Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Casey and distinguished members of the subcommittee,

and honored panelists and guests, my name is Kambiz

Hosseini. I’m the host and writer of the program called ‘‘Parazit’’

on the Voice of America Persian News Network.

This subcommittee has heard from distinguished policymakers

and human rights activists. I respectfully point out to the honorable

chairman of the subcommittee that I am a journalist, satirist,

comedian, a bad boyfriend, and just a plain old Iranian who wants

to help his country.

My testimony today reflects my personal perspective. It does not

represent the view of the U.S. Government. I hope it will be of

value to the subcommittee in considering the critical issues of

human rights and democratic reform in Iran.

I and a talented team of producers began our program in 2009,

with the goal of bringing a fresh and entertaining perspective on

events inside Iran to our audience. Our goal remains the same as

it was since the beginning: being the voice of voiceless youth inside

Iran, and projecting and amplifying what they are whispering on

the streets.

Despite all governmental pressure to limit basic freedom in Iran,

my generation is sending—I was born in 1975, by the way—sending

a clear message to the Islamic Republic. We want our basic

rights as human beings. We criticize the Iranian Government with

respect, and we make fun of hypocrisy of political figures in a civilized

manner. We try to be civilized with them, even though

they’re not civilized with us. We offer dialogue, and we defend

universal human rights and values for all Iranian, including those

authorities inside Iran who dislike the show because of its

anticensorship spirit.

And how we do it? We do it Persian-style, with humor—dark

humor. Dark, because nothing bright is coming out of today’s Iran,

where women are forced to obey laws that are discriminatory, children

are being executed, information is censored, prisoners don’t

have basic rights, lawyers are in jail simply because they wanted

to defend human rights, and artists and filmmakers, like Jafar

Panahi, who is an internationally acclaimed director, is prohibited

from pursuing his art for next 20 years. Imagine, 20 years. If that

happens to me, I’ll commit suicide today.

I believe that currently in Iran the human rights situation is

absurd, and that’s exactly what our program is doing, showing the

absurdity of the system to the audience. Believe me, watching irrational—

if you knew Persian and you watched the irrational and

illogical speeches made by the officials in Iran, they’re as funny as

watching ‘‘Waiting for Godot’’ live for 3 hours. You would laugh.

That’s what we are doing right now.

And it’s working. Our show is working. And we have over

428,000 fans, just on Facebook, where they leave comments proactively

and communicate with us in a manner that sometimes

make us think that they are producing this show and we are their

audience. Our broadcasts reach Persian-speaking audience in Iran

and the entire Persian-speaking world, including the large Iranian

diaspora outside Iran.

As the Iranian Presidential election of summer 2009, and their

aftermath, unfolded, our show became an important rallying point

for many Iranians, particularly young Iranians, to stay connected

and continue their quest for democratic change in Iran. We have

continued this dialogue with our audience ever since. We use all

available communications means to stay connected, and our audience

in Iran remains in touch, despite the Iranian Government’s

severe limitations on electronic communications and free access to

information.

It’s important to note that many people in Iran struggle to view

our program, as the Iranian Government has aggressively jammed

our satellite broadcasts. In fact, our program name, ‘‘Parazit,’’

means ‘‘static’’ in Persian, which is what many Iranians’ viewers

see when they try to view or listen to international satellite broadcasts

their government has jammed.

But, we will continue to reach out, you know. We’re sending the

message of hope for our audience. Our audience is why we do

‘‘Parazit.’’ I believe our program speaks to, and for, the many people

inside Iran who lack the freedom to express themselves.

We remain in constant contact with our viewers and fans. And

they help shape the direction of our show. When we announce a

guest for our program, for instance, thousands of suggestions and

questions flood in from our viewers and help to inform the questions

we ask our guest. In addition, we welcome and respond to

viewer feedback on who deserves mention for positive and negative

actions within Iran. Through this and other means, we give our audience

a chance to speak out about conditions and events in Iran

they might not otherwise have.

Perhaps someday the Iranian Government will lift the electronic

curtain it has built around its people. Unless and until that day

comes, our show and VOA Persian, in general, will work to keep

the lines of communication between the Iranian people and the

United States open.

I thank the chairman and the distinguished subcommittee for the

opportunity to offer my comments, and would be pleased to respond

to any easy question. [Laughter.]

I just want to add something really quick, that

you don’t see clear evidence of protests, on physical evidence. But,

online this movement does exist, where people can go without, you

know, getting identified, and all that.

And it’s so interesting that now, when, for instance, a football

player—a soccer player says something about government, he

becomes the icon, and he becomes the talk of the town. And people

go after him and try to support him on live show, keeping—keep

calling the sports shows, because—not because of he’s a good soccer

player, because he made that comment about government. So, it’s

just—like they said, it’s fire under ashes. And any opportunity that

that movement that has changed, shifted from, ‘‘Where is my

boat?’’ to, ‘‘Death to the dictator,’’ and broad prodemocracy movement

will explode.

I want to refer to what you mentioned earlier,

about—that the human rights issue in Iran is a moral issue for

United States, a moral obligation, moral duty. I think you should

communicate with people, via media, and translate this for them,

and try to let them know that, ‘‘Hey, this is how we think, here,

United States, and this is a moral value for us.’’

And also, don’t underestimate the power of media. I believe we

can do a lot with what we have in Persian Service, if we had just

a little bit more money. You know, we could pump it up to something

very more interesting than what we have right now. And this

is the only channel of communication that we have with Iranian

people. And supporting them with this only channel of communication,

I think, to me, we can proceed a lot with all we want to do,

as a human being, and help them.

This is the only thing I can recommend. Support media and don’t

underestimate the power of media.

Look, I basically made the show for myself. When

I was a young—younger man in Iran, I used to go through those

channels and I—you know, I was thirsty to get some sort of information.

You know, please, give me some sort of truth. Because you

can’t—you know, any normal man in the world who watches the

state media in Iran, you can say they’re lying. You—that’s—you

use your common sense. This is what we do on our show, too; we

use common sense a lot. You use your common sense, as a viewer,

you sit down and you watch the state media; you know they’re

lying. You know you can’t trust these people.

I make the show for myself, a young man who was thirsty to get

information. When I sit in front of camera, I’m like—I see myself

in my little room, in the small town in Iran. And I used to—this

is my experience—I used to surf through the channels, and I’d see

a lot of static, because of the jamming, you know. And it’s frustrating

that you see all the static. And through all the noises, you

want to hear something, you know, a sentence from a newscaster

or something. So, I thought, why not we call our self ‘‘Static’’?

That’s who we are. And we’re going to be static in Iranian government’s

face.

Yes, we have—like Rudi said, we have this Green

Movement that is alive, and we have all those people that—who

oppose the government—are with us; they agree with whatever we

say, and we all have that base of audience that we have had.

We are trying to reach out to those lower-class people, who voted

for Mr. Ahmadinejad and who are supporting the government,

despite the fact that this government is brutally violating human

rights in Iran every—everyday basis. So, what we are trying to do

is win the heart and mind of those lower-class people, who are

getting paid by government to survive, and they have no choice—

morally, sometimes they know that this is wrong, what they’re

doing. But, they’re getting paid, they have to survive. We’re trying

to reach out to them. Like those Basijis and plain-clothed people

that you see on the streets, we’re trying to communicate with them.

Like, we had a show, a couple of months ago, that we communicated

directly with Basijis, and we talked to them, and we said—

and we got some responses, too, from them.

We get e-mails from people who support Ahmadinejad and who

support Abdul Khameini. And it’s very interesting to—I can forward

some of them to you, if you’re interested to read those.

They’re very interesting to see that people are frustrated. The economy

is not that good in Iran, and people are struggling to survive.

And that’s their main—this is the main concern right now: economy.

They want to feed their family, and they can’t do it. So, those

people, they’re communicate with us. They send us e-mail, they

send us comments, and all that. And it’s heartbreaking, but those

are the people we’re aiming for: lower class, people who live in

small cities and villages, and they vote for certain candidate without

knowing who that person is.

Yes.

Yes. We, as our audience is growing, we suspect

that we’re getting some of those, you know? Because how many

people can—how do you call a show popular? How many people in

a 70 million population country can watch a show that you call

that show popular? And I think we have the base of all oppositions

on our show, but we’re getting bigger every day. The number I told

you, 428,000, a week ago—10 days ago, we had 4—we just reached

400,000; so, 28,000 in 10 days. To me, it’s skyrocketing, these num-

bers, and I’m sure that we’re tapping into the lower class, because

now they’re interested in our common sense.