H.R.5408 – the Ukraine Religious Freedom Support Act

On Thursday December 12, Congressman Joe Wilson (R-SC), ranking member on the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission), and Congressional International Religious Freedom (IRF) Caucus member, Congressman Emanuel Cleaver, II (D-MO), introduced H.R.5408 – the Ukraine Religious Freedom Support Act – in the House of Representatives. This bipartisan legislation, which opposes violations of religious freedom in Ukraine by Russia and armed groups commanded by Russia on Ukrainian territory, is now referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on the Judiciary. U.S. Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman, Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS), plans to introduce companion legislation in the U.S. Senate.

This legislation directly follows on the first U.S visit of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Epifaniy, Primate of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. During His Beatitude’s meetings with U.S. legislators in October, he expressed hope that Washington would support religious freedom, underscoring the appalling situation with the freedom of religion in the occupied territories of Donbass and illegally annexed Crimea. Executive officers of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA) accompanied His Beatitude during these meetings, carrying with them the belief of Ukrainians in America that Kremlin officials are responsible for this religious persecution, and U.S. legislation would help bring them to justice.

“This bipartisan legislation, which targets religious freedom violations by Russia and their proxies, is one additional measure to pressure the Kremlin to stop its aggression against Ukraine,” underscored UCCA’s President Andriy Futey.


On December 17th, the US Senate overwhelmingly approved fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) by a vote of 82-8, just days after it was approved in the House of Representatives, by a vote of 377-48. The bill now goes to the White House, where President Trump is expected to sign it into law.

The 2020 defense policy bill, which authorizes a total of $738 billion in U.S. defense spending, further reauthorizes $300 million of funding for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, and will allow for the sale of coastal defense and anti-ship weapons as part of future security assistance packages to that country. The 2020 bill also contains provisions to impose sanctions on companies constructing Russia’s Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline linking Russia and Germany via the Baltic Sea.

“This additional military assistance is vital, as Ukraine continues to stand on the front lines and fight for democracy”, stated UCCA’s President Andriy Futey. “I am thankful for our community’s continued activism in advocating this issue, and pleased that Congress continues its strong, bipartisan support of Ukraine,” he continued.
UABA Joins UCCA

The Executive Board of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA), the representative assembly of nearly 30 regional and national associations of Ukrainian Americans representing the interests of nearly 2 million Americans of Ukrainian descent, has announced that the Ukrainian American Bar Association (UABA) has been accepted as the newest member organization of UCCA’s National Council.

Assembling in New York City on December 7, UCCA National Council delegates reviewed a year’s worth of UCCA activities at a meeting presided over by National Council Chair and Ukrainian National Association (UNA) President, Stefan Kaczaraj. The highpoint of the afternoon, however, was the report of UCCA’s Membership Committee, which is authorized and required to review each applicant for membership. On the recommendation of the committee’s chair, Marie Duplak, UCCA’s National Council, the highest ruling body between UCCA’s quadrennial conventions, unanimously voted to admit UABA as its newest member organization.

Founded in 1977, the Ukrainian American Bar Association (UABA) is a national bar association whose members are U.S. judges, attorneys and law students of Ukrainian descent and those American attorneys with an interest in Ukrainian matters. Over 4 decades, UABA members have developed working relationships with Ukrainian judges, jurists and government officials, led pro bono initiatives on behalf of Ukrainian American causes, established a legal scholarship fund, provided assistance to Ukrainian Embassy and Consular offices in the United States, and held multi-day Conferences at the United States Capitol attended by Members of Congress, United States Diplomats, Judges, US State Department and foreign policy experts and representatives from the Embassy of Ukraine in Washington and guests from Ukraine, on issues relevant to Ukraine’s security from foreign aggression and continued development as a sovereign democracy governed by the Rule of Law.

“We have been fortunate that in the past few years several prominent national organizations have returned to UCCA, giving our community a better opportunity to speak with one voice to foster a greater understanding of and stronger advocacy for Ukraine,” stated UCCA President Andriy Futey. “I am delighted to welcome UABA as our newest member organization, and look forward to their active involvement and to the many contributions they will make. I would also like to thank UCCA’s Membership Committee and the leadership of UABA in getting us to this historic vote. It is a prime example of how, in working together, we can wield much more influence on the political process in the United States, and have a greater ability to assist our vibrant community and our brethren in Ukraine,” continued Futey.

Bohdan Shandor, newly elected President of the UABA, commented on the new relationship with UCCA by saying, “The UABA is both excited and enthusiastic at becoming a member and we look forward to working closely with UCCA, an organization with a stellar history that over the years has worked tirelessly for the Ukrainian American community and the freedom loving people of Ukraine.”

2020 Anniversaries

As we embark on our 80th anniversary year, UCCA would like to inform our local UCCA branches, UCCA membership and the greater Ukrainian American community about several important anniversaries to mark in 2020, including:

- **March 5** – 70th anniversary of the death of General Roman Shukhevych;
- **May 14** – 100th anniversary of the birth of Slava Stetsko;
- **May 24** – 80th anniversary of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America;
- **July 16** – 30th anniversary of Ukraine’s Declaration of Sovereignty;
- **July 29** – 155th anniversary of the birth of the Venerable Metropolitan Archbishop, Andrei Sheptytsky;
- **September 4** – 35th anniversary of the death of Vasyl Stus;
- **October 2-18** – 30th anniversary of the Ukrainian Student revolution – Revolution on Granite;
- **2020** – 180th anniversary of the first publication of Taras Shevchenko’s “Kobzar.”

The UCCA urges our community to appropriately mark these important historical dates. UCCA will send out official statements in a timely manner that will be posted on social media for mass distribution.

UCCA Issues Year End Appeal

For nearly 80 years, with your help, UCCA has worked for the benefit of not only the Ukrainian American community, but also that of an independent Ukraine. Over the past 5 years, it has become clear that the work of Ukrainians in America and our many organizations is needed more today by our family and friends in Ukraine than in recent memory. Only with your continued support, can UCCA continue to pursue our longstanding mission of increasing the importance and role of the Ukrainian American community and presenting our community's desire to aid the people of Ukraine.

Will you renew your support by supporting UCCA with a generous gift today?

You can support Ukrainian American advocacy online: bit.ly/2019UCCA