

On Senate Floor, Portman Discusses Meeting with Newly-Elected Ukraine President Zelensky

WASHINGTON, DC – Today on the Senate floor, U.S. Senator Rob Portman (R-OH), the co-founder and co-chairman of the Senate Ukraine Caucus, discussed his recent visit to Ukraine to meet with newly-elected Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky and Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Ruslan Khomchak. Portman pledged continued support from the U.S. Senate for Ukraine's self-determination, democracy, and freedom from Russian aggression while encouraging them to continue the anti-corruption efforts and structural reforms of the economy and the military.

A transcript of his remarks can be found below and a video can be found [here](#):

"I would like to spend a few minutes talking about an important trip I took last week. After honoring our fallen soldiers here at home in Central Ohio, I traveled to Ukraine, where I had a meeting scheduled with Ukraine's new President, Zelensky. On my way there, I stopped in London for trade meetings and briefings by the Ambassador and our excellent U.S. embassy personnel there.

"I was very eager to meet President Zelensky. First of all, along with colleagues on both sides of the aisle, I have been a longtime supporter of Ukraine's quest for self-determination, democracy, and freedom from Russian aggression. As co-chair and co-founder of the Senate Ukraine Caucus, along with my colleague, Dick Durbin from Illinois, I have been proud to take the lead since the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 in giving Ukrainians the lethal and non-lethal aid they need to defend themselves from aggression in Crimea and the Donbas region.

“Second, I share the enthusiasm for Ukraine that is held by so many of my constituents, friends of mine, particularly in Cleveland and that area, who are proud members of the Ukrainian diaspora.

“Third, I was very impressed with President Zelensky's election victory, in part because he received a remarkable 73 percent of the vote. I also thought that his focus on reform and change was important for the country. I wanted to meet him and learn more about how and why his appeals for unity largely succeeded.

“Fourth, I wanted to hear more about his plans to fight the aggression from Russia on his eastern border, fight corruption at home, and put in place the reforms that will make his country stronger.

“Finally, I wanted to tell him we are with him. The United States stands by Ukraine. And our ties between our two countries can even deepen further. We want to help Ukraine succeed in this historic moment.

“I can report to my colleagues that I come away from the meeting with President Zelensky impressed. I was encouraged. We talked for about an hour and covered a broad range of topics. He is smart, engaging, and determined.

“We had a good discussion about Russian aggression in Crimea and in the Donbas region. President Zelensky has been out to the contact line, which is where the fighting is occurring. I was there last year. There is a real war going on – 13,000 people have been killed on the eastern border of Ukraine on that contact line. He spoke frankly about the bravery of his troops but also about their needs, in terms of weapons systems and basic conditions. We talked about Russian propaganda along the eastern border and efforts to jam Ukrainian TV signals to sow the seeds for dissension for the people of the Donbas region. We talked about some ideas that would help

counter that propaganda, the jamming, and the disinformation, and I have already been in touch with the State Department about those ideas.

“We also talked about the 24 Ukrainian sailors captured by the Russians last November 25th in the Kerch Strait in the Azov Sea. At that time, President Trump rightly refused to meet with President Putin at the G20 summit in Argentina until those sailors were freed. President Zelensky and I talked about how to keep the pressure on Moscow to do the right thing. I gave President Zelensky my commitment to do everything in our power here in the United States Senate to keep these 24 sailors front and center until the crisis is resolved. Recently, the United Nations issued a statement about these sailors, saying that they should be sent back to Ukraine, that their taking was wrong.

“I told President Zelensky that he is now the face of reform in Ukraine and indeed for those of us watching around the world. He acknowledged that with a smile and said, ‘I know.’ He said that his commitment to reform is real, but he also had no illusions about how hard reform will be, and I am very hopeful he will have the continued courage to see it through, whether we are talking about fighting corruption, more transparency in government or civilian control of the military. He understands it is the only path forward and frankly a linchpin of the U.S. partnership with Ukraine, and as a matter of law, a condition of our future defense assistance.

“Finally, we talked about the importance of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States, about two million people strong, thousands of whom live in Ohio, my constituents, about how they are putting great hopes in his leadership and are willing to do all they can to help.

“As I said, it was a very productive meeting, and I was grateful for his time. Of all of the messages of that discussion, the one that was most important to me, was when I asked him how he could win with 73 percent of the vote. He said, it wasn’t about me, it was about change and reform and betterment for the people of Ukraine. It was a modest and appropriate response.

“The messages of our discussion were reinforced by my meeting afterward with Lt General Ruslan Khomchak -- he’s the new chief of the general staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. A man with great experience and knowledge. He was confident and well-informed, and we had an open and detailed talk about how the United States can be helpful. I have already begun to talk to my colleagues on the Armed Services Committee and in the Trump Administration about those specifics and some of the requests that he had.

“So, my colleagues, I return from this brief trip to Ukraine hopeful. Hopeful that Ukraine is ready to write the next chapter of its long history, and it will be a chapter of freedom with a government and society that benefits all its citizens. And the United States of America must continue to be a good friend and ally in that quest. I am certainly determined to do my part to make it so.”