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Memo

To: Interested Parties

From: Gary Marx, President, Defenders of Faith and Religious Freedom in Ukraine

Date: April 23, 2022

RE: Analysis: Evangelicals Played Key Role in Speaker's Shift on Ukraine Aid

Much has been written in recent days about House Speaker Mike Johnson's extraordinary shift in posture on Ukraine funding. As a rank-and-file member, Johnson voted against Ukraine funding; on Saturday, he led a bipartisan effort to pass a \$61 billion aid package for Ukraine.

Johnson's change of heart was no doubt influenced by a spate of national security and intelligence briefings, and – as the Speaker himself acknowledged – the implications that escalating conflict in Eastern Europe could have on his own family, as his son was recently accepted into the Naval Academy.

But perhaps the greatest motivating factor behind Speaker Johnson's evolution on Ukraine funding has been intensifying pressure from Christian Evangelicals – the most reliable and, arguably, the most important bloc of voters in the Trump coalition. Of the 74.2 million votes Trump received in 2020, 45.4% (33.7 million) were white Evangelical Christians, according to [exit polls](#).

"Christians advocating for religious freedom in Ukraine may have played [a key role](#) ahead of an upcoming vote on foreign aid in Congress," reported Christian Broadcasting Network's (CBN) John Jessup on Friday.

Jessup, CBN's lead anchor from Washington, separately reported that the Speaker shifted his position on Ukraine funding after intense [appeals from Christian Evangelicals](#).

"A last-minute" push from "[a spectrum of religious groups](#)" preceded the House vote, report Adelle Banks and Jack Jenkins, writing for Religion News Service (RNS). Former Christian Coalition head Ralph Reed, who now leads the Faith & Freedom Coalition, "suggested that Johnson, despite threats from some GOP members to challenge his speakership, will ultimately be celebrated by conservative Christians if the [Ukraine and Israel funding] bills are passed."

"[More than a dozen Christian leaders](#)...sent a letter to U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson April 17 urging Congress to protect religious liberty in Eastern Europe by supporting Ukraine," reported the *Baptist Standard*. "Previously, the Ukraine Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches made a similar appeal to Johnson in a [March 26 letter](#), and a group of Southern Baptists sent an [April 8 letter](#) to Johnson urging support for Ukraine."

In recent months, virtually every major Christian news publication has ramped up coverage of the atrocities being committed against Ukraine's Christians by occupying Russian troops. Harrowing stories of Christians being kidnapped, tortured, and killed have become commonplace in these news outlets, especially in Baptist

publications (the nation's largest Protestant denomination), and this coverage has been amplified extensively via social media channels.

- Baptist Press
 - [‘About 400’ Baptist churches lost in Russia’s war on Ukraine](#)
 - [Ukrainian Baptist leaders tortured by Russia find voice in U.S. citizen](#)
 - [Religious persecution grows in Russia’s war on Ukraine, U.S. hearing says](#)
- Baptist Standard
 - [Stories recorded of Ukrainian Christians tortured by Russia](#)
 - [Russian forces occupy seventh Baptist church in Ukraine](#)
 - [Ukrainian Baptist leader says spread of the gospel at stake](#)
- Christian Post
 - [Ukrainian Evangelical Christians facing torture, destruction of churches in Russian-occupied areas](#)
 - [Ukraine Evangelical leader tells US lawmakers Russia is targeting Ukrainian Christians](#)
 - [Russia’s religious persecution campaign in Ukraine backed by Orthodox Church, David Curry warns](#)
- Christianity Today
 - [Baptists Call on House Speaker Mike Johnson to Stand with Ukraine](#)
 - [‘Continue to Remember’ the Suffering in Ukraine](#)
- CBN
 - [Evangelicals Who Support Ukraine Find Friend in Speaker Mike Johnson: ‘A Brother in Christ’](#)
 - [As Russia Tortures Evangelicals Christians, US Baptists Urge House Speaker Johnson to Take Action](#)
 - [Prominent Christian Pastor Narrowly Escapes Russia, Hunted for Opposing War in Ukraine](#)
 - [Putin’s Next Target: Moldova’s Christians](#)
 - [Plight of Ukrainian Christians in Occupied Russia Territories](#)

The more U.S. Evangelicals hear the stories of persecuted Ukrainian Evangelicals, the more motivated they are to intercede politically on their behalf.

Polling conducted last fall by Republican firm Public Opinion Strategies found that when Republicans are told about Russia’s targeting of Christians, they are much more likely to support congressional authorization of funding. Importantly, the political impact of this information is considerably greater among Evangelical Christians than it is among secular Republican primary voters:

According to American Christian leaders, evangelical Christians are being persecuted and tortured by Russian soldiers in the areas of Ukraine that are occupied by Russia. Christians report torture with electrical shocks and being beaten with a baseball bat. Some bodies are too disfigured by torture to be easily identified.

- All GOP Primary Voters - 63%
- **Evangelical Christians - 70%**

Russians associate Evangelical Christians with America and single them out for abuse and torture.

- All GOP Primary Voters - 57%
- **Evangelical Christians - 65%**

Although Protestant Christians make up less than 4% of Ukraine’s population, they make up one-third of the reported incidents of persecution, torture, and abuse at the hands of Russian soldiers in occupied areas of Ukraine.

- All GOP Primary Voters - 58%
- **Evangelical Christians - 65%**

The persecution of Christians in Ukraine, and the specter of broader religious oppression across Eastern Europe galvanized Evangelicals into action. Their collective voice helped to persuade Speaker Mike Johnson to change course and advance Ukraine funding in the U.S. House.