

Ukrainians in Pioneer Valley decry inaction on military aid



Angelica Mosijchuk of West Springfield seals boxes for shipment to the people of Ukraine on March 17, 2022, at the Full Gospel Church in Westfield. (Don Treger / The Republican)

By Dave Canton

At the Bethesda Ukrainian Pentecostal Church in West Springfield, pastor Peter Mosijchuk and his parishioners pack boxes with necessities for Ukrainians.

They ship off care packages from people who care. Mosijchuk and others in the Pioneer Valley with ties to Ukraine are disappointed that representatives in Congress are failing to support Ukraine.

“It is disappointing how many people are going to die. The elderly and children. They had a chance to do something, and they didn’t want to,” Mosijchuk said. “The

American government will lose another war just because they don't have enough ammunition. It's horrible."

Ukrainian forces are scrambling to hold on to gains made last summer and fall in the country's eastern

provinces in their fight against the 2-year-old Russian invasion.

But those gains have been hampered and diminished by the lack of armaments needed to continue the fight. Ukraine this weekend gave up ground to Russian soldiers when they pulled out of Avdiivka, a city in the eastern Donetsk region.

This weekend, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said at the Munich Security Conference that delays in the flow of arms from friendly countries put his country at risk due to a lack of necessary weaponry. He said an "artificial deficit" of arms gives Russian army forces breathing space to consolidate their forces and distribute armaments to the front lines. He said Ukraine needs much more artillery and long-range weapons to continue to fight.

Zelenskyy's plea for a continuous flow of arms does not surprise Anna Nagurney. Her parents fled Ukraine during World War II and she returns often as the co-chair of the Board of Directors for the Kyiv School of Economics. In her economics classes at the Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Nagurney often deals with logistics.

"I teach a course on transportation logistics and a famous quote I use is, 'Armchair generals talk strategy, real generals talk logistics,'" she said.

"It's going to take a while for those arms to get there when they do release them. And I am very concerned about air defenses," Nagurney said. "You need more Patriot missiles and so on because it was shown last week when western Ukraine got hit."

"Zelenskyy said they had to give up a major city in the east because they didn't have the firepower to hold off the Russians," she said. "We don't have the air protection. It is extremely problematic."

Nagurney is doubly concerned because a woman with whom she corresponds in western Ukraine dropped out of touch after a missile attack.

"Western Ukraine got hit and I couldn't get ahold of one of my correspondents for over 24 hours. It was pretty close to her home," she said. "The anxiety I felt."

Bogdan Prokopovych also teaches at the Isenberg school at UMass, but his parents live in Eastern Ukraine. While not directly in the fighting area, they are too close for his comfort.

“I am very disappointed with the political establishment that Ukraine needs so much ammunition. We are always three steps behind,” he said. “We had asked for artillery shells and tanks, and eventually they arrived, but they arrived late.”

“There has always been a fear of escalation — and it just happened,” Prokopovych said.

Even as supporters of Ukrainian independence call for more aid to the fight in Eastern Europe, House Republicans continue to stall a multi-billion-dollar package of military aid to Ukraine and Israel at the behest of former President Donald J. Trump.

House Speaker Mike Johnson told fellow Republicans in a meeting Saturday he will not be rushed into passing the \$95.3 billion package.

“The Republican-led House will not be jammed or forced into passing a foreign aid bill,” Johnson said at a press conference.

The aid package originated in the Senate and was passed overwhelmingly in a bipartisan vote. But that does not play into the House plans for the bill. Propokovych said he is pessimistic about what will happen in Washington.

“We are already seeing evidence of brutalities and a complete disregard for human rights by the Russians,” he said.

“Whether or not it will move the needle in the United States I am very doubtful,” Propokovych said. “When the war started a lot of us had hopes that Russian society would (intervene) because there would be so many victims. But given the number of victims at this point, given what everybody knows about the fighting, there is still nothing coming from Russia. No protests.”

Vladimir Putin’s rule over Russia is perhaps the cause of the Russian people’s lack of opposition to the war, Propokovych said. When the war started in 2022, there were some protests, but they were met with brutality by Putin’s forces.

Protests over the death of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who was jailed in a penal colony in the Arctic region, brought additional arrests, according to news reports.

“I feel very badly for the loss of life (of) probably the only opposition leader that Russia seemed to have who had some real prominence. (But like his death) unless we give Ukraine the military aid it, too, will be drowned out in the next news cycle,” Propokovych said.

Navalny died Friday week while serving a 19-year sentence in a Russian work camp. Authorities said he went for a walk and on return collapsed and died. He was 47 years old.

In a 2022 documentary, “Navalny,” he left a video statement to the Russian people in the event of his death. In it, he said, “You are not allowed to give up.”

He said his death would have meaning. “If they decide to kill me then we are incredibly strong. The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for the good people to do nothing. So, don’t be inactive,” Navalny said. “You are not allowed to give up. We need to utilize this power to not give up, to remember we are a huge power that is being oppressed by these bad dudes.”

At the same Munich Conference Zelenskyy attended, Navalny’s wife, Yulia Navalnaya, told assembled leaders: “I want Putin, his entourage, Putin’s friends and his government to know they will be held responsible for what they have done to our country, my family and my husband. That day will come very soon.”

Nagurney, the UMass professor, said Navalny may have had an impact on the war in Ukraine had he lived. His father was Ukrainian and his mother was Russian. As a child, he spent time in Ukraine with his grandparents and his death is a loss to Ukrainians due to his opposition to Putin, she said.

“Maybe this will result in an uprising. It seems that in other countries there is more action,” she said. “A greater number of demonstrations. Even in Hungary against (President Viktor) Orban. Some people have reached their limits in terms of atrocities and murders and killing, complete inhumane treatment of fellow citizens.”