

An Open Letter from America's Human Rights and Democracy Community To U.S. Political Leaders

We join this letter from profound love of our country, and from personal experience with what freedom and democracy in the United States symbolize for people around the world.

In working to strengthen democracy and human rights overseas, we have seen nations overcome monumental crises in pursuit of freedom. So often these heroic acts have been inspired by the symbol of America at its best.

For generations, the United States has stood out as a beacon for people seeking to establish or strengthen democracy in their countries, often after years of nondemocratic rule. We have inspired others to seek the pillars of a free society, including:

- Commitment to the rule of law, to constitutionalism, and to human liberties;
- Government that derives its authority from free and fair elections based on universal suffrage.

We now face a challenge greater than many of us have ever experienced, a pandemic that will destroy lives, threaten our basic institutions, and test our character. To meet this challenge, we must live up to the great heritage that has helped the United States inspire freedom-loving people around the world.

We urge our political leaders to embrace these principles:

- In this time of a global pandemic health crisis, we must find honorable compromises to strengthen our democratic institutions, starting with ensuring that the 2020 elections can take place consistent with the Constitution and in an inclusive, transparent, secure, and fair manner.
- Government “of the people, by the people, and for the people” depends upon elections that enable participation by all citizens. If we fall short of enabling full participation, we undermine the trust in government that is fundamental at all times, and essential in a time of crisis. Now more than ever we must do better.
- State and national legislators must recognize the absolutely unique circumstances that we find ourselves in today, and must help enable electoral procedures that do not require a choice between protecting health and exercising the franchise.
- Times of crisis demand government that is effective and trusted by the people. We must promote truthfulness and reasoned discourse, and combat disinformation, dishonesty, and rhetoric that undermines confidence in our democratic processes and our elections.
- To help lead the community of nations as the world recovers, the United States must continue to prioritize support for democracy and human rights, and must speak out against regimes that take advantage of the pandemic to undermine fundamental freedoms and democratic norms.

Signed,

(Affiliations are provided for identification purposes; signers participate in this letter in their individual capacities only.)

Michael Abramowitz

President, Freedom House

Paige Alexander

Former Assistant Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development

J. Brian Atwood

Former Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development;
Former President, National Democratic Institute

Susan Atwood

Former Regional Director, National Democratic Institute

Dan Baer

Former U.S. Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Frederick (Rick) Barton

Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Conflict and Stabilization Operations;
Lecturer & Co-Director, Woodrow Wilson School
Princeton University

Howard Berman

Former Member of Congress;
Former Chair, House Foreign Affairs Committee

Eric Bjornlund

President, Democracy International

Thomas Carothers

Vice President for Studies and Director
Democracy and Rule of Law Program, Carnegie
Endowment for International Peace

David Carroll

Director, Democracy Program, The Carter Center

Susan Corke

Executive Director, Trans-Atlantic Democracy
Working Group, German Marshall Fund

Larry Diamond

Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution and Freeman
Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford
University

Paul Fagan

Director of Human Rights and Democracy Programs, McCain Institute for International Leadership;
Former Africa Director, International Republican Institute

Mark Feierstein

Former Assistant Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development;
Former Senior Director, National Security Council

Steve Feldstein

Former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor;
Frank and Bethine Church Chair of Public Affairs at Boise State University

Jeff Fischer

Former International Election Supervisor – Bosnia and Herzegovina, East Timor, and Kosovo

Larry Garber

Former Mission Director West Bank/Gaza, U.S. Agency for International Development;
Former Senior Associate for Electoral Processes, National Democratic Institute

Jeffrey Gedmin

Former President, Radio Free Europe;
Editor, The American Interest

Kevin Johnson

Executive Director, Election Reformers Network

Patricia Keefer

Project 18 Youth Vote;
Former Senior Associate, National Democratic Institute

Monica Kladakis

Senior Advisor for Human Rights and Democracy, McCain Institute for International Leadership;
Project Manager, George Bush Presidential Center

Jim Kolbe

Former Member of Congress;
Former Chair, House Sub-Committee on Foreign Operations

David J. Kramer

Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor;
Former President, Freedom House

Stuart P. Krusell

Former Director of Operations for Iraq, International Republican Institute;
Senior Lecturer, MIT Sloan;

James Kunder

Former Deputy Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development

Barbara Langley

Former Country Director Romania, Bosnia, Mongolia, International Republican Institute;
Former Executive Director, Arab Women's Leadership Institute

Mark P. Lagon

Former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large responsible for Monitoring and Combating Trafficking in Persons; Chief Policy Officer, Friends of the Global Fight Against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Scott Lansell

Former Senior Director, International Foundation for Electoral Systems; Vice President for International Development, GeoPoll

Lindsay Lloyd

Bradford M. Freeman Director of the Human Freedom Initiative, George W. Bush Institute; Former Regional Director, International Republican Institute

Michael McFaul

Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia; Director, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University

Edward McMahon

Former Regional Director, National Democratic Institute; Adjunct Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Vermont

Thomas O. Melia

Former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor; Assistant Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development

Sarah E. Mendelson

Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations' Economic and Social Council; Distinguished Service Professor of Public Policy and Head of Heinz College, Carnegie Mellon University

James Michel

Former U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala; Former Counselor, U.S. Agency for International Development

Derek Mitchell

President, National Democratic Institute; Former U.S. Ambassador to Burma (Myanmar)

Desaix (Terry) Myers

Former Professor, National War College; Former Mission Director Indonesia and Russia, U.S. Agency for International Development

Kent Patton

Former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs

Mary Ann Peters

CEO, The Carter Center; Former U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh

Liza Prendergast

Senior Director for Strategy and Outreach, Democracy International

Susan Reichle

Former Counselor, U.S. Agency for International Development

Avery Davis Roberts

Associate Director, Democracy Program, The Carter Center

Nilmini Rubin

Managing Director & Co-Founder, Fix the System; Former staff member, National Security Council

Mark Schneider

Former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State
for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs;
Former Director, U.S. Peace Corps

Nancy Soderberg

Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations
for Political Affairs;
Former Deputy Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

Chris Vance

Former Chairman, Washington State Republican
Party

Christine Todd Whitman

Former Governor of New Jersey;
Former Administrator, Environmental Protection
Agency

Eric Schwartz

Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State,
Population Refugees and Migration;
Former Senior Director, National Security Council

William Sweeney

Former CEO, International Foundation for
Electoral Systems

Aaron Williams

Former Director, U.S. Peace Corps

Kenneth Wollack

Former President, National Democratic Institute