

A panel discussion on prospects for democracy in Iran sponsored by Senators Santorum and Lieberman is scheduled for Thursday, March 2 at 10.30 am. Participants are:

ALIAFSHARI, one of the most recognizable faces within Iran's reform movement, he has campaigned for a decade on behalf of reform-minded leaders and change within the Islamic Republic. From 2000 to 2003, Mr. Afshari was imprisoned by the Islamic Republic on charges that he was threatening the national security of the country through his active role in pro-democracy programs on college campuses. During those years, he was placed in solitary confinement for 400 days, including 328 days consecutively.

Mr. Afshari was tortured into providing a false confession in which he admitted to the crimes with which he was charged. This confession was broadcast across Iran and garnered considerable attention from the public.

Mr. Afshari has published his views in over forty essays and papers including and has been profiled by the BBC, Agence France Presse and The Irish Times.

AKBAR ATRI, a visionary within the Iranian student movement, has been a longtime leading proponent of global democracy and human rights standards within Iran. He is a founding member of Iranian Students for Democracy and Human Rights.

Mr. Atri has been imprisoned, fined, and physically abused at the hands of the Iranian regime for his political activities. He has been sentenced in seven years prison term in absentee for his efforts in the United States promoting democracy and human rights.

In encouraging a new constitution within the framework of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Mr. Atri co-authored a petition calling for a national referendum on a new constitution. The referendum would provide Iranians the ability to request a new constitution based upon democratic values.

Since the petition's publication, more than thirty-five thousand political activists and other organizations have signed and joined the cause. Mr. Atri was able to leave from Iran, seeking refuge in the United States, where he currently travels across the country, speaking in support of freedom and a non-violent, disobedient, democratic movement in Iran.

Mr. Atri has been published or profiled by numerous media outlets including the BBC, The American Spectator and New York Sun.

MEHDI JALALI, a political commentator and Middle East specialist with a focus on secularization and political transition in Iran is a student of Islamic jurisprudence and comments on Islamic neo-fundamentalism.

Mr. Jalali hosted the program Political Reflections on Persian satellite TV during which he regularly interviewed leading activists and political figures.

Mr. Jalali has published numerous articles on Iran and Middle Eastern affairs in Iranian newspapers and in the electronic media. Mr. Jalali was Chief of Staff to Abbas Amir, the former deputy prime minister of Iran, one of Iran's leading dissidents and Iran's longest held political prisoner.

Known for his discontent with the Iranian regime, Mr. Jalali was arrested and interrogated on a regular basis while in Iran.

He is the co-founder of the Center for Research and Political Review, a newly found Iranian think tank that examines socio-political issues.

The U.S. Department of State has found Iran to be the world's leading sponsor of international terrorism for the past twenty years.

The government of Iran supports violent actions against American and Coalition personnel in Iraq through its support of and help to insurgent forces as well as through various radio and television stations broadcast in Iraq .

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Ministry of Intelligence and Security continue to plan and support terrorist acts and by a variety of groups using terrorism to pursue their goals. Iran continues to provide Lebanese Hizballah and Palestinian rejectionist groups--notably HAMAS, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the PFLP-GC--with varying amounts of funding, safehaven, training and weapons.

Recent elections demonstrate the desire of Iran's people to realize many of the freedoms we enjoy in the West. Yet, many of the mechanisms of change remain controlled by those entities most opposed to change: the Supreme Leader, the Council of Guardians, and the courts.

The proposed Iran Freedom and Support Act of 2005 authorizes assistance for pro-democracy groups committed to democratic ideals and principles in Iran. The legislation declares that it should be U.S. policy to support efforts by the Iranian people to exercise self-determination over their form of government; and that the U.S. should actively support a national referendum in Iran with oversight by international observers and monitors to certify the integrity and fairness of the referendum.

The bill codifies existing sanctions, controls, and regulations in place against Iran, and expands the list of entities that can be targeted by sanctions through the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA).

The bill will make it harder for the government of Iran to have access to revenue and foreign investment to foster terrorism and support weapons of mass destruction programs.
