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# The One Person Both President Obama and President Rouhani Admire

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By Amb. Kenneth M. Quinn

Even though President Obama and Iranian President Rouhani are both scheduled to address the UN later this week, there are reportedly no exchanges planned between them. Not a handshake, a phone call or a meeting. But there should be! There is a unique opportunity for them to take a small but perhaps not insignificant bridge building step, one that centers on a place for which President Obama has enormous affection and which has a legacy of promoting peace through agriculture--Iowa.

While the nuclear discussions that are ongoing are no doubt filled with tension and extremely difficult issues, there is one thing that both the top American and Iranian political leaders share in common: An enormous respect for Iowa-born agricultural scientist Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, the late Nobel Peace Prize laureate and "father of the green revolution."

On March 25, when the state of Iowa unveiled Borlaug's statue in the U.S. Capitol, the entire top bipartisan leadership of the Congress was in attendance, and all spoke glowingly of Dr. Borlaug's accomplishments. Respect for Borlaug, who trained Iranian wheat scientists in the 1960s, is such that Iranian officials made inquiries with the artist in an attempt to purchase a copy of that

same Iowa statue so that it might be erected on the campus of their agricultural research institutes in Karaj.

Just imagine the powerful symbolism that would be conveyed by Borlaug's statue standing in both Washington and near Tehran. But there are more immediate and practical steps that could be taken.

Both the U.S. and Iran are facing the severe threat of wheat rust disease, against which Dr. Borlaug struggled his entire life. While there are many issues that divide us, this is one area where we could find steps to take together to defeat wheat rust and at the same time honor Dr. Borlaug.

Following the unprecedented invitation to me to speak at the August 26 Iranian celebration of the centennial observance of Dr. Borlaug's birth [it was the first time a former U.S. ambassador ever addressed a conference organized by the Iranian government], the World Food Prize has invited an Iranian expert in wheat to take part in its Borlaug Dialogue Symposium October 15-18 in Des Moines. Approval of the visa for this scientist would be that small but not insignificant next step.

In 1959, at the height of the nuclear threat during the Cold War, Soviet Premier Khrushchev came to the Garst farm in western Iowa where he saw firsthand impressive American corn production. That visit led to a three decades-long series of agricultural exchanges by a great Iowa Democrat, John Chrystal, that helped build openings and diffuse tensions between Moscow and Washington.

There is the chance for another Iowa opening now. All it takes is a phone call about the one person, maybe the only person, they both admire.

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