecy.

In September 2012, Iran arrested and later sentenced Pastor Saeed Abedini to 8 years for gathering with others to study the Bible—as his wife notes, this is a lawful act, even under Iranian law, but one which the regime deemed a threat to national security. His jailers have asked him to renounce his faith and I think he has been jailed for 8 years with threat of more if he does not renounce his faith.

In August 2011, Amir Hekmati, a former U.S. Marine, was sentenced to death for alleged espionage. Upon his appeal, the sentence was reduced to 10 years. His sister will tell us how Amir has been beaten on his feet with cables and tasered repeatedly in the kidneys. His father is gravely ill and he had gone to Iran to visit family.

In 2007, Robert Levinson went missing on Iran's Kish Island. Eight years later, Iran continues to refuse to assist the United States in locating him. As Daniel notes, his father is the longest held hostage in American history.

Each of these tragic cases is unique, but they each demonstrate Iran's view of the United States, which is one of contempt. Washington Post editor, Martin Baron, wrote last week, "There is no justice in this system, not an ounce of it. Iran is making a statement about its values in the disgraceful treatment of our colleague." This is, by the way, I would point out, a country that regularly holds these "Death to America" rallies. And so the contempt with which they hold American hostages is not something new with respect to dealing with the Iranian regime and frankly, with the Houthis now holding four Americans and refusing to release them because they are Americans, we have an extension of this policy into Yemen.

And while our focus this morning is the release of these Americans, these cases do call into question the integrity of the diplomacy surrounding Iran's nuclear program. As editorial boards point out, is this another attempt to pressure the administration into weakening its position at the talks? If a journalist can be suddenly imprisoned on bogus charges, what treatment can international inspectors for Iran's nuclear program expect?

And I would add to this a more fundamental point. If top Iranian officials cannot be counted on to assist these wrongfully jailed Americans, can they be counted on to honor the commitments they make at the negotiating table? Call me a skeptic, but we are very concerned about the fact that these four Americans have been held for so long and especially this show trial which just began last week. So the bottom line this morning is that these four Americans should be allowed to come home now.

And I will recognize the ranking member for today's hearing, Mr. Ted Deutch of Florida for any opening comments he may have.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thanks to you and Mr. Engel for giving us the opportunity to hear from the families today. Let me say to each of you today, we will not rest until your brothers, fathers, and husbands return home.

I represent South Florida, Coral Springs, Florida especially today, home to the Levinson family. Bob Levinson disappeared from Kish Island in March 2007. Since his disappearance, Bob's

family has received proof of life in the form of pictures and recording, yet Bob's whereabouts remain unknown. No family should have to go through eight agonizing years of not knowing when their husband, father, and grandfather will come home. In those 8 years, Bob has missed his seven children's birthdays and weddings, his 40th wedding anniversary with his courageous wife, Christine, who is here today, and the birth of grandchildren.

In the 2013 CNN interview shortly after his election, President Rouhani said, "With respect to Bob, we are willing to help and all the intelligence services in the region can come together to gather information about him to find his whereabouts and we are willing to cooperate on that." It is well past time to make good on that pledge.

For the next 30 days, U.S. negotiators will sit across the table from their Iranian counterparts. I appreciate the efforts made to raise these cases at every meeting, but the time has come to turn up the pressure. We have been told for a variety of reasons why the nuclear issue should be dealt with separately. But where we are now and at this morning's hearing is not about centrifuges. It is not about enrichment capacity, PMD, or snap-back sanctions. It is about respect for human rights and human dignity and it is about justice.

The United States Government must not rest until Amir Hekmati, Jason Rezaian, Saeed Abedini and my constituent, Bob Levinson, are home. And the time, Mr. Chairman, is now.

I would now ask unanimous consent to yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Michigan, Mr. Kildee, who is the author of the resolution that we will be marking up after this hearing, calling for the release of these individuals in Iran. He also represents the Hekmati family.

Chairman ROYCE. Without objection, Mr. Kildee.

Mr. KILDEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing. I appreciate your help and your perseverance on this question. We are here today to hear testimony from families whose loved ones are imprisoned in Iran, including my constituent, Amir Hekmati.

It is important that we hear their stories. It is important that the American people hear the names, Amir Hekmati, Jason Rezaian, Saeed Abedini, Bob Levinson, and not let their cases or their stories fade. Congress should know their names. The American people should know their names. They are being unjustly held in Iran and they should be released so they can be with these family members.

The world is watching Iran and today, Congress and this committee will speak with one voice considering House Resolution 233 that calls on Iran to simply do one thing, release the Americans that it holds. It is very simple. This resolution states and this Congress will say with one voice that Iran cannot hold Americans as political prisoners, people like Amir Hekmati, if it wants to be taken seriously in the global community.

Let me be clear. The onus is on Iran to do what is right, to release Amir and the other Americans that it holds.

So to the families today, I look forward to hearing your testimony, to hearing your stories, to help the American people and this

Congress understand that each of these individuals deserve the rights and respect that any human being does. And I look forward to the day when we can welcome them all home.

With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you so much and I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Chairman, I now ask unanimous consent to yield 1 minute to the gentleman from California, Mr. Huffman, who represents the Rezaian family.

Chairman ROYCE. Without objection.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank you for the opportunity to be here to welcome my constituent, Ali Rezaian, and to express my solidarity with him and his family and all of the families here and the many people around the world who are watching this important hearing today.

It is important that we do speak with one voice today, especially given the fact that there is a spectacle of a trial taking place in Iran involving Jason Rezaian. It is important that the Iranian regime understand that the whole world is watching. And our bipartisan expression, by passing this importance piece of legislation, is one of the best ways we can make that statement.

I want to thank my colleague, Dan Kildee, for his leadership in authoring this bipartisan bill. And I want to thank the committee for considering the bill on its own merits. Whatever issues or even disagreements we may have about broader issues, we are able to speak with one voice on this important matter today and that is important for all of these Americans who are unjustly detained and for their families and supporters around the world. Thank you very much.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back the rest of my time.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Deutch. Without objection, I think I will also recognize Mr. Raul Labrador from Idaho for 1 minute if he would like to comment.

Mr. LABRADOR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for letting me speak, even though I am not a member of the committee.

And Naghmeh, welcome to our committee today and to Congress. Not only is she a constituent and her husband a constituent, but she is a dear friend of many of my dear friends who love her and who I hear from almost on a daily basis about your husband.

On December 20 of 2012, Reverend Saeed Abedini, a naturalized U.S. citizen and convert to Christianity, born in Iran, was imprisoned on charges of undermining national security for setting up orphanages in partnership with Iranian Christians. His closed trial was held January 22, 2013, and he was convicted and sentenced to 8 years in prison.

I commend President Obama for advocating for the release of your husband and I know that he has spoken to Iran's President on this. But I also believe that I am concerned that the Iranian Government is more interested in words than in actions. If the Iranian Government is sincerely committed to action, a good first step would be to immediately release your husband and all the other people that are being held captive in Iran. And I believe that all negotiations with Iran should cease, in my opinion, if this is not the first step that they engage in. If they are not willing to become part of the world community, we should not be negotiating with

them at all. And I hope that this hearing today will help us to get that goal completed. Thank you very much for being here and God bless all of you.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. We will go for 1 minute to Ms. Ros-Lehtinen, chairman of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. And I praise the courage, the strength, and the love that our witnesses have shown for their family members who are being used as pawns by the Iranian regime. Bob, Saeed, Amir, and Jason are American citizens being held in Iran, but they are much more than that. They are fathers and sons and husbands, brothers, uncles, and friends. Yet, for years, they have languished in Iran's most notorious prisons and more needs to be done to secure their release now.

The U.S. must not negotiate to reward the Iranian regime while continuing to pursue this weak nuclear deal with a regime that continues to imprison American citizens. We must make it clear in no uncertain terms that we will not allow the regime to hold American citizens and deny them their due process while torturing them and subjecting them to inhumane treatment. The administration must realize that while it expresses niceties to Iran, the Iranian regime continues to imprison American citizens and violate their human rights. This must stop now.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. And lastly, 1 minute to Mr. Chris Smith, chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much. Thank you for calling this extraordinarily important hearing, very timely. I can only imagine the emotional agony, especially in the middle of the night, each of our distinguished witnesses experience as you pray, as you think and ponder what your loved one is going through. Naghmeh is back again for the fourth time now, testifying twice before my subcommittee. She has been absolutely tenacious on behalf of Saeed Abedini, as have all of the other witnesses, calling for their unconditional and immediate release.

It seems to me to be folly in the extreme that we are engaging in a negotiation on nuclear—potential nuclear weapons, when Americans are being held hostage by a dictatorship. I call again, as we all do, upon the administration to make this even more of a priority. Let us not forget at the first hearing where Naghmeh testified, she had gone down to the State Department and they told her there is nothing we can do. There is so much all of us can do. This resolution is another step in that direction and hopefully, we in a totally bipartisan way, will express the will of the American people, please, let these innocent people go.

Chairman ROYCE. We need to welcome the newest member of our committee here, Congressman Daniel Donovan, Jr. He recently won the special election in Staten Island, New York. Previously, he served as District Attorney in Richmond County. So welcome, Mr. Donovan. And the family just had a baby girl, I am told.

Mr. DONOVAN. We did, just 12 days ago.

Chairman ROYCE. Well, congratulations, Mr. Donovan. And we now will introduce our panel, the witnesses here today.

Mr. Ali Rezaian is the brother of Washington Post correspondent, Jason Rezaian, whose trial began in Iran last week in secret. And he has traveled, Mr. Rezaian has traveled from California to be with us today. We welcome him.

Mrs. Naghmeh Abedini is the wife of Pastor Saeed Abedini, who is currently serving an 8-year sentence in an Iranian prison. Mrs. Abedini grew up in Boise, Idaho and has been actively involved with her church congregation for many years.

Sarah Hekmati is the sister of Amir Hekmati, a former Marine, now imprisoned in Iran for 4 years. Ms. Hekmati has led the campaign for his freedom since his imprisonment in 2011.

And Mr. Daniel Levinson is the son of Robert Levinson, who has been missing in Iran since 2007. Mr. Levinson is an analyst at a Government contractor and he is based in Coral Springs, Florida.

And we appreciate all of our witnesses being with us today. Without objection, all of the witnesses' full prepared statements are going to be part of the record and members here will have 5 calendar days to submit any statements or questions or extraneous material for the record.

And Mr. Rezaian, if we could start with you, if you could summarize your remarks. Thank you, sir.

STATEMENT OF MR. ALI REZAIAN (BROTHER OF JASON REZAIAN)

Mr. REZAIAN. Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Deutch, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Ali Rezaian, and I am here on behalf of my brother, Jason Rezaian, who has been held for nearly a year in a prison in Tehran for activities that he did not commit.

My brother has always been a passionate storyteller. Since 2012, he has been serving as the Tehran Bureau Chief for the Washington Post. Jason's reporting in Iran has ranged from stories about everyday life in Tehran to baseball's growing popularity with Iranian citizens. His stories always went beyond stereotypes, reported on facts, and informed readers about the rich and complex fabric of Iranian society.

While simply doing his job, Jason and his wife were taken without warning and he has now been detained in Evin Prison for 315 days.

While most people know Jason as a journalist, I know Jason as a brother, son, husband, and devoted uncle. Jason is my little brother. In fact, when he was born my parents turned to me for ideas about what to name him. I suggested the name Jason because at the time my best friend's name was Jason. Today, Jason is my best friend.

Like a lot of kids in our neighborhood, Jason grew up infatuated with Star Wars and he always has been an enthusiastic Oakland A's fan. I proudly watch Jason grow up to be a truly, truly remarkable man with intellect, endless curiosity, joy for life, and the ability to tell a story led him into journalism where he has excelled. But above all, Jason is a loving family member.

In 2011, my own family suffered the tragic and unexpected death of our 5-year-old son Walker. Jason was working in Iran at the time when I called him with the news. Without a second thought, Jason got on a plane in the same day to come to California to comfort and support our family. I cannot tell you how much that meant to myself, my wife, as well as our parents.

In addition to being a devoted son and brother, Jason became a husband 2 years ago when he married Yeganeh Salehi. Sadly, Jason has now spent nearly half of their marriage in prison. My son Paxton, who is seven, asks me daily when is Uncle Jason going to be released from prison? With the help of this committee and others from around the world, I believe Uncle Jason and Paxton can still see an A's game in Oakland together this summer.

Let me be very clear. The charges against Jason are false. Jason did sometimes write about Iran's domestic and foreign policy, but this is perfectly legal conduct recognized around the world as practicing journalism. Iran's treatment of Jason has been and remains in violation of international human rights laws that Iran has repeatedly promised to uphold. Yet, despite being party to treaties that protect free speech and due process, Iran has afforded Jason neither of these fundamental rights.

Now more than ever, I am concerned about Jason's health and welfare. While in prison, Jason has suffered painful and debilitating infections. He has lost more than 40 pounds. He also has chronic high blood pressure and a respiratory condition which was exasperated during the hot summer months in Tehran. He is often kept in solitary confinement and is allowed only minimal human interaction.

I appreciate the support of all of the very good people who want to free Jason. The Washington Post's Chief Foreign Head is here with us today. President Obama has spoken about Jason publicly. The Washington Post's legal team led by Jay Kennedy, has been unwavering in its support of Jason and me. Thank you all. It means more than words can express.

It is time for Jason to come home. It is time for the families here to all be reunited. Releasing Jason is the humane thing to do and it is the right thing to do and I hope that Iran will do so immediately.

My mother wishes that she were here today to tell you all about Jason. But she is currently in Tehran so that she can more closely follow the situation with his trial. With the committee's indulgence, I would like to play a short video that perfectly sums up how we all feel.

Chairman ROYCE. Without objection.

[Video played.]

Mr. REZAIAN. It is time for Jason to come home to his family. It is time for the loved ones of everyone on this panel to come home to their family. Iran could make that happen today and should do it without further delay. Thank you for your time and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Rezaian follows:]

**HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE
ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

June 2, 2015

Written Testimony of Ali Rezaian
Brother of *Washington Post* Reporter Jason Rezaian

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to be here today. My name is Ali Rezaian and I am here on behalf of my brother Jason Rezaian, who has been detained in Iran for almost a year for offenses he did not commit. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about my brother and the efforts to secure his release and bring him home. On behalf of my entire family and Jason's loved ones, I want to express our deepest gratitude to the leadership of *The Washington Post*, Reporters Without Borders, and the broader community of journalists and their families around the world. We are also incredibly grateful for the efforts of this Committee, the Congress, President Obama, the Administration, and so many good people around the world. Jason is not yet free and our work is not yet done. But I am convinced that our efforts will soon lead to his release, as well as the release of other Americans who have been unjustly held.

My brother Jason has always been a passionate storyteller. Before he became the Tehran Bureau Chief for *The Washington Post* in 2012, he worked as a freelance journalist reporting for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *GlobalPost* and *Slate*, among others. Jason enjoys writing on topics ranging from everyday life in Tehran to baseball's growing popularity with the people of Iran. Jason's goal has always been to move his readers beyond the stereotypes and into the rich and complex fabric of Iranian society. Despite the fact that he has always sought to present a balanced and fair view of Iran, Jason was arrested along with his wife without warning in July 2014 and he has been detained in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison for the past 315 days. I want to talk about the details of my brother's wrongful arrest and detention, but first I want to talk about who he is as an individual.

Jason and Our Family

While many people know Jason as a journalist who was arrested for doing the job he loved, I know Jason primarily as a brother, son, husband, and devoted uncle. Jason is my little brother. In fact, when he was born, my parents turned to me for ideas about what to name him, and I suggested the name Jason because that was my best friend's name. Today, Jason is my best friend. Jason and I grew up in a loving home in Marin County, California. Our father moved from Iran to live in America in 1958. Our mother, his bride, grew up in Chicago. Like a lot of kids in our neighborhood, Jason grew up infatuated with Star Wars, and he has been a lifelong Oakland A's and Golden State Warriors fan. I can remember him in his room as a child, which of course had the requisite Star Wars comforter on the bed, wearing his A's hat as he combed through his prized collection of baseball cards.

I proudly watched as Jason grew up to become a truly remarkable man. Jason is the extrovert in the family, always engaging with others and drawing people together. His intellect, endless

curiosity, joy for life, and ability to tell a story led him to journalism, where he has excelled. But above all, Jason is a loving brother, son, husband, and family member.

In 2011, my wife and I suffered the tragic death of our five-year-old son Walker. Jason was working in Iran when I called him with the terrible news in the middle of the night on the other side of the world. Without a second thought, Jason got on a plane to come to California to be with us, and to comfort and support us. I cannot express how much his love and care was critical to my family and our parents at that time.

Jason has always been utterly devoted to our family. When my father passed away, Jason again dropped everything while abroad and returned to the U.S., providing much-needed support to my mother and me. He is a faithful and loving son to my mother, and even shared an apartment with her in Tehran in recent years when she wanted to spend time with family in Iran. My mother would like to be here in person to tell you all about Jason. But she is currently in Iran so that she can be near Jason and follow his situation as closely as possible.

In addition to being a devoted son and brother, Jason became a husband two years ago when he married Yeganeh Salehi, also a journalist, in Iran. Sadly, Jason has spent nearly half of their young marriage in a Tehran prison. Jason is also a devoted uncle to my seven-year-old son Paxton, who asks daily when Jason will be released from prison. Our entire family wants nothing more than to be reunited with Jason. In fact, just before Jason and Yeganeh were arrested last year, they were planning a trip to visit us in California. My son Paxton was looking forward to going to his first A's game with his Uncle Jason. With the help of this Committee and others around the world, I believe Uncle Jason and Paxton can still see an A's game in Oakland together this summer.

Jason's Arrest, Detention, and Trial

Let me turn now to the circumstances of Jason's arrest, detention, and trial. On the night of July 22, 2014, Jason and his wife Yeganeh were taken from their home in Tehran by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. They were detained without charges, and confined to separate cells in Evin Prison, a cold and intimidating place with a dark history, where they were relentlessly interrogated by Iranian intelligence and security agents and allowed virtually no contact with each other or the outside world. Yeganeh was released on bail after 72 days in prison—much of it filled with frightening interrogations and isolation—but she is now prohibited from leaving Iran and banned from working as a journalist. My brother remained in prison, where he continued to be repeatedly interrogated without access to counsel. Although he became ill and suffered from infections, he was deprived of medical care for long stretches of time.

For roughly five months after Jason's arrest, the Iranian government refused to fully disclose the basis for his detention or to bring formal charges against him. Jason was formally charged on December 7, 2014 in a ten-hour long court proceeding that was closed to the public. My brother was again denied legal representation at this proceeding and was permitted to be accompanied only by the Revolutionary Court's translator, even though our family had repeatedly attempted to hire an independent lawyer to represent him. After formally charging him, the Revolutionary Court refused to allow Jason to be represented by an attorney for nearly three more months, and

then prevented us from engaging several attorneys who were not deemed “acceptable” to the Revolutionary Court. Prior to his trial, Jason was only permitted one 90-minute meeting with his attorney Leila Ahsan in the presence of an official translator. We are incredibly grateful for her support and tireless efforts, but we are incredibly frustrated by the draconian limitations that have been placed on her and on us as we seek to defend my brother. Obviously, a single meeting with counsel is not adequate time to prepare for trial.

Jason’s trial began one week ago today on May 26, 2015, with a two-hour hearing that was closed to the public, over the objections of his attorney. The proceedings were then halted and have been suspended indefinitely. While the Revolutionary Court has made it clear to Jason’s attorney and our family that it is generally illegal to reveal certain information about the closed proceedings, the Iranian press has printed what they claim to be detailed descriptions of the hearings, and several of these accounts contain details that we know to be blatantly false.

To date, the Revolutionary Court has yet to disclose with any specificity the charges and evidence against my brother or the factual allegations on which they are based. We believe the charges may include espionage based upon alleged collecting and distributing information about internal and foreign policies, collaborating with hostile governments, gathering information under the devious disguise of journalism, and conducting propaganda against the establishment.

Let me be very clear. Jason is innocent of all the charges against him. Indeed, the notion that my brother Jason has committed such offenses is absurd. Jason is a dedicated journalist, who was committed to closely following the established rules about reporting in Iran and was licensed by the Iranian government to do so. It is true that Jason wrote from time to time about Iran’s domestic and foreign policy, but this is perfectly lawful conduct that is typical of many credentialed journalists in Iran. As White House Correspondents’ Association President Christi Parsons recently put it, what Jason did is recognized the world over as simply “practicing journalism.”¹

The So-Called “Evidence” Against Jason

There appear to be two key pieces of “evidence” that the Iranian government has relied on in the proceedings so far. The first is an online job application that Jason submitted in 2008 following President Obama’s election. Jason wrote: “In all my journeys to Iran and the work that has come out of them, the underlying theme has always been bridging gaps between the United States and Iran, most importantly between the people of these two nations.” This is not evidence of wrongdoing. This is the work of a proud Iranian-American seeking to express his personal desire for improved relations between the two countries he loves most by opening a cultural exchange. Jason never interacted with the transition team and was never hired by the government. Instead, he continued working as a freelance journalist until, four years later, he started working for *The Washington Post*.

¹ See Obama says he will not rest until Post reporter in Iran is freed (Apr. 25, 2015), available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-vows-to-get-post-reporter-freed-from-iran/2015/04/25/ac8a9988-a190-474b-8c31-6b46db296b0c_story.html?tid=sm_tw_sl

The second piece of supposed evidence is correspondence between Jason and immigration officials in connection with an American visa application Jason prepared in June 2013 for his wife Yeganeh that asked for expedited treatment, citing the precarious nature of working as a journalist in Iran and ongoing safety concerns due to the upcoming Iranian elections. This request in no way supports the charges against Jason. All it shows is that Jason was concerned—justifiably, as events later proved—about his wife’s safety and freedom, and that he communicated with immigration officials about the possibility of expediting her visa application. My brother lived in Iran during the 2009 Iranian elections, a period of upheaval and uncertainty for journalists. Many reporters were arrested, detained, or deported. As a newlywed, his wife’s welfare was of paramount importance. Trying to protect someone you love is not a crime; nor is communicating with immigration officials in an effort to expedite a loved one’s visa application.

Iran’s mistreatment of Jason violates international human rights laws that Iran has ratified and repeatedly promised to uphold. Iran’s own laws require that Iran abide by the international treaties to which it is a party. Yet despite being a party to treaties that protect free speech and due process, Iran has afforded Jason neither of these fundamental rights during his ten months of baseless imprisonment and spurious trial. To the contrary, Iran has flouted these rights and detained Jason in clear violation of law.

Now more than ever I am concerned about Jason’s health and welfare. While in prison, Jason has suffered painful and debilitating infections, and he has lost more than forty pounds. He also has chronic high blood pressure and a respiratory condition that is exacerbated during the hot summer months in Tehran. He is often kept in solitary confinement, and allowed only minimal human interaction. My brother has been in prison for offenses that he did not commit for nearly a year. Releasing Jason is the humane thing to do and the right thing to do, and I hope Iran will do so immediately.

Public Support for Jason

The outpouring of public support for Jason’s cause has been overwhelming and very meaningful to our family. Throughout this ordeal, *The Washington Post* has been there by our side, actively working every available channel for Jason’s release. As *The Washington Post* Executive Editor Martin Baron noted recently, the *Post* is “completely focused on getting [Jason] released, getting him the freedom he deserves,”² and views the charges as “ludicrous,” “absurd,” and “transparently baseless.”³ I cannot imagine a more supportive and committed partner in obtaining Jason’s release. And the *Post* is not alone in supporting Jason. Reporters Without Borders, Human Rights Watch, the *BBC*, *The New York Times*, *Al Jazeera*, Amnesty International, and the Committee to Protect Journalists, among countless others, have all called for Jason’s release. What all of these groups have recognized is that the freedom of the press is of paramount importance—and that the imprisonment of law-abiding journalists anywhere is a threat to freedom everywhere.

² See WaPo’s Martin Baron on Rezaian case (May 28, 2015), available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/crit-wcmplc/wp/2015/05/28/wapos-martin-baron-on-rezaian-case-we-cant-snap-our-fingers-and-just-get-him-released/>.

³ See Full Statement on Jason Rezaian from *Post*’s Executive Editor Martin Baron (Apr. 20, 2015), available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/full-statement-on-jason-rezaian-from-posts-executive-editor-martin-baron/2015/04/20/1fbb97b2-c771-11e4-9767-6276c9b0ada_story.html.

The support of the U.S. government, from the President and the Administration to this Committee and the Congress, has also been extremely encouraging to my family during this difficult time. We were particularly grateful when President Obama stated on behalf of Jason: “For nine months, Jason has been in prison for nothing more than writing about the hopes and fears of the Iranian people...[W]e will not rest until we bring him home to his family, safe and sound.”⁴

Bringing Jason and Other Americans Home

We realize that Jason is not the only American being held in Iran. Sitting beside me today are other families that are also suffering because their family members are detained there, too. I know that Nagameh Abedini, wife of Saeed Abedini, Sarah Hekmati, sister of Amir Hekmati, and Daniel Levinson, son of Robert Levinson, are also worried for their loved ones just like my family is worried for Jason. I ask for your continued support in securing their release as well. It is time to bring my brother home. It is time to bring all of our families back together again. Iran has the power to make these families whole again. And it should do so without any further delay.

⁴ See Obama says he will not rest until Post reporter in Iran is freed (Apr. 25, 2015), available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-vows-to-get-post-reporter-freed-from-iran/2015/04/25/ac8a9988-a190-474b-8c31-6b46db296b0c_story.html?tid=sm_tw_sl

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Ali. Mrs. Abedini.

STATEMENT OF MRS. NAGHMEH ABEDINI (WIFE OF SAEED ABEDINI)

Mrs. ABEDINI. Thank you, Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Deutch, and Mr. Engel and members of the committee and over 917,000 who have signed petitions for the release of my husband, who surrounded our family with their prayer and support. I am thankful for the State Department for speaking to Iran on the sidelines and for the President who has spoken out and also gave me an opportunity to meet with him in January of this year.

But as Mr. Rezaian mentioned, it is time to bring Saeed home. I have been before the Human Rights Committee and our Foreign Relations Committee a few times and I just think about 3 years ago when I was so hopeful that maybe this hearing will bring him home, maybe something will happen. And I am really hoping that this will be it.

I stand before you today not as a lawyer or a politician. I am actually very scared of speaking in public, but as a wife of a husband who is in prison in Iran because of his Christian faith, and the only reason I put myself out there and speak is to bring my husband home and to bring the father of my children home.

Saeed is an American citizen who was sentenced to 8 years. As mentioned, the Iranian Government has said they would add on more years because he refuses to deny his Christian faith. He has been in the Iranian prison for his Christian faith and for gathering with other believers 13 years earlier, under a different President who was actually allowing it, and again, this is protected by Iranian law. But the Iranian Government has said that peaceful gathering of religious minorities is a threat to their national security.

Every day, I wake up with an excruciating pain as I understand many of the families wake up. Life is no longer carefree. You wake up with a pain. Most mornings, I wake up in a hotel room or I am in airports and I wake up to the reality of our life. And my children have had to go without a father and a mother for 3 years now. It is very difficult to try to choose between being at home with my children when they need me the most and as they are hurting and they want to hold on to at least one parent, and trying to advocate for my husband. I just can't imagine not doing everything I can every single day of my life until my husband is home.

So it is very painful for me to have to leave my kids behind. I just came back a few days ago from speaking before the European Parliament and the German Parliament and trying to get their support. And my children, I had to explain to them why again I had to travel, as they were desperately holding on to me and asking me not to go. And every time I tell them it is for Daddy. I am going to bring your Daddy home.

It is very difficult going back to them and not being able to have solid answers. I really hope that this will be the time that we can bring Saeed home. Saeed has been tortured. The first few months of his imprisonment he was beaten pretty badly where his internal injuries and bleeding started. He has been sent to an exile prison, Rajai Shahr prison. He has been moved many times. He was put in a murderers' ward where he was told by the head of the new

prison that if they find out he is a convert, they will kill him. He was literally in the lion's den when he was in the murder ward in Rajai Shahr and he was covered with lice and doing horribly physically and psychologically. He has been put in and out of solitary three times now. The last time he was put in solitary was actually a few months ago a few days after we made that framework agreement with Iran, he was put in solitary again.

I came to the United States 30 years ago and the greatest gift that this country gave me was the freedom to choose Jesus Christ as my lord and savior. And for that I am forever grateful. I felt safe. I felt I came to a safe place, a country that would protect me and would stand up for my freedom, especially for my religious freedom. And Saeed is in that situation right now.

He refuses to deny his Christian faith and the Iranian Government continues to harass him and threaten him with more imprisonment. They have put him in and out of solitary to break him. I am not worried just about his physical pain, but his psychological. They are trying to—when they release Saeed, they want to make sure they release a very sick person and Saeed has held on to his faith and refused. But I am very concerned. I think time is of the essence. I just want to finish with this verse, if I can for a few minutes.

A family relied on their personal relationship. When you are going through a trial, the dos and don'ts of religion can't do anything for you. It is only a relationship with God through the price that Jesus Christ paid on the cross that you can go through the trials of life with peace and strength. No religion can give you that. It has to be a relationship with God. And I believe this is where the blessing of this nation came from and the freedom we have is because of the blessing that comes from our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Our family has relied on this personal relationship to endure this pain and to overcome our daily worries and concern. I want to conclude with the story in the Bible that describes our current situation. It includes a fiery furnace, threats of death, and a Savior in the midst of it. It is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And as you might know, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship other gods and they were told that they will be put in the fiery furnace. And they say, "O King, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your god." And this is our situation.

Saeed refuses to recant his faith. And they command the furnace to be heated more and in the end the king says, "I see four men unbound walking in the fire." The fourth man was Jesus and Jesus has been with us through this fiery furnace. It has been excruciating pain and it has been difficult to even breathe most days. But I am here to say that Jesus has been with us through every second of it, with me and my family and that invitation to open to anyone who wants to receive Him. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mrs. Abedini follows:]



PREPARED WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF

Naghmeh Abedini

Wife of Imprisoned American Saeed Abedini

Foreign Affairs Committee

June 2, 2015

“Americans Detained in Iran”

I stand before you today not as a lawyer or politician, but as the wife of a husband who is imprisoned in Iran because of his Christian faith. My husband, Saeed Abedini, is a U.S. citizen who Iran sentenced to 8 years because he peacefully gathered with other Christians to study the Bible, a lawful act even under Iranian law but which the government of Iran deemed in his case to threaten the national security of Iran.

For the past 3 years I have been carrying with me a deep excruciating pain knowing that my husband continues to suffer yet another day in one of the worst prisons in the world. Most mornings like today, I wake up in a new hotel in a new city or country and am reminded of my new reality—a reality that includes lonely airports and empty hotel rooms. This pain of this journey without my husband has only increased as I have had to frequently leave my children to advocate for my husband’s release. The reality is, we are a family torn apart.

Over the last three years, I have had to watch my two children, Rebekka (who is 8 years old) and Jacob (who is 7 years old), suffer daily as they have grown up without a father or a mother. Many times I have contemplated staying at home and holding my babies at a time that they need me the most. Yet, I cannot imagine not fighting for my husband’s release for even one day while he suffers in the Iranian prison.

Every morning I get up thinking, “could this be the day that our family is released from this pain?” I am hoping that someone somewhere will see past the politics and get past the different lines that so easily separate us and instead see the human side of our story. That someone somewhere would be motivated to do something to end this unbearable pain. I am here to ask for your help.

Recently I returned from speaking to the human rights and foreign relations committees at the European Parliament and the German Parliament. After only a few days at home, I had to explain to my children why mommy had to leave again. There was so much hope and excitement in their eyes when I explained to them that this could be the trip that could bring their daddy home and back in their arms again.

I am here today as single mother who is trying to be strong for her children, and as a wife who humbly admits, I need your help. I cannot bear to look at my children's longing eyes one more time and explain to them why their daddy is still not home. I cannot bear to see their hopes crushed again. I cannot imagine my husband spending yet another day in an Iranian prison. I need your help. I cannot do this on my own.

When I entered this great nation almost 30 years ago as a young girl, I was given the freedom to choose Jesus as my Lord and Savior. I felt safe knowing that my rights to choose my own religion would be protected and defended in this great country of the United States of America. Today my husband is suffering in the Iranian prison for this very reason. It is because he also chose to believe in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. The Iranian government has repeatedly told Saeed he holds the key to his freedom – but this key would be to deny his faith and return to Islam. Yet, Saeed has refused to deny his faith in Jesus Christ in the face of torture and abuse. Saeed has been moved from prison to prison (Evin to Rajaei Shahr prison). He had been put in a murderers' ward where he was told that if other prisoners found out that he was a convert from Islam to Christianity, they would kill him. Saeed has been in and out of solitary confinement 3 times now (the last time was April of this month) and told that he would never be set free unless he returns to Islam.

Today, I ask you to stand with him as he stands for his faith in Jesus. This is the time that Saeed needs his country the most. Please do not abandon him.

The aim of the Iranian government is to break Saeed before they have to release him. Doctors have confirmed Saeed needs two surgeries. But my biggest concern right now is not Saeed's physical health, but rather his psychological health. I often think about the condition that Saeed will be in when he is released and how our family would have to cope with that—what father will return to my precious children? Time is of the essence in getting Saeed out of the Iranian prison before it is too late.

When you are living a nightmare no religion in the world can help you. The do's and don'ts of religion cannot bring much peace and comfort. Only an intimate relationship with our Maker can bring about the supernatural peace and strength that is covering our family today. And that relationship is only possible through the acceptance of the heavy price of sin that was paid on the cross by Jesus Christ. Today that salvation is available for all who believe.

Our family has relied on this personal relationship to endure the pains, and to overcome the daily worries and concerns. I want to conclude with a story in the Bible that describes

our current situation the best. It includes a fiery furnace, threats of death, and a Savior in the midst of it all.

Daniel 3:13-25

13 Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and ordered that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought before him. When they were brought in, 14 Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up? 15 I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?"

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. 18 But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will NEVER serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

19 Nebuchadnezzar was so furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face became distorted with rage. He commanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual. 20 Then he ordered some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. 21 So they tied them up and threw them into the furnace, fully dressed in their pants, turbans, robes, and other garments. 22 And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames killed the soldiers as they threw the three men in. 23 So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, securely tied, fell into the roaring flames.

24 But suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, "Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?"
"Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did," they replied.

25 "Look!" Nebuchadnezzar shouted. "I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!"

Jesus was with them. He was the fourth man in the furnace. In the midst of the fiery furnace Jesus did not abandon His own. During the last 3 years Jesus has never abandoned Saeed and me. He has been with us during the fiery furnace even when the furnace had been heated seven times hotter than usual. He has dried every tear and has given us the strength to endure.

I know that God is with us in this journey, but I also know that God can use men and women to bring about freedom and justice. I hope today that someone here is motivated to be that man or woman.

Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mrs. Abedini. Sarah.

STATEMENT OF MS. SARAH HEKMATI (SISTER OF AMIR HEKMATI)

Ms. HEKMATI. Thank you. Can you hear me? Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity today to testify about the arbitrary imprisonment of my brother, Amir.

And in support of Congressman Kildee's House Resolution 233, with your permission, I would like the opportunity to submit additional material for the record.

Chairman ROYCE. Without objection.

Ms. HEKMATI. This is the first opportunity our family has received in nearly 4 years of my brother's imprisonment in Iran and we appreciate the time and effort that went into making it possible for me to appear today on Amir's behalf.

For over 3 years, our family has been living a nightmare. Every day we wake up hoping that it is the day we find out Amir will finally be released and is returning home. We are in constant fear for his health, his safety, and his life. The fact that Amir is the first American to be sentenced to death by Iran since 1979 adds to our fears. The fact that he has been held in Evin prison longer than any other American in history is emotionally draining.

My parents came to this country not because they had to, but because they saw opportunities here that they wanted for their future children. My dad has a PhD in Microbiology and was a college professor and my mother an accountant, and it is in gratitude for the opportunities afforded to us as Americans that my brother Amir was proud to serve in the Marine Corps.

I want to be very clear. While our family takes issue with the actions of a certain faction of the Iranian regime, we know this is not a reflection of the government as a whole nor of its people. Iran is the country of my parent's birth, and as a family we were always raised to be proud of our heritage.

It is this pride in our Iranian heritage and importance of family that led Amir to make his first trip to Iran in August 2011. It is a trip that thousands of Iranian-Americans make. I, myself, have made this trip twice. Amir had last seen our grandmother when he was a young child when she visited America. He felt it was his duty to visit her after all these years because she was too elderly to come to the US anymore. On August 29, 2011, only days away from his return home to Michigan, Amir was preparing himself to attend a family gathering. However, Amir never showed up. When our family in Iran went to the cousin's apartment he was staying at, they could see the apartment had been broken into and a struggle had taken place. Amir was missing. Also gone were his computer, camera, and passport. Our relatives in Iran spent every day contacting officials, searching Tehran for Amir hoping to find out who took him, where they took him, and why.

Two and a half months later, we found out that Amir had been imprisoned. At that time, both the Iranian and the United States Governments urged us not to go public with Amir's imprisonment, asking that his imprisonment not go public and that it be handled

behind-the-scenes. They both suggested that by going to the media, Amir would be put in more danger and his case would become highly politicized. Our family learned later that our silence allowed Amir to suffer the worst torture imaginable.

As a sign of respect for both Iran and the U.S., Amir offered nothing but transparency when applying for a visa to Iran. He was assured that his past experience in the military would not be an issue. However, on December 2011, Iran reported that they had caught an American spy and my brother's face appeared on Iranian-state television.

Our family received no warning of this by Iranian officials and instead were faced with having to witness our brother be wrongfully accused before being allowed to defend himself in court. Days later, Amir was tried by Judge Salavati in the Revolutionary Court. Amir did not meet his court-appointed attorney until 5 minutes before his trial started. Relatives were not allowed to attend his trial. It was held behind closed doors and in only 15 minutes, Amir was charged with espionage, corrupting the earth, and waging war against God. By the end of the week, the media had announced without prior notification to our family in the U.S. that Amir was sentenced to death. He became the first American to receive the death sentence since 1979.

In March 2012, an appeals court overturned the charges against Amir and annulled his death sentence, stating that there was insufficient evidence to let the conviction stand. A new trial took place in December 2013. That was when he found out he had been sentenced to 10 years in prison for cooperating with a hostile government, presumably because of his military service to the U.S. The conviction of this crime confuses us. Based on the Supreme Leader's own mandate, service in a foreign military for a dual national is not illegal in Iran. Relations between the U.S. and Iran are at a historic point. Even according to Amir's Iranian attorney, how can the U.S. still be considered a hostile country to Iran when we sit across from them at the negotiating table for the first time in decades?

Iran wants to rejoin the international community, expand their tourism industry, and help their economy grow. What message does it send to Iranians who live abroad when Amir is held as an innocent man behind the walls of Evin prison for committing no crime? As a tourist, Amir was kidnapped from the home of his relatives and taken to Evin prison. As a tourist, he was held in a one meter by one meter cell, allowed out for only 10 minutes a week to stretch his legs. He was beaten on his feet with cables, tasered repeatedly. He was held for months in solitary confinement.

To date, our family feels as though we have exhausted every option. We have reached out to the U.N., human rights groups, Islamic organizations, ambassadors from other nations and we have engaged with high level officials from the

U.S. and Iran. Our only reassurance is being told by the U.S. that Amir's case is being raised on the sidelines of the negotiations and our reassurance from Iran is silence, only to be told that Amir is an Iranian and that his case will be dealt with according to Iranian law.

We thank Congressman Kildee and Senator Stabenow for their efforts on our behalf, particularly arranging a meeting for our family with Vice President Biden last month. We were very grateful for his time and the compassion he showed my father and our children who are 5 and 7 years old. After our meeting, Vice President Biden tweeted about Amir. It was the time some public mention had been made.

Our family is under no illusion that there are things we cannot be told about the effort the government is undertaking on Amir's behalf, but it does not make sense to our family how previous American prisoners in Iran have been released when the United States had no diplomatic relations with Iran and were not sitting across the negotiating table much sooner than Amir.

Now is the time that this issue could and should be resolved and yet August will mark 4 years Amir has been taken from our family. And that brings me to my final point. Our father has terminal brain cancer. Within the last year, he has suffered several strokes. Our father now requires 24-hour care. My mother could not be with us today. She is with my father right now and she misses her son very much. Our father holds on, hoping to hold Amir in his arms again, but fearful that he will not. And he now resides in a wheelchair needing assistance for everyday things you and I take for granted. The father Amir left behind to visit his relatives in Iran is no longer the same man now. We ask you to please do all that you can to help fill this chair and bring Amir home. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Hekmati follows:]

Sarah Hekmati
Sister of imprisoned American and Marine veteran Amir Hekmati
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
June 2, 2015
Subject: Americans Detained in Iran

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Members, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity today to testify about the arbitrary imprisonment of my brother, Amir Hekmati, and with your permission, I'd like the opportunity to submit additional material for the record. This is the first such opportunity our family has received in nearly four years of my brother's imprisonment in Iran and we appreciate the time and effort that went into making it possible for me to appear today on Amir's behalf.

For over three years, our family has been living a nightmare. Every day we wake up hoping that it is the day we find out Amir will finally be released and is returning home. We are in constant fear for his health, his safety, and his life. The fact that Amir is the first American to be sentenced to death by Iran since 1979 adds to our fears. The fact that he has been held in Evin prison longer than any other American in history is emotionally draining. We are physically and emotionally exhausted. We are sleepless. We are full of fear and anxiety. We need this nightmare to end.

My parents came to this country not because they had to, but because they saw opportunities here that they wanted for their future children. My dad has a Ph.D in Microbiology and was a College Professor and my mother an accountant, and it is in gratitude for the opportunities afforded to us as Americans that my brother Amir was proud to serve in the Marine Corps. My hope, as the mother of two young children, was always to one day take my children to visit Iran to meet family, and learn about their heritage. It breaks my heart that my children's only frame of reference for Iran is that the Iranians hurt the uncle they love and that they badly want to see again. I want to be very clear – while our family takes issue with the actions of a certain faction of the Iranian Regime, We know this is not a reflection of the government as a whole nor of its people. Iran is the Country of my parent's birth, and as a family we were always raised to be proud of our Iranian heritage.

My brother, Amir, was born in Flagstaff, Arizona. Our family later settled in Michigan, where Amir attended high school, played ice hockey, and soccer. By many standards, our childhood was that of a typical American family, with one exception: my parents came to America from Iran and my siblings and I are first generation Americans. We were taught to be proud Americans while still embracing our Muslim faith and our Iranian heritage. Our parents instilled into us a sense of duty – to our family, to our community, and to our country.

It is this pride in our Iranian heritage and importance of family that led Amir to make his first trip to Iran in August of 2011. It is a trip that thousands of Iranian-Americans make. I, myself,

have made this trip twice. Amir had last seen our grandmother when he was a young child when she visited America. He felt it was his duty to visit her after all these years because she was too elderly to come to the US anymore. On August 29, 2011, only days away from his return home to Michigan, Amir was preparing himself to attend a family holiday celebration. However, Amir never made it. When our family in Iran went to the cousin's apartment he was staying at, they could see the apartment had been broken into and a struggle had taken place. Amir was missing. Also gone were his phone, computer, camera, and passport. Our relatives in Iran spent every day contacting officials, visiting prisons, and searching Tehran for Amir hoping to find out who took him, where they took him, and why.

Two and a half months later, we found out that Amir had been imprisoned. At that time, both the Iranian and the United States governments urged us not to go public with Amir's imprisonment, asking that his imprisonment instead be handled behind-the-scenes. They both suggested that by going to the media, Amir would be put in more danger and his case would become highly politicized. Our family learned later that our silence allowed Amir to suffer the worst torture imaginable.

In 2001, Amir joined the United States Marines. He served until 2005, leaving the Marine Corps as a decorated combat veteran for his service during Operation Iraqi Freedom. After his service in the Marine Corps was complete, he went on to serve his country as a military contractor, focusing on translation, language, and cultural education. Amir felt this work was in service of his country and that it would benefit both enlisted soldiers and ordinary citizens in combat zones. Amir decided it was time to move onto the next chapter of his life and applied for and was accepted into the University of Michigan's graduate program in economics. He was only weeks away from starting when he was arrested.

As a sign of respect for both Iran and the United States, Amir offered nothing but honesty and transparency when applying for his tourist visa at the Iranian Interest Section in Washington D.C. Amir could have denied his military history. He did not. Amir could have lied about the work he did once he left the military. He did not. He was assured that his past experience in the military would not be an issue. By the Supreme Leader's own laws, it is not considered illegal for dual-nationals to serve in a foreign military. This honesty and transparency are the actions of an ordinary citizen wanting to connect with his parents' homeland, desiring to learn more about his heritage, and meeting many members of his family for the very first time. They are not the actions of a spy.

However, that is exactly what Amir was called when on December 2011, Iran reported that they had caught an American spy for the CIA and my brother's face appeared on television in a forced confession on Iranian state television. Our family received no warning of this by Iranian officials and instead were faced with having to witness our brother being wrongfully accused before being allowed to defend himself in court. Days later, in January of 2012, Amir was tried by Judge Salavati in the Revolutionary Court. Amir did not meet his court-appointed defense

attorney until five minutes before his trial started. Relatives were not allowed to attend his trial and it was held behind closed doors. Amir's trial lasted only 15 minutes. At the end of those 15 minutes, Amir was charged with espionage, corrupting the earth, and waging war against God. By the end of the week it was announced in the media without prior notification to our family that Amir was sentenced to death. He became the first American to receive the death sentence since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

In March of 2012, an appeals court overturned the charges against Amir and annulled his death sentence, stating that there was insufficient evidence to let the conviction stand. A new trial took place in December of 2013. This trial was held in secret, behind closed doors, without the presentation of a defense. In fact, it was not until April of 2014 that Amir knew this trial had even taken place. That was when he found out he had been sentenced to 10 years in prison for cooperating with a hostile government, presumably because of his military service. The conviction of this crime confuses us. As stated before, even based on the Supreme Leader's own mandate, service in a foreign military for a dual national is not illegal. Relations between the US and Iran are at a historic point. Even according to Amir's Iranian attorney, how can the US still be considered a hostile country to Iran when we sit across from them at the negotiating table for the first time in decades?

For the past three years, Iran has been promoting their tourism industry. Western media has reported that more tourist visas were being issued by Iranian officials. However as a tourist, Amir was kidnapped from the home of his family by agents for the Ministry of Intelligence and taken to Evin prison. As a tourist, Amir was held in a 1m x 1m cell, allowed out only 10 minutes a week to stretch his legs, he was beaten on his feet with cables, was tasered repeatedly in the kidneys. Amir has been held for months in solitary confinement, not allowed visits from his attorney or family, and not allowed to make phone calls. Interrogators drugged Amir with Lithium, and forced him to suffer painful withdraws.

This is how Amir, a man proud of his Iranian heritage, duty bound to his family, and loyal to the country of his birth – America – is treated by Iran, yet Iran wants to promote and encourage tourism?

Iran wants to rejoin the international community, expand their tourism industry, and help their economy grow. What message does it send to Iranians that live abroad when an ordinary, private American citizen sits behind the walls of Evin prison for committing no crime?

During much of Amir's imprisonment, our family has felt that we were fighting for his freedom alone. When Amir was first imprisoned, the State Department urged us to remain quiet about his imprisonment and to not speak to the media. In doing this, it allowed for Iran to control the message of Amir's imprisonment and their message was that Amir is a spy. It is a message that sentenced him to death. In speaking with Americans and other Westerners formerly imprisoned in Iran and their families, we know what the administration - the White House and the State Department - can do. While we appreciate the efforts that have been made thus far, we know that

they can do more. It was not until April of this year, days after Amir's story first received widespread attention on cable news, that we got our first call from the White House. After nearly four years in prison, they should be doing more, or, in the very least, directing us on how to do more.

To date our family feels as though we have exhausted every option, we have reached out to the UN, Human Rights Groups, Islamic organizations, Ambassadors from other nations that have bilateral relationships with Iran and the US, we have engaged with high level officials from the US and Iran privately and have utilized the media publicly to no avail. Our only reassurance is being told by the US that Amir's case is being raised on the sidelines of the negotiations and our reassurance from Iran is silence, only to be told that Amir is an Iranian and that his case will be dealt with according to Iranian law.

We thank Congressman Kildee and Senator Stabenow for their efforts on our behalf, particularly arranging a meeting for our family with Vice President Biden. This meeting happened only a month ago. It was the first meeting of this kind. For the first time, we felt like we got some concrete and direct information, and we could not be more grateful for his time, and the compassion he showed our children who are 5 and 7 years old. After our meeting tweets concerning Amir appeared from Vice President Biden's official Twitter account. This is the first time such public mentions of Amir have been made. We thank Vice President Biden for that simple act of kindness. After nearly four years, it meant a great deal to our family and to Amir to finally feel like we were being heard. It was not until Congressman Kildee was elected and began advocating for our case that we feel our family and Amir's case was heard. Even with Congressman Kildee's hard work, we have questions.

We are under no illusions that there are things we cannot be told about the effort the Government is undertaking on Amir's behalf, but it does not make sense to our family how previous American prisoners in Iran have been released when the United States had NO diplomatic relations with Iran and were not sitting across from them at a negotiating table much sooner than Amir? This is a historic time. It is a time for the first time in decades that the United States and Iran are having conversations with each other instead of conversations through third parties. Now is the time that this issue could and should be resolved, and yet, August will mark four years Amir has been taken from our family.

And that brings me to my final points. Our father has terminal brain cancer. Within the last year, he has suffered several strokes. Our father now requires 24 hour care. His memories are being stolen from him as freedom is being stolen from Amir. As the eldest son, Amir is needed at home, not only for the care of our father, but for the care of our mother, too. Our father holds on, hoping to hold Amir in his arms again, but fearful that he will not. We have received messages from all over the country of former students of my father, telling us he was an important man in their lives. That man is no longer able to stand in front of a classroom and teach microbiology, something he is passionate about. He now resides in a wheelchair, needing assistance for

everyday things you and I take for granted. The father Amir left behind to visit his relatives in Iran is no longer the same man now.

Putting aside the political differences of our two political parties and these two countries, we share common experiences that tie us together through our shared humanity. One of our common bonds is family. Imagine for a moment that Amir is your brother or your son. Imagine giving up your entire life to fight for the freedom of a man who committed no crime, who sacrificed for your country, and who is locked behind the doors of Evin prison. Imagine knowing that he has been tortured, mistreated, and abused. Imagine the birthdays and holidays that pass with an empty chair at the table. This has been our life for nearly four years.

We ask you to please do all that you can to help fill that chair and bring Amir back home.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Sarah. Daniel.

STATEMENT OF MR. DANIEL LEVINSON (SON OF ROBERT LEVINSON)

Mr. LEVINSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Daniel Levinson and I am the eldest son of Robert Levinson who was taken hostage on the Iranian island of Kish on March 9, 2007. Unlike the other three Americans currently imprisoned in Iran, the government has never acknowledged arresting him. The closest evidence of this appeared less than 3 weeks after he went missing, when the Iranian state-sanctioned media outlet PressTV reported that he was "in the hands of Iranian security forces" and could be "freed in a matter of days." Three thousand seven days later, we are still waiting for him to be released and returned home to us.

My father is the longest-held hostage in American history. No U.S. citizen has been held overseas longer than he has, ever. Our family's hearts break for the other families here, who have suffered the wrenching agony of having their loved ones away from them for so long all of these years. Yet my father has been held four and a half longer than any of the others. No family should ever have to go through what we all are going through.

To say these past 8 years and 3 months have been a nightmare would be an understatement. I am one of my parents' seven children, and my mother, who is here with us today, just marked their 41st wedding anniversary last month. My father has missed so many milestones: The births of three grandchildren, two weddings, numerous high school and college graduations. To put it simply, he has missed too much of our lives.

There is not a day that goes by when we don't think of him, how much he must be suffering, and what we can do next to bring him home. In November 2010, we were emailed a 1-minute video of my father from an anonymous email address where he looked gaunt, ill, and desperate. The last words we heard from him in that video were "33 years of service to the United States deserves something. Please help me." Six months later, we received several pictures from another anonymous email address where he held various signs in broken English that appear to have been produced by his captors in order to taunt the United States Government. We are extremely worried about his health. He is 67 years old, with several pressing health concerns including diabetes, hypertension, and gout.

My father had a long career serving the United States. He was still a contractor for the U.S. Government at the time of his capture, and therefore the U.S. has a moral obligation to help bring him home.

We have sought help through numerous heads of state, Presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers, NGOs, private citizens, and religious leaders here and around the world, to no avail. My mother, aunt, and I even traveled to Iran in 2007 to meet with officials there, but the trip ended with no progress made on his case. This has been a bipartisan effort spanning two U.S. presidencies, with lawmakers from both parties working to bring him home. We are eternally grateful for the efforts of members of this committee, including Congressman Ted Deutch, who represents our home dis-

strict in Florida, and Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who have continued their efforts to highlight my father's case on the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa. Senator Bill Nelson has been our staunch advocate and has given us voice to the powerful. However, my father is still not here with us.

We were encouraged by the election of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, and the appointment of Javad Zarif as foreign minister. They have sought active engagement with the United States on a number of issues, but to our knowledge, have not engaged on the topic of my father's capture in their country.

My family believes this engagement is by far our best opportunity to bring my father home safely, and we need American officials to ramp up this engagement as they meet in the next few weeks over Iran's nuclear program. We need, in fact, we implore negotiators to take a more aggressive approach than merely asking for Iran's help in locating him. It is true that those involved in the talks may not know where my father is, or what happened to him, but we are certain that there are people in Iran who do. We believe that, if the Iranian Government had the will and motivation to locate my father and send him home, they most certainly could.

My family will never rest until our father is back home with us, and we can only hope the members of this committee, along with those involved in discussions with Iran, share that unwavering commitment. My father could be anyone's father, or grandfather, or brother, or husband. He is all of those things to my family. He is an American. And America should not rest until one of its own is returned home to the family that loves him more than life itself. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Levinson follows:]

Daniel Levinson
Son of Robert Levinson
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
"Americans Detained in Iran" 6/02/2015

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we need American officials to ramp up this engagement as they meet in the next few weeks over Iran's nuclear program. We need – in fact, we implore - negotiators to take a more aggressive approach than merely asking for Iran's help in locating him. It is true that those involved in the talks may not know where my father is, or what happened to him, but we are certain that there are people in Iran who do. We believe that, if the Iranian government had the will and motivation to locate my father and send him home, they most certainly could.

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Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. I will go to Mrs. Abedini and Ms. Hekmati for a question. I have read the reports on the torture in prison. What I am interested in right now is the mental well-being or the condition psychologically. If I could ask you about your husband and about your brother.

Mrs. ABEDINI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Actually, his mental condition is my biggest worry even though his physical condition is not very well. He doesn't get very much protein or clean water and he is still suffering from the internal injuries. But his mental is—him being taken in and out of solitary three times now, being put in exile prison, being put in a murderers' ward, the continuous pressure they have tried—he is seen in early April. There was close to 50 prisoners in his prison that were executed in Rajai Shahr. He is continuously told that he should be given the death. He should be—because he is a convert, because he is a Christian, he is continually told he will never come out unless he denounces his faith. His family, his father who is visiting him in Iran right now is the greatest worry he has is his mental condition and the psychological games they are playing with him. My biggest worry as a wife and mother is the condition I will have to deal with when he comes home.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. Sarah.

Ms. HEKMATI. Similar to Naghmeh, she refers to psychological games. Amir has been strung along for nearly 4 years. He said that during his court appearance for the 15 minutes that it was determined he was worthy of being sentenced to death, that his attorney had reassured him that he could be acquitted and be released in a year max. At that point he was already serving 6 months. Now it is going on 4 years.

He has been told things like his mother was killed in a car accident as a part of mental torture. At that time, he had no way of communicating to our family to even determine whether that was true or not. It has been a long ride for him to the point that he has become emotionally numb and just doesn't really know what to expect any more. So we do really worry about his emotional well-being as well.

Chairman ROYCE. Last week on the eve of the beginning of Jason's so-called trial, Washington Post editor Martin Baron issued a statement that read in part: "It is worth recalling what kind of system we are dealing with. Jason was arrested without charges. He was imprisoned in Iran's worst prison. He was placed in isolation for many months and denied the medical care he needed. His case was assigned to a judge internationally notorious for human rights violations. He could not select the lawyer of his choosing. He was given only 1½ hours to meet with a lawyer approved by the court. No evidence has ever been produced by prosecutors or the court to support these absurd charges. The trial date was only disclosed to Jason's lawyer last week and now, unsurprisingly, but unforgivably, it turns out the trial will be closed."

Mr. Rezaian, have you been able to have any communication with your brother?

Mr. REZAIAN. I haven't spoken to my brother since last July. My mother went to Iran and has been able to speak to him just recently. The trial did begin last week and it adjourned after 1 day.

Chairman ROYCE. How are his spirits right now?

Mr. REZAIAN. Well, I think that it has been very difficult for him to be so isolated. He is a very social person. I think we are thankful that there is a process that is moving along, but as we can see, we don't know what will come out of it. He is happy that my mother is there. Although he is really concerned because neither his wife nor my mother were able to go to the trial when they started last week.

Chairman ROYCE. What would be the duration this charge brings with it, what consequence?

Mr. REZAIAN. You know, we have heard different things, but I think that it could be years in prison is what we have heard, possibly 10 years in prison or more.

Chairman ROYCE. Were there any other thoughts that any of the witnesses would like to express at this time before I go to Mr. Engel?

I thank you all for your testimony and we will now be going to Mr. Eliot Engel of New York for his questions.

Mr. ENGEL. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank all four of you for the courage you have and for your extraordinary testimony. I want to tell you something you already know. I see Mr. Kildee is here. There isn't a moment that Mr. Kildee hasn't stopped to talk to me about this case. He has been relentless. Mr. Deutch as well. Mr. Huffman. I just want you to know that we are all with you.

We cannot imagine the grief you are going through. And our hearts are with you. We will do everything we can to bring them home. And that is why we are having this hearing because we hope that at this crucial juncture with less than a month to go before there is supposedly an agreement with Iran, this is the time to really bring forward the cases of your loved ones. This is the time.

I must tell you that I feel so angry that at a time when we are sitting with Iran and a number of you alluded to this and mentioned this in your testimony, we are sitting with them to discuss a new arrangement between our two countries and they continue to poke us in the eye and continue to spit in our face. I don't know how else to say it. It is ludicrous.

Mr. Rezaian, your brother, at this juncture when we are a month away from perhaps having an agreement that they would dare to put someone on trial, in a show trial, it just infuriates me. It just infuriates me. While we don't want to tie your cases to our talks because we don't want Iran or others to bring in other issues, the fact of the matter is that it is just infuriating and outrageous that they would do this; that they would just spit in our faces.

So I just want to tell you that we are not letting any of these four cases drop. We are united in trying to help you. And I want to just thank you, all four of you for your tremendous, tremendous courage. You know, if I let myself go, I would probably cry. That is how genuine all of you are. So thank you for your courage.

Let me ask anyone who would care to answer, we want to obviously do everything possible to help bring them home and create that kind of atmosphere. When we question the administration, the President's people, when we are briefed and we talk to them in private conversations, when we are briefed as a Congress, they tell us

that they raise the issue of the American hostages each and every time they meet with the Iranians. Is there anything that you can tell us that has not been done that you would like to see us do or see the administration do? Is there anything more than we can do?

I know having this hearing and us timing this hearing today is obviously something that we are attempting to draw attention to it, but is there something else that any of you think that we should be doing perhaps?

Ms. Hekmati.

Ms. HEKMATI. Thank you for asking that question because it has been our frustration and it is not very comforting to know that at this point and this juncture where we are at that it is just being raised. And our question consistently when we ask what the substantial response is from the Iranians is nothing very substantial other than in my case, for example, with Amir, that he is a dual national and they don't recognize his American citizenship. So I don't know how often, if this is being raised on a regular basis, are they just giving a flat response or no response or what is the answer that they are receiving?

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you. I can tell you it would just be ludicrous and outrageous for us to have a deal with Iran that doesn't include the bringing home of our hostages. You know, we all remember, at least if you are as old as I am, 1979, when we had these American hostages being held for more than a year and the whole country was riveted on it. And then finally they were brought home. Well, we want the country to be as riveted with your loved ones so that they can come home safely. So I just want to thank you all for your courage.

And for me, the devil is in the details. I am going to see what the agreement is before I decide how I am voting, but it would just be ludicrous for us to pretend that it is business as usual. We are going to have a nice agreement with Iran. We are going to look to the future. We are going to have better relations and we are all going to hold hands and skip away happily and Americans are rotting in prison? That is not acceptable to me. And I hope it won't be acceptable to this Congress. Thank you for your courage.

Chairman ROYCE. Well, Mr. Engel, if I could offer one addendum to that, I think it would also be important, I talked to a young Iranian who recently came to this country over the weekend and she told me, I asked her about her experiences. She said her parents brought her here because she would start every morning with these chants in school, "Death to America, Death to Israel." And she said this at home and her parents said, we are Jewish. We are concerned with the indoctrination. It is the indoctrination of children in Iran today which produces the types of jailers that want to torture those of other faiths. Or want to torture Americans.

And I think it would be important that Iran cease this kind of indoctrination of its children, stop the process of poisoning the minds of the next generation because they are setting up a condition in which when they become jailers or they become judges, they treat other human beings this way.

We go to Ileana Ros-Lehtinen from Florida.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for sharing your families' stories. I can't even begin to

imagine the toll that this has taken on each and every one of you and your loved ones, but it is so important that you are here today and that you share the truth about what is going on in Iran inside this so-called moderate regime that we have got with Rouhani. And it is no secret that the human rights situation in Iran under Rouhani, who was selected by the Supreme Leader, has actually gotten worse and he continues to use your loved ones as pawns.

The Iranian regime responds to strength and they see us as weak right now, but our American citizens must not have a target on their back when they go to places like Iran and anywhere else because of this perception by the Iranian regime of us being weak. And your loved ones are American citizens. We demand their immediate, safe, and unconditional return now.

I wanted to ask you about these nuclear talks. Do you worry that when the negotiations and we know with this deadline, but it will go on, do you worry that our leverage will not be there or some of you believe that we should not be discussing your loved ones during these negotiations, that it is a separate item?

So I wanted to ask your feelings about, your thoughts about how the nuclear negotiations and these talks impact the imprisonment or the disappearance of your loved ones.

Mr. Levinson?

Mr. LEVINSON. Thank you. I appreciate that question because I think it is very important and relevant to the current situation. My family has always been supportive of engagement with the Iranians. We do worry that regardless of the outcome of the deal, whether there is a successful deal, and there is improved relations, I don't know if there will be a sense of urgency to get any of our family members home anymore because it would be propaganda win for both the regime and for us—I guess it is a win for the administration, but there is no urgency anymore to increase the pressure and this is a very pressing issue that has lasted years for most of us.

I think if the talks fail and there is no deal, we could lose the engagement and the constructive talks that we are having right now. And those could cease and we are back to square one, particularly for my family as well.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Levinson. Ms. Abedini, I saw that you were agreeing.

Mrs. ABEDINI. Yes, I agree. I think these next few weeks is a very crucial time. If we don't get the Americans out, I don't know when we will have more leverage. I agree with Mr. Levinson that either way, we lose if we don't get the Americans out before an agreement is reached or not reached. We only have a few weeks left. And while we still have leverage, while the Iranian Government would still be motivated at some degree to release them.

As I mentioned, as the family members have said, they are being held on bogus charges. There is no evidence. They are being held because they are Americans or because of their freedom of practice, freedom of speech, and religion. So I think this is a very crucial time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. I wanted to ask just in the minute remaining following up on Mr. Engel's question, what more can we do in Congress? What more can the administration do?

Mr. REZAIAN. Thank you for the opportunity and thank you for the concern for everybody. Not being a diplomat or a policy expert, I would say that the things that you are doing right now, bringing attention to the case, showing unanimity, and the bipartisan support that we have seen for this type of activity is certainly very helpful.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Ms. Hekmati?

Ms. HEKMATI. I was obviously again like Ali said, not from a policy expert, but maybe reaching out to bilateral governments that have a good relationship with the Iranians because they tend to resist any kind of interaction from the U.S. or the Swiss, for example, that were the intermediary before. So perhaps reaching out to foreign officials as well.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Levinson?

Mr. LEVINSON. I also agree that for us the most important thing is to keep it in the eye of the administration and the American public because in this day and age, this is a great hearing and it is going to generate news and we need that, but in a few days, people may forget about it and they will likely forget about it. And then, we are back to where we were.

And so seeing the U.S. Congress, making this such a priority is crucial to all of us. We have a limited window right now with the engagement going on and if we can at least keep it up through that and past that until all of our family members are home, it would mean the world to all of us I know.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. You are not alone. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. Mr. Ted Deutch of Florida, ranking member on the Middle East Subcommittee.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, first, I would thank all four of our witnesses for being here. I was reminded during your testimony of how much your four family members really reflect so much about what we value in our country. Obviously, the commitment to family that all four of you have expressed so powerfully.

Mrs. Abedini, the role that faith plays for you and in our country. Ms. Hekmati, the story, the immigrant story that you described, your family coming, your parents coming to this country to provide opportunities for their children which is really also so much the story of our country and the service to our country that Amir bravely served as a Marine. Ali, freedom of speech and freedom of expression that we so often take for granted, it is impossible for us to do that as we listen to you talk about your brother. And as much as anything we are a nation that perseveres. And Dan, for 8 years and 3 months that you and your mother and your siblings have endured, you have persevered because 8 years and 3 months is just too long and he has missed, as you said, too much of your lives.

And so I would ask, you have all been told, we have been told that these talks on the sidelines there is a focus on all four of your families. And you have answered what more should be done in our communication with our Government, other governments. I guess what I would ask you is to take advantage of this opportunity. If you were on the sidelines, if you were sitting with the Iranian foreign minister, what would you say? What would you tell them?

Please, Mrs. Abedini?

Mrs. ABEDINI. I would say no more discussions until first you release the Americans, and then we will talk further.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Rezaian?

Mr. REZAIAN. I think I would have to ask what do they think they are accomplishing? What are they doing to their own image if they want to join the community of nations which is their stated goal, become more normalized. How do they think that this helps them at all?

Mr. DEUTCH. Ms. Hekmati?

Ms. HEKMATI. That is a tough question. I think just really trying to understand what leverage does these civilians who have no clout or leverage in winning over any kind of concessions for Iranians or with the United States. They need to be removed from this. So really just trying to understand what leverage they have.

Mr. DEUTCH. Dan?

Mr. LEVINSON. That is also a very tough question for us because we are just desperate for anything, any kind of answers, any acknowledgment that he is there, anything that will provide us, give us hope. So that would be the first start. We have been reaching out for that for years and we are just—we want anything.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Chairman, I would just finish by telling all of you, starting with you, Dan, we share your unwavering commitment to bring your family members home. And Ali so that Jason and Paxton can see an A's game this year. Naghmeh, so that you can bring your children's daddy home. Sarah, so your father, especially, has an opportunity to embrace his son. And Dan, so at this point, so you and your mother, Christine, your entire family, no longer have to celebrate milestones without your father.

I would finish just by telling again to all four of you that we will continue to be your advocates and bring your family members home will continue to be a priority for Congress. We will continue to press to make sure that it is a priority for the administration, but I want to thank you for your willingness to come here today to testify because I think, Dan, you are right. We sometimes—we have a short attention span in this country, but it is impossible to hear the four of you share in the most personal terms the impact of the fact that all four of you are missing your family members without being moved by it. And so I am sure that after today, the American people will continue to stand by you, as we will, until your family members are brought home. We are so grateful for your participation.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman ROYCE. Mr. Chris Smith of New Jersey.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I, too, want to thank our very distinguished witnesses, very powerful testimony on behalf of a son, a brother, sister, and of course, a husband. Hopefully, the Iranians are listening. It is still a country in relatively good standing at the United Nations and I would be wondering if any of you would like to speak to how well or poorly the U.N., the Human Rights Council or Ban Ki moon, for example, has he raised each or any of your cases personally with Rouhani and other high officials in the Iranian Government?

I met with Zarif some years ago on behalf of Saeed Abedini and he commented to me and a few others who were in that meeting that this is different than Ahmadinejad's government, that Rouhani is different. And I said if you want to really demonstrate that difference, the bold stroke is human rights. Start with the Americans, Mr. Levinson. How many days, 3,000 days? It wasn't 3,000 then, but it certainly was thousands. Release the Americans. And we will say a new page has been turned and that Iran is on a different trajectory than it has been on in the past under Ahmadinejad.

Sadly, and with great tragedy, it seems it has actually gotten worse when it comes to human rights and the holding of four innocent Americans, the torture, the mistreatment is absolutely appalling and brings dishonor to the country or the government, not the country, and not the people, but the Government of Iran.

And so I would tell you, your testimony by the grace of God will be heard by the ears of the Iranian leadership and Zarif and others—I mean Zarif was educated in Denver and in California. He knows Americans. He knows that human rights do matter and he talks a good game. It is about time he showed it with his actions.

So my comments to you, we will persist on. Mr. Levinson, you pointed out that we need to keep this in the eye of the administration. Hopefully, they will keep it in everybody else's eye. This is something that should be talked about, discussed, not on the fringes and on the sidelines of the negotiations, but as a mainstay issue and whether the negotiations on nuclear issues succeed or fail, we will be there, I believe, as a Congress and hopefully, the President tenaciously pushing for the release until that happy day does arrive.

Mrs. Abedini, you have mentioned that you have been to the European Parliament and the Bundestag. You might want to elaborate on how well received you were there, because obviously the European countries are very involved with the nuclear talks and they do care about human rights.

And again, if any of you have any insights on whether or not the U.N. has been feckless and ineffective or whether or not they have embraced each or any of your cases, your family cases with the Iranian Government.

Mrs. Abedini.

Mrs. ABEDINI. Thank you, Congressman Smith. The U.N., I have spoken before the U.N. and I know Ban Ki Moon has raised that case with the Iranian Government. Recently, the working group of the United Nations released the report saying that Iran is breaking its own laws and international laws by holding Saeed in prison and they should compensate every day of his imprisonment. So the U.N. has continuously spoken out about Saeed's imprisonment. Many countries at the U.N. have spoken out.

My recent trip to the European Parliament was very helpful. One of the Vice Presidents took Saeed on as a political sponsor and I was assured by many high officials at the European Parliament that Saeed's case would be raised, especially their foreign relations committees and their human rights committees were very involved.

My trip to Germany and Berlin was very helpful. I met with Mr. Kauder who was one level down from the Chancellor and he was

very helpful in making sure that Saeed's case is not only raised in the next few weeks during the talks, but also that Saeed's case is raised continuously with Iran and their human rights issues.

I got to also meet with the head of the human rights group in all of Germany and also the Iran section and it has been very helpful both with the European Parliament and the German Parliament working with their foreign relations and their religious freedom or their human rights group. It was very helpful. I received a lot of commitments and promises to advocate not only for Saeed, but also for religious freedom and human rights issues in Iran.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. I see I am out of time.

Hopefully, the Special Rapporteur also raised it with the Iranians.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Smith. Mr. Lowenthal? Mr. Lowenthal is going to pass. Mr. Keating. Mr. Keating will pass. Mr. Kildee.

Mr. KILDEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again, thank you and ranking member for allowing me, a person who is not a member of the committee, to participate in this important hearing.

First of all, the committee will take up a resolution that will call for the immediate release of Amir Hekmati and the others. Amir is my constituent, somebody that I feel—though I have never met Amir, I have become very close with the Hekmati family and I feel as though I know him. And if he is anything like you, Sarah, or your parents, it is no wonder that he has been able to sustain himself in nearly 4 years in one of the worst places on earth. The strength, the will that you demonstrate, obviously is something, and the other family members demonstrate, is something that your family members obviously share.

We have over 160 Members of Congress that have co-sponsored this resolution and at a time, we have to acknowledge this, at a time when there is very little agreement often on big questions that we are trying to wrestle with here in Congress, it is really important that this Congress speak with one unified voice on behalf of the millions and millions of people that we all represent and make sure that Iran hears loud and clear that they cannot be accepted into the international community if they continue to hold innocent Americans who are guilty of nothing other than being Americans against their will, for whatever political purposes they think they are achieving.

And so I thank the chairman and the ranking member for working with me to present this language to the committee. And I hope other members that have not yet signed on will do so and that we can get a resolution to the floor as soon as possible.

One other point that I would like to make and then I have a question or two. The P5+1 negotiations, the nuclear negotiations with Iran do provide something that we have not had in 35 years and that is the opportunity for direct, acknowledged, direct bilateral discussions between Iran and the United States. But I do think that it is important and I have heard loud and clear some of the comments made by other members and I share the frustration, but I think it is really important that we make it clear that the onus is on Iran to release these Americans if they expect any

negotiated agreement or any other engagement with the rest of the world to be taken seriously.

And I say that to especially underscore the point that the freedom of Mr. Rezaian, Mr. Abedini, Amir Hekmati, Mr. Levinson, the freedom of these innocent Americans should not be exchanged for any concession regarding Iran's nuclear capabilities or any reduction in economic sanctions that have forced them to the table. Iran must act unilaterally if they expect any agreement or any engagement to be taken on face value. So I think that is an important point and it is important that we understand this moment provides us the chance to engage Iran on this question, but that we not conflate the freedom of these Americans with the items that are being negotiated regarding those nuclear capabilities.

No American, and I know Amir feels this way, wants to be exchanged for something that we would grant to Iran regarding their ability to threaten the safety of the rest of the world. Iran must act unilaterally and the U.S. must continue to press that point. I think that is a really important distinction.

For me, as many of the members know, this has sort of become personal and I hope that that is the case for other members. I know it is for the other members that represent the families here, but I hope for all members we look at this as a personal mission. These are American citizens. These are people who are part of us and we need to do everything we can. We need to press Iran and press our administration to be as strong as we possibly can.

Sarah, I wonder if you might talk to us a little bit about the contact that you—I know there has been occasional, not much, occasional contact, but there was some discussion about how Amir is doing. Can you expand a bit on how he is doing physically and emotionally? I know the last few months especially have been particularly trying for Amir. If you could just tell a little bit more of his story in terms of how he is doing now, I think that would be helpful.

Ms. HEKMATI. You know, it is a testament to Amir's character to note that Amir, when he learned that my father was diagnosed, it was late in the game. My father was already diagnosed with cancer and was undergoing treatment and Amir had no idea. We did not have any contact with Amir for the first 2 years, no phone calls were allowed. We were not allowed to send letters. However, as of this past year, he has been allowed short phone calls. They are sanctioned phone calls, obviously. My mother is the primary person that receives the phone calls and he has his moments of hope when he hears that there is new developments in the political climate between the U.S. and Iran and then sometimes that hope falls. Obviously, he is always cautiously optimistic, but holding his breath because he knows that he has been strung along for now going on 4 years.

And you know, it is just a testament to him as much as this is really—you know, he has referred to his situation in some instances as he has died 100 times in this situation, so much so that he has become numb and just hardened himself to the fact that he doesn't know. Like he has to kind of resign to maybe he is stuck here for 10 years. He doesn't want to hold that in his mind. He wants to have hope. So we want to be able to give him hope, but

it is almost psychological torture for our family to have his phone calls every day for 5 minutes and then to say what is new? And there is nothing new for us to give him. It has been painful for him and for us as well.

Mr. KILDEE. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. Mr. Dana Rohrabacher of California.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the witnesses. I thank you personally, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member Eliot Engel for providing leadership in issues like this that you both continue to make us proud to serve on this committee.

I was in the Reagan White House during the Iran Contra fiasco and it started with concern about hostages being held by radical Islamists and a negotiation with the mullah regime to try to get them free. That turned into an absolute fiasco and we should have learned our lesson and you do not negotiate with the Iranian mullah regime as long as it is holding the hostages. And if you say we will not be negotiating with you, that will give them some reason to actually let them go.

I don't think that they pay any attention to the expressions of sympathy and solidarity that we have heard today. They don't care what we say here. They don't care what we think, as long as we don't have some action behind what we are talking about.

Now I support this resolution. I think it is a first good step. And I thank our leadership for bringing it forward and focusing the attention of this committee on this issue. I would hope that when we get done, however, that my colleagues would join me and our leadership would work with me on legislation that would suggest that if the mullah regime continues to hold these hostages, and we consider it an illegal holding of hostages, that any representative of the mullah regime that goes outside the borders of Iran would be susceptible of being taken into custody and held until the hostages are free. Maybe they would listen to that. Maybe they would be—if we arrested one of the leaders that is responsible for holding your families and held them, saying you are engaged in blackmail. You are engaged in an activity that we consider to be illegal, then you will be held until those people are free, until your government has changed its policy. We have to do something like that or they will not pay attention.

And one last thing about the negotiations we have had, the fact is that the negotiations we have had with the mullah regime and thinking how important it is for this nuclear agreement, even though we realize if we make an agreement with them on this nuclear facility so that it can't produce the material for a nuclear weapon, even if we get that, they can buy a nuclear weapon. They can buy it. Twenty-five million dollars, they go to Pakistan or North Korea or whatever. But what these negotiations have done have prevented us from being tough on issues like this, where we should be tough because it means something. So I again thank the chairman, I thank the witnesses for bringing this to our attention. I hope that we actually get together now, now that the leadership has brought up the issue, put it on the table. I hope we come up

with a solution that is going to get their attention and force decision making by the mullah regime.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the witnesses.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. We go now to Robin Kelly of Illinois.

Ms. KELLY. I don't really have a question. I just want to thank you for coming here and sharing your stories with all of us. I really appreciate that and I hope that something can be done where your relatives are freed. And I just want to thank Representative Kildee for his leadership in this effort. So thank you for being here.

Chairman ROYCE. Mr. Michael McCaul of Texas.

Mr. MCCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the witnesses. I was a Federal prosecutor for many years and we have due process in this country. We have freedom of religion. And I look at these charges and I mean it is unreal.

Ms. Abedini, your husband's crime was attending peaceful church gatherings for, as you put it, believing in Jesus Christ is a threat to the national security of the Iranian Government. I just find that astounding and for that belief, he is thrown into prison. What does that say about our negotiating partner? Are they really acting in good faith?

And Ms. Hekmati, your brother being put in a one meter by one meter cell and beaten and tortured, I can't imagine what he is going through. And I know you think about it every day of your life. And what is his crime? Corrupting the earth and being an enemy of God? Cooperating with the United States? What kind of charge is that?

And now all the while we are doing these negotiations, it seems to me, Ms. Abedini, as you mentioned, now is the time to increase the pressure to release these American hostages. Now is the time we have the negotiations and I would argue you are absolutely correct. We should halt these negotiations until these prisoners are released. We should stop the negotiation until they agree to release our American hostages first and foremost. But I am afraid that is not going to happen.

I am concerned also about what are we doing to facilitate the release of your loved ones. We have had witnesses come before this committee from the administration that talk about this issue, but we get very little information. I wanted to just ask each one of you what has the administration done to further the release of your loved one? And I will start with Mr. Rezaian.

Mr. REZAIAN. Well, I think I am fortunate because it is possible the administration learned some things from some of the previous situations. I have been in touch with State Department. They have spoken with the Iranian Government. They have worked with the Swiss protecting power as well, although the Iranians won't give Jason access to consulate access. So those kinds of things.

And they have been in touch on numerous occasions. When I have questions, I am able to contact them.

Mr. MCCAUL. Ms. Abedini?

Mrs. ABEDINI. I have been in contact with the State Department regularly. They share with me, as Ms. Hekmati has mentioned, that they are being discussed on the sidelines and the Iranians are

not really responding to that. And if we continue this talking for the last 3, 2, over 2½ years, almost 3 years of talking on the sidelines, it is not really working. Still they are not released. It has been almost 3 years for our family and in a few weeks it will be 3 years since we have seen Saeed.

My frustration is that I appreciate that they are being discussed on the sidelines, but they are still not home. Where is the action? Where are the results? I don't see any result. Iran continues to shrug it off and not really respond to our discussions on the sidelines. As I mentioned, this is crucial time. Iran has to feel some pressure to want to release the Americans. They are not going to do it through sideline discussions and just chit-chatting. I hope there is some pressure as this is a crucial time to bring these Americans home. And the pain and suffering of all of our families. Even one day, we would appreciate it.

Mr. McCAUL. American hostages should be the priority, not be placed on the sidelines.

Mrs. ABEDINI. Exactly.

Mr. McCAUL. Ms. Hekmati?

Ms. HEKMATI. Right, just to chime in with the rest. It pretty much has been a lot of our family informing them of what has been going on and the process in Iran and then being reassured that it is a priority and that it has been raised. Obviously, they have done some facilitating of engagement with governments that are bilateral, have a bilateral relationship with the U.S. and Iran and reaching out to them. And they have reassured us that they have these nations. Whenever there is an opportunity to engage with the Iranians that they reach out and they ask about the cases of the prisoners being held there.

However, again, I reiterate prior to us even having this face-to-face engagement, these prisoners that were American that have been released have never been held as long as, for example, Amir, and he is going on 4 years where we are sitting face-to-face. So I am wondering how effective is this raising of it on the sidelines of these negotiations really at this point? And I think that we are beyond that.

Mr. McCAUL. I see that my time is expired, but Mr. Levinson, just very quickly.

Mr. LEVINSON. I am afraid we are in the same boat because right now it has been on the sidelines, but for years we didn't have any kind of engagement, so this has been progress. My father is a retired FBI agent, so we have been working very closely with the FBI, but they had limited powers in what they can do.

I just want to note real quick in case someone—there are people watching this online in Iran, the FBI has offered a \$5-million reward for the safe return of my father. So we would like that to be highlighted as well.

Mr. McCAUL. It is a good point. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. We go now to Mr. Matt Salmon, chairman of the Asia Subcommittee.

Mr. SALMON. Thanks a lot. First of all, Ms. Hekmati, I just wanted to acknowledge the fact that your brother was born in Arizona in Flagstaff where I am from and a lot of prayers and thoughts are coming from Arizona.

The other thing I wanted to comment on is that I think you have one of the greatest advocates in the universe helping you with Montel Williams. He is great guy. I have never seen a Marine in trouble that he didn't step forward to bail out. Worked with him on Andrew Tahmooressi. And I just think the world of Montel Williams. He is an American hero. You have got the right guy helping you out.

Ms. HEKMATI. We were all born in Flagstaff.

Mr. SALMON. That is great. We love Flagstaff.

Ms. HEKMATI. We do, too.

Mr. SALMON. Mrs. Abedini, I just wanted to make a comment to you how moving your testimony of Jesus Christ was to me personally. You know, in some of my darkest hours in my life when I thought that there was nobody for me, he was. And when I was a young missionary for the Mormon Church in Taiwan, I had some cards printed up that "a true friend is one that walks in when the rest of the world walks out." What I found in my life is he always walks in. I was very, very moved by your testimony. And I wanted you to know that I truly do believe also he won't let you down.

We do hold the cards, folks. We do hold the cards. We just voted a few weeks ago to require a vote by the Congress on any deal that the Obama administration strikes with Iran and I think we should state unequivocally both from the House and the Senate that any deal with Iran is dead on arrival that doesn't include the release of these prisoners. That is what we should say. And we should do it either through a joint letter of Members of Congress. A number of us from the House and the Senate side, I think if we can achieve a critical mass saying that any deal is dead on arrival that doesn't deal with this prisoner release. And I think that we say that I know right now it seems like the President wants a deal more than life itself on this nuclear thing which I am very, very skeptical about to begin with. But it seems like that ought to be the one fundamental thing that we can all agree on. If it doesn't include that, it is done.

Mr. Rezaian, I am curious about the charges of your brother. Do you have any idea of how the Iranian Government became aware of your brother's American visa application submitted to the U.S. consulate in Dubai and the letter that he wrote to the Obama administration as part of a job application? Has there been any investigation how they were able to obtain that information that they are using as evidence against your brother?

Mr. REZAIAN. Our assumption is it came from his computer. When they came, they took his computers, phones, all those kinds of things. So we believe that is where it came from.

Mr. SALMON. I learned early in my youth when I was a little boy I got picked on by a bully in the school yard and the only thing that bullies understand is a punch in the nose. And I think that is how we have to deal with Iran.

Look, on this deal that they are talking about that the President is negotiating, it means billions and billions and billions of dollars to these guys. The very least we can do is step forward and say any deal is dead without the release of these prisoners and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. McCAUL [presiding]. The Chair recognizes Mr. Duncan from South Carolina.

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am sorry. I am sorry the United States Government has failed you and your families. These prisoners are American citizens and that should mean something. It does to the men and women in this room and the United States Congress, the 160 plus people that have signed this resolution, the 90 people in the Senate that voted for a similar resolution.

You know, I think about the fact that more attention was given to the Natalie Holloway disappearance in Aruba 10 years ago than has been given to your loved ones imprisoned in Iran.

I want to take this moment to thank those that are around the world that are praying for you and your families. I join them in those prayers and ask that God will keep you from having that pain every morning that you have talked about, Mrs. Abedini. That God will comfort them wherever they may be, whatever jail cell, or situation that they are facing today, that they will understand that there are folks here in the United States that love them and care for them and are doing everything we can to effect their release.

I agree with Mr. Kildee when he said that there shouldn't be any quid pro quo here with negotiations with Iran over their nuclear weapon. That is an issue that America doesn't want to see in the Western world and the free world doesn't want to see Iran have a nuclear weapon. But if Iran wants to enter the international community and be taken seriously, they need to release these prisoners that were taken forcefully from an apartment of their loved ones. These are American citizens.

We have seen the United States Senate pass by a vote of 90 to nothing, a non-binding resolution stating that the United States Government should undertake every effort, using every diplomatic tool at its disposal to secure their immediate release.

We are getting ready to pass the same thing by a vote in this committee. I look forward to the opportunity to talking about your loved ones from the floor of the United States House of Representatives continuing to raise awareness. But this is a resolution. What can we do? You heard the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Salmon, talk about we have tools at our disposal, pieces of legislation that give the United States Government leverage over this regime, leverage with more sanctions. We shouldn't be lifting any sanctions until these prisoners are released because these prisoners are American citizens and that is what America is about.

Congress still retains that ability. Do you believe that further legislative action is necessary? What more can we be doing? I am going to ask each one of you, what more can we be doing?

Mr. Rezaian.

Mr. REZAIAN. As I said before, I am not a policy expert. You guys are the policy experts. I am in favor of any kind of activity from you guys, from Congress, from the President and the State Department that would get Jason out as soon as possible. I will leave it to the experts to decide.

Mr. DUNCAN. Ms. Abedini.

Mrs. ABEDINI. I would say help bring my husband home before you consent to any deal. When you are reviewing the deal, consider whether they are home or not. Thank you.

Mr. DUNCAN. I want to ask you real quick. You said you were in communication with the State Department. Do they call you or do you call them?

Mrs. ABEDINI. They call me, both, when I have updates I contact them, but they contact me regularly. It has been very good communication, especially the last year. Again, it is always discussed on the sidelines and Iran continues not to respond.

Mr. DUNCAN. That is good that they call you and you are not in the dark. I appreciate that.

Ms. Hekmati, what more can we be doing?

Ms. HEKMATI. I mean obviously in my limited knowledge of what you can do, I just think continuing to keep this in the forefront of this administration, especially when Secretary Kerry is engaged with them and what is the response and continuing to push and understanding what it is going to take to bring them home. I just don't want this to be forgotten.

I know when the hostages were taken in '79, this was something we as a family have a countdown of how many days he has been in prison. I think that countdown needs to exist for all of the prisoners and it needs to be visible.

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you. Mr. Levinson?

Mr. LEVINSON. As I mentioned, keeping it in the headlines is ultimately most important and we are just ordinary Americans and we are doing our very best, but you guys are the ones who can make the headlines. And I know in a couple of days, God willing, they get home in the next couple of days, but it is very unlikely that will happen. The next couple of days, when you get home and you see that it out of the headlines, think about what can you do to keep this in the public eye. What can you do to keep the pressure up on our Government to make sure it is not forgotten.

I know I will go home and I will think about my dad all day, every day, and Americans won't be doing that. And in a couple of days, can you remember our family members who are suffering over there and think about what they are doing when you are brushing your teeth, when you are at home with your kids, thinking about what they are missing out on. And if you guys have any power to remind everybody in the world what is going on, please use any tools at your disposal.

Mr. DUNCAN. And it happens. And you all please know your loved ones have not been forgotten. Every day the floor of the United States House, someone goes to the floor with a 1-minute speech to remind Americans, and I want to thank the gentleman sitting behind you, Montel, for staying engaged in this.

As I talked about, Natalie Holloway's case, 10 years ago had all of this national attention. Where is the national attention for their loved ones that are in prison in Iran? Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the leniency and I yield back.

Chairman ROYCE [presiding]. Thank you. We go now to Mr. Randy Weber of Texas.

Mr. WEBER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank you all for being here today and I have some real quick questions.

Mr. Rezaian, when was the last time you spoke with your brother?

Mr. REZAIAN. We spoke in July about 3 days before he was taken. He was planning to come on vacation to the U.S.

Mr. WEBER. Mrs. Abedini, when was the last time you spoke with your husband?

Mrs. ABEDINI. The Iranian Government hasn't allowed any calls. His father visits him in prison every Wednesday.

Mr. WEBER. But when is the last time you personally spoke with your husband?

Mrs. ABEDINI. Before his sentence in January 2013, there was a sanctioned call for probably about 4 or 5 minutes.

Mr. WEBER. So about 2 years, 4 months ago, give or take?

Mrs. ABEDINI. Yes.

Mr. WEBER. Ms. Hekmati, when is the last time you spoke with your brother?

Ms. HEKMATI. Me, personally, a week ago, for 5 minutes. And again, I noted that he has been able to call almost daily for about 5 minutes.

Mr. WEBER. And Mr. Levinson, your dad?

Mr. LEVINSON. March 8, 2007, 3,008 days ago.

Mr. WEBER. Over 8 years ago?

Mr. LEVINSON. Yes.

Mr. WEBER. I hope the administration is paying attention. You all are real people with real lives and real pain. This is really bad, real bad, real serious. None of us wanted this. I don't feel like we started this. This regime, and I will call them a thuggish regime, has started holding hostages in '79 and for the administration to be negotiating with these thugs in my estimation is just real foolishness.

I think and I appreciate my brother Duncan's comments over here that somebody goes to the floor of the House daily with a 1-minute to remind the American people how really bad this is and I appreciate his comments.

I think Congress should get real serious. No agreement period until Iran releases the hostages. They want to re-enter the world community. We keep hearing they want to re-enter the world community. Well, if they want to do that, then they need to get real serious right now. I just hope that John Kerry, President Obama, and everybody on their team that is in the negotiation phase would quite frankly come to their senses and say if human rights isn't everything, isn't the main thing when you are dealing with this kind of regime, how can you trust them on anything else?

And so I just hope and pray that our President and John Kerry wakes up and understands the dilemma that is before us today and how long it has been going on. Mr. Levinson, 3,000 days?

Mr. LEVINSON. 3,007.

Mr. WEBER. 3,007. This is unconscionable that we would be dealing with a regime like that. And if this hearing, if nothing else, if you all being willing to come out and through your pain and share with us, so that we can get some attention, if our President and our Secretary of State would pay attention and make this an issue, then we might be able to help bring your loved ones home and I pray real soon.

And Mr. Chairman, I am going to yield back before my time. Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE. Mr. Darrell Issa of California.

Mr. ISSA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. Usually, when we have witnesses, their testimony is a series of complex facts. Today, very clearly your facts are pretty simple. We have a rogue nation that has been a rogue nation since 1979 when it took our Embassy in violation of all sensibilities in the global community, held them, blaming, pointing fingers at students when, in fact, it was the new government that took those hostages, those diplomats, many of them covered by international diplomatic immunity.

Your loved ones are not covered by diplomatic immunity, but they should be covered by the sensibility of fair and honest trials and they are not. So you have this committee, I think, on an incredibly bipartisan basis support that we will, in fact, continue to use such powers we have, including resolutions and opposing the President's normalizing of relations with Iran in any way as long as not just they do or don't have nuclear ambitions, but they do or don't respect the rules of the civilized community and whether that is unlawfully keeping your loved ones in various levels of detention support for Hezbollah and Hamas, the various global terrorism they have supported, or in fact, their continued attempt to destabilize country after country throughout the Muslim world.

So like many of the members here, there aren't a lot more questions to be asked of you. You have done a great job of explaining the plight of your loved ones. I do very much support the chairman's effort to make it very clear that Iran has to change its ways in three ways: Abandon its nuclear desires; treat both their own citizens and their visitors with a level of respect and rule of law that they clearly do not at this time; and stop their attempt to destabilize countries in the world, but particularly within their region.

And so, Mr. Chairman, I, too, will be yielding back, but I would ask if any of the witnesses wanted to add anything from their observations to things that we should be aware of in our deliberation here relative to Iran. Again, thank you. And I yield back.

Chairman ROYCE. We go to Mr. Meadows of North Carolina.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank each of you for being here today and sharing your personal story.

Mr. Levinson, today is the first day that I have met you, but I feel like I have known your family because Mr. Deutch on each and every hearing, he hasn't missed one, has raised this particular issue with the Secretary of State, Mr. Kerry, sitting at that same table, he has done that. So I feel like I know your family. Honestly, I had to Google it the first time that he mentioned it, and shame on me for that.

For many of you, this is the first time I have met you, but Ms. Abedini, it is not the first time for us. I just need to ask your forgiveness, because we have been working very hard to get your husband who is a U.S. citizen and his only crime was that he cared about other people. And this goes back many, many, many months. We met in New York. I met, at that particular time, with Foreign Minister Zarif, personally and raised this issue. We have had conversations. We have had hearings. We have talked to the State Department. And each and every time we wanted to make sure that

we did no harm, that we were gentle in our negotiations to make sure that we didn't create a worse situation for your family members.

I have run out of patience. The time is now. The time must be now and we have heard these words from Mr. Kildee, who is advocating on behalf of a constituent. This is a bipartisan issue. It is not Republican or Democrat. We have come together.

But we have failed many of you and what I want to make sure that is clear, the message to Iran today is in the late '70s there were thugs and terrorists that took hostages and they wore ski masks and dark clothing. And the only difference today is that the terrorists and thugs wear suits and give the illusion of being international diplomats. That is not the case.

So you have my commitment that I won't vote for a deal. I will advocate tirelessly with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to make sure that no deal is signed until your family members come home. And it is a precondition of what we must do. It is not a sidebar. It is not a note that we are doing soft diplomacy. It is time for real, hard facts and it is time that we demand that U.S. citizens return home to their families.

So you have my apologies for not being effective. I pray that there are no more birthdays, anniversaries, or holidays that are missed, until they come home.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman ROYCE. Mr. Lee Zeldin of New York.

Mr. ZELDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And as I listen to Mr. Meadows, we are all reminded of the passion and emotion and investment that so many of my colleagues have toward this effort. I am honored to serve with them in moments like now where you see that kind of passion on both sides of the aisle, both Republicans and Democrats from all across America who want to be part of the successful effort to bring back your loved ones.

I also very much appreciate the fact that you have gotten individuals with followings from around America to take up this cause to raise awareness because I think that is a key part of this effort is to raise awareness as to what is going on. It is hard to work your way through Twitter without coming across a hashtag #FreeAmirNow. I know that people like Montel Williams go on national TV to help the cause. I personally don't believe the negotiations should have started without freeing your loved ones.

The President of the United States believes in making good-faith concessions when he starts negotiations with other countries. The President of the United States made a slew of dozens of concessions before starting a negotiation with Cuba. Right now, our leverage is being negotiated away at the table and I am concerned with everything that isn't part of the negotiation right now including returning your loved ones back to your homes so you can be able to start enjoying holidays together again.

The President of the United States has this burden on him and I would greatly encourage him in his foreign policy approaching his last year and a half in office as he is negotiating with Iran to not only avoid negotiating away his leverage and his diplomats' leverage to bring your loved ones home, but not to undercut and handicap whoever the next President of the United States is because if

this President isn't getting the job done, the next one is going to be faced with that burden and I want to do everything in my power because this cause really shouldn't outlast this Presidency, but there will be challenges that the next President will be inheriting. So my personal opinion is these negotiations shouldn't have started without that good faith concession being from Iran.

I would like to also say thank you to Congressman Kildee, Congressman Deutch for their leadership on this effort. As I mentioned in a past hearing, actually I have more members, family members in Congressman Deutch's district than my own down in Florida. I am Jewish. The pilgrimage for New York Jewish families to make the trip to Boca, that is going back to the homeland for us. But we are all uniting for a very worthy cause that hopefully we can come back here and have something great to celebrate.

But the very real threat of negotiating away that leverage for this President, our diplomats, or the next, is something that we need to take very seriously. Because if Iran doesn't have the incentive now when they are pursuing that \$50 billion signing bonus, or the \$140-plus billion that is following right behind it, as they are working to overthrow foreign governments, sponsoring terrorism, pledging—chanting “Death to America,” developing ICBMs, but there is no conversation that can be complete without talking about what is not part of the negotiation, without talking about United States citizens being unjustly imprisoned by the Iranian Government and those who love America. And that is a cause worth fighting for with as much passion, conviction as we saw Mr. Meadows have just now. Thank you for your efforts and thank you for all of your supporters for helping advance the cause. I yield back the balance of my time.

Chairman ROYCE. Mr. Donovan of New York.

Mr. DONOVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have two quick questions. As you heard when I was first introduced about 2 hours ago, this is my very first hearing and I just had a baby. I think about if someone had ever taken my baby, she is only 14 days old, what I would do to get her back. And I think about your loved ones and your loved ones are America's children. We should do everything in our power to get your loved ones back.

I just have two quick questions. I thought, Ms. Hekmati, that you had told us that you are informing the State Department of the process of your brother's captivity, that it is not the other way around.

Do each of you have someone from the State Department who is your liaison that you could call any time, day or night, to find out the status of your loved one? Do each of you have someone that you can do that with?

And my other question was the four of you, your courage to come here, your tenacity to fight for the freedom of your loved ones is unequivocal. Are there other families that you are aware of that aren't here who are suffering the same fate as you are? Are there other families that you are aware of who have loved ones who are being held captive that you are aware of?

Mrs. ABEDINI. Many Christians, unfortunately, are being held captive or in prison in Iran. So I know a lot of families that are imprisoned simply because they are Christians.

Mr. DONOVAN. American families?

Mrs. ABEDINI. Not American, but Christian.

Mr. DONOVAN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back my time.

Chairman ROYCE. Any other members seeking recognition? Well, this then would conclude our hearing.

Again, we want to thank the witnesses. We deeply appreciate you coming to Washington to testify today and we will be in contact with the family members as we continue our efforts. We deeply appreciate your courage and we are very, very sorry for what each of your families have been through.

So at this point though, we have to conclude this hearing and we will now go to the markup on the resolution. If you would like to stay for that markup, we appreciate also your support for the resolution by Mr. Kildee which we are about to bring before the committee. So we stand adjourned for the hearing.

[Hearing adjourned.]

Chairman ROYCE. We meet pursuant to notice. I am going to ask that the committee to come to order and members to return here to the committee for the markup.

We meet pursuant to notice to mark up a single resolution. The clerk will take her seat.

I now call up House Resolution 233 expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that Iran should immediately release the three United States citizens it holds, as well as provide all known information on any U.S. citizens who have disappeared within its orders. Without objection, the resolution is considered read and open for amendment at any point.

[The information referred to follows:]

114TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 233

Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that Iran should immediately release the three United States citizens that it holds, as well as provide all known information on any United States citizens that have disappeared within its borders.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 29, 2015

Mr. KILDEE (for himself, Mr. HUFFMAN, Mr. DEUTCH, Mr. LABRADOR, Mr. ENGEL, and Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that Iran should immediately release the three United States citizens that it holds, as well as provide all known information on any United States citizens that have disappeared within its borders.

Whereas three United States citizens have been held captive in Iran, some of them for multiple years;

Whereas one United States citizen disappeared in Iran over eight years ago; and

Whereas Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has stated that his government wishes to engage in a constructive interaction with the world: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That it is the sense of the House of Rep-
 2 resentatives that Iran should release all detained United
 3 States citizens immediately and provide any information
 4 it possesses regarding any United States citizens that have
 5 disappeared within its borders.



Chairman ROYCE. All members may have 5 days to submit any questions or extraneous material for the record.

After opening remarks from myself and the ranking member, I will be glad to recognize any others seeking recognition and I will yield myself right now such time as I may consume.

I again want to thank the family members who testified at this morning's hearing. I also want to thank the author of this measure, Congressman Kildee of Michigan, as well as those members who continue to stress how important it is to this body and to the American people that these Americans come home.

I am a proud co-sponsor of this resolution as are many members on this committee and this resolution rightly points out that if Iran truly wishes to engage constructively with the rest of the world, step one would be releasing these Americans and allowing them to be reunited with their loved ones.

Last month, the Senate passed a similar resolution of a vote of 90 to 0 and I look forward to the House taking up this measure with a similar show of unanimous support. And I now recognize the ranking member, Mr. Engel, for his remarks.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Chairman, thank you for bringing forward this resolution which, of course, I support. And thanks to the Members of Congress and in particular, Mr. Kildee, who as I said before has been relentless in this, talking to me all the time about this, and won't rest until the hostages are all free. So thank you, Mr. Kildee for all your hard work.

I want to also thank Mr. Deutch, Mr. Labrador, and Mr. Huffman, along with Mr. Kildee, who represent the families of the detained and missing Americans in Iran, for their leadership in pressing this issue and ensuring that these Americans are not forgotten, will never be forgotten until we get them home.

I want to thank our witnesses for joining us earlier today. These men and women come from different walks of life, but what they share is the daily uncertainty about family members, all American

citizens, and we should stress that. This is about all American citizens, missing or detained in Iran.

I wish we knew more about the conditions for these four Americans, but in these cases, Iran, as usual, isn't playing by the rules. I can't say that is a huge surprise.

Mr. Chairman, typically, if an American were detained in Iran, our Swiss interlocutors would have access to them for consular services. In the cases of these three Iranian-Americans, Iran doesn't acknowledge their dual citizenship, only their Iranian citizenship. This position runs roughshod over long, established international law. Without consular access, we can't judge the health and welfare of our own people. The United States respects this access for Iranian citizens held here. Reciprocal privileges are the least they could provide.

Sadly, Robert Levinson's whereabouts are unknown as we heard in the testimony. I simply don't believe that the Iranians have been forthcoming about his status. If he is indeed a hostage, he is now the longest-held hostage in American history. Some argue that we should tie Iranian cooperation on this matter to the outcome of the nuclear talks. I feel that way very often. It is absolutely ludicrous that we are negotiating with a government that is holding our citizens to languish in Iranian jails.

We remain deeply concerned about Iran's imprisonment of Americans and the lack of information about the whereabouts of Robert Levinson. This is a bipartisan concern. It doesn't matter where you come from in this country or what your political affiliation is. We want to see all the hostages home safely to their families.

I think it is clear from the emotional testimony we have heard here today that when it comes to these missing and detained Americans, Iran can do much more to help bring these Americans home to their families.

So I am glad we are doing this hearing. Mr. Chairman, I thank you for doing this hearing. This has been a great, once again, bipartisan collaboration on the part of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

And again, I want to thank our colleagues, particularly Mr. Kildee, for coming here and working with us in partnership and we are not going to stop until we get these people home.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Engel. Do any other committee members seek recognition to speak on this measure?

Are there any amendments? Hearing no further questions from members, the Chair now moves that the committee agree that House Resolution 233, all those in favor say aye.

[Ayes.]

All opposed no. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it and the resolution is agreed to and without objection the measure is ordered favorably reported and the Chair is authorized to seek consideration under suspension of the rules. Thank you, members, and we now stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:09 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING AND MARKUP NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Edward R. Royce (R-CA), Chairman

June 2, 2015

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing and markup of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at <http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov>):

DATE: Tuesday, June 2, 2015

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

SUBJECT: Americans Detained in Iran

WITNESSES: Mr. Ali Rezaian
(*Brother of Jason Rezaian*)

Mrs. Naghmeh Abedini
(*Wife of Saeed Abedini*)

Ms. Sarah Hekmati
(*Sister of Amir Hekmati*)

Mr. Daniel Levinson
(*Son of Robert Levinson*)

MARKUP OF: H. Res. 233, Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that Iran should immediately release the three United States citizens it holds, as well as provide all known information on any United States citizens that have disappeared within its borders.

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

**NOTE: Further measures may be added.

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day Tuesday Date 06/02/15 Room RHOB 2172

Starting Time 10:06 Ending Time 12:03

Recesses 0 (to) (to) (to) (to) (to) (to)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Edward R. Royce, Rep. Michael McCaul

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

Americans Detained in Iran

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See attached.

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rep. Raul Labrador, Rep. Jared Huffman, Rep. Dan Kildee

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

IFR - Mrs. Naghmeleh Abedini

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 12:03


Jean Marter, Director of Committee Operations

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE MARKUP

Day Tuesday Date 06/02/15 Room 2172

Starting Time 12:03 Ending Time 12:08

Recesses 0 (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Edward R. Royce

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

BILLS FOR MARKUP: *(Include bill number(s) and title(s) of legislation.)*

See attached.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See attached.

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

None.

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

None.

ACTIONS TAKEN DURING THE MARKUP: *(Attach copies of legislation and amendments.)*

See markup summary.

RECORDED VOTES TAKEN (FOR MARKUP): *(Attach final vote tally sheet listing each member.)*

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Yeas</u>	<u>Nays</u>	<u>Present</u>	<u>Not Voting</u>
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TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 12:08


Doug Anderson, General Counsel

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	Edward R. Royce, CA
X	Christopher H. Smith, NJ
X	Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, FL
X	Dana Rohrabacher, CA
X	Steve Chabot, OH
	Joe Wilson, SC
X	Michael T. McCaul, TX
X	Ted Poe, TX
X	Matt Salmon, AZ
X	Darrell Issa, CA
	Tom Marino, PA
X	Jeff Duncan, SC
X	Mo Brooks, AL
	Paul Cook, CA
X	Randy Weber, TX
	Scott Perry, PA
X	Ron DeSantis, FL
X	Mark Meadows, NC
X	Ted Yoho, FL
X	Curt Clawson, FL
	Scott, DesJarlais, TN
X	Reid Ribble, WI
X	Dave Trott, MI
X	Lee Zeldin, NY
X	Dan Donovan, NY
X	Raul Labrador, ID

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	Eliot L. Engel, NY
	Brad Sherman, CA
X	Gregory W. Meeks, NY
	Albio Sires, NJ
X	Gerald E. Connolly, VA
X	Theodore E. Deutch, FL
X	Brian Higgins, NY
X	Karen Bass, CA
X	William Keating, MA
X	David Cicilline, RI
	Alan Grayson, FL
X	Ami Bera, CA
X	Alan S. Lowenthal, CA
X	Grace Meng, NY
X	Lois Frankel, FL
X	Tulsi Gabbard, HI
X	Joaquin Castro, TX
X	Robin Kelly, IL
X	Brendan Boyle, PA
X	Dan Kildee, MI
X	Jared Huffman, CA

6/2/15 Foreign Affairs Committee Markup Summary

The Chair called up H. Res. 233 for consideration.

H. Res. 233 (Kildee), Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that Iran should immediately release the three United States citizens it holds, as well as provide all known information on any United States citizens that have disappeared within its borders.

H. Res. 233 was agreed to by voice vote, and ordered favorably reported by unanimous consent. By unanimous consent, the Chair was authorized to seek House consideration of H. Res. 233 under suspension of the rules.

The Committee adjourned.



MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY MRS. NAGHMEH ABEDINI



June 8, 2015

The Honorable Ed Royce
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Royce:

Thank you again for allowing Ms. Naghmeh Abedini to appear before the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs on June 2, 2015. The purpose of this letter is to provide a brief supplement for the hearing record.

In Ms. Abedini's testimony, she indicated that more than 917,000 individuals have signed petitions calling for Iran to release her husband, Pastor Saeed Abedini. Please let the record reflect that this number has since increased to 938,049 and growing.

Again, thank you for holding this important hearing, and for giving Ms. Abedini the distinct honor of appearing before you. We are extremely grateful for your attention to this dire matter.

Sincerely,

Nathanael S. Bennett
Director of Government Affairs