

## Iran Election Process Rigged From the Start; Rouhani is Still Just a Regime Insider and Khamenei Will Still be Calling the Shots, Ros-Lehtinen Says



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(WASHINGTON) – U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman of the Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee, made the following statement during a subcommittee hearing titled: “Elections in Iran: The Regime Cementing its Control.”

Statement by Ros-Lehtinen:

In our fervor to repudiate all things Ahmadinejad and force ourselves into believing things in Iran are set to change, the West has rushed to anoint Hassan Rohani as the moderate hope who will ease tensions between Iran and the West.

And in wanting this change so badly, we’ve quietly lulled ourselves into submission – accepting that a Rohani victory was the choice of the Iranian people who wanted change – unwilling to see that this was still just a victory for the Supreme Leader and the regime.

The people never really had a choice – they were forced to choose from one of Khamenei’s candidates.

And that is what Khamenei wanted – this whole thing was rigged from the start.

Khamenei is once again playing games with the West.

In Rohani, he now has the perfect opportunity to coax the United States and international community to ease up on sanctions, while using Rohani as the fall guy should public opinion turn.

The regime in Tehran will use his election as an opportunity to undermine support for sanctions and buy time to fight back the effects the sanctions have had on Iran, while marching forward with its nuclear program.

And we must see this for what it is and not get caught up in the enthusiasm that has accompanied nearly every presidential election in Iran since the 1990’s.

Because if history has shown us anything, it is that these elections tend to bring with them a false hope that the regime is cracking, when in fact it is just cementing its control.

These elections were anything but free and fair.

It’s not fair when half of the population is disqualified from running because they are the wrong gender or they are a religious minority, and they aren’t free when the candidates are handpicked by the regime – assuring that no matter who wins, the regime has their man in office.

And that is what unfolded in Iran last Friday; the people didn’t have a free choice and got stuck with Rohani – the consummate regime insider.

I would urge caution to those so desperate to label Hassan Rohani as a “reformist” or moderate.

He is a man who has been in the core of the inner circle of the regime since the beginning, having been close with the

founding clerics of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, including Grand Ayatollah Khomeini.

And how quickly those who need Rouhani to be something he will never be whitewash his past so his election fits the reformist narrative.

They seem to have forgotten that in 1999 Mr. Rouhani, serving the regime, led a relentless and violent crackdown on a student uprising.

During a pro-regime rally in response to the students, Mr. Rouhani reportedly declared "from today our people shall witness how in the arena our law enforcement force...shall deal with these opportunists and riotous elements, if they simply dare to show their faces."

This speech was reportedly followed by an IRGC force storming through university campuses, arresting, torturing and murdering those who sought reform.

And now, this is what we have pinned our hopes to as a "reformer" in Iran.

I urge us all to remember that ultimately, the power in Iran rests with Khamenei, the IRGC and the regime.

I fear we will be too eager to lift the pressure on the regime under the false narrative of reform and moderation.

The U.S. position must be clear: no concessions, no rewards, no easing of sanctions.

The U.S. must not give up any ground unless the regime takes verifiable steps to halt its enrichment and dismantle its nuclear program.

Let us not forget that he was part of the regime that concealed its nuclear program from the world for 20 years before becoming the face of that program as Iran's top nuclear negotiator.

And while many point to the halting of enrichment in 2004 under his watch as positive signs, I'd advise you to use caution with this rationale.

This was a delay tactic that the regime, and even Rouhani himself had admitted to using in order to push the nuclear program forward.

During the campaign, Rouhani reportedly bragged that under his watch, Iran didn't suspend the program – no indeed, they had completed it.