

LOCAL

Rally in support of Ukraine gathers at the Peace Arch

Protests against Russia, praise for Ukraine and calls for action

By KAI UYEHARA
Staff Reporter

BLAINE — Charles Sullivan’s red-and-black Ukrainian flag, a rendition of the besieged country’s traditional national flag symbolizing resistance, waved against the backdrop of the Peace Arch amid a crowd of demonstrators Sunday as vehicles honked in support.

The assembly of about 50 people held signs in English and Ukrainian with phrases like “Glory to Ukraine,” “Stop bombing my family,” and “Russian warship, f--- off.”

The crowd gathered in a circle at the foot of the Peace Arch on the U.S. — Canada border discussed heroism of the Ukrainian military and civilians.

Demonstrators also expressed frustration that American-imposed sanctions against Russia were likely only a long-term

solution to an immediate conflict.

The United States is home to about 1 million people of Ukrainian descent, with about 21,000 living in Seattle. The war has weighed heavily on them as they watch families and friends endure hardships in their motherland.

Sullivan, a former Peace Corps volunteer in Ukraine and retired Canadian Border Patrol officer, organized the event after a feeling of helplessness washed over him two nights earlier. He and his Ukrainian wife have

test before, knew he had to do something. He picked up the red-and-black resistance flag for \$1 during three years in the Peace Corps in Ukraine. Until Sunday, it sat gathering dust at his home in Blaine.

“I actually took it out and shook it today,” Sullivan said. “I’d never thought that I would be hoisting that flag. The least I can do is go out there and show the flag.”

Sullivan said he loves the Ukrainian people and wants to show them the same support he experienced when he lived there during the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

“Ukrainians came up to me for days afterward asking how my family was,” Sullivan said.

Sullivan’s in-laws live 20 miles from the conflict in western Ukraine, he said. They told him they have heard repeated artillery fire. A cousin-in-law is working

in a Kyiv emergency room.

Sullivan wanted the crowd, and those passing by, to feel angry about the war.

Many in attendance felt frustrated at the United State’s response to the invasion. Some demonstrators said that while sanctions may help long term, and they are grateful for the efforts, they are not enough.

For some families of those in attendance at the rally, tangible aid cannot come soon enough.

Liliya Zourkos, a Ukrainian-American mother of four, said she has family near the military zones in Kyiv. Some of her relatives have been able to evacuate to smaller villages farther from the conflict, she said, but are still trapped in Ukraine. Right now, they are waiting out the conflict in cold basement bunkers.

Marina Baydak, another Ukrainian American in attendance, said her family lives on the border between Ukraine and Russia, and their hometown is surrounded by the Russian military. She said her



Ukrainian-American Vitaliy Baydak stands outside Peace Arch State Park in Blaine to support his family and friends in his home country. (Hailey Hoffman/Cascadia Daily News)

family sees helicopters and aircraft overhead. Baydak wants NATO forces to give Ukrainians air support.

The sanctions “are going to work, but it’s too late,” said her husband, Vitaliy Baydak. “We need ammunition, we need airplanes to stop their planes from bombing our cities.”

While discussion at the rally focused on the needs of Ukrainians, attendees also spoke proudly of their compatriots. The demonstrators said they are confident those in Ukraine would survive the ordeal.

“I want to tell Ukrainian people we love them, we support them and don’t surrender,” said Walter Pavlyuk, who also has family bunkering on the Ukrainian-Russian border. “Kill the Russians!”

Pavlyuk, like many oth-

er Ukrainian-Americans, has tried unsuccessfully to send money to his family in Ukraine.

“We want to create some website where people can donate and we can send it to them,” Pavlyuk said.

Sullivan urged supporters to donate to those caught in the conflict in whatever way they can. The effort does not stop at a demonstration, he said. Sullivan and his family have sent clothing to Ukrainian orphanages and offered an apartment they own there to family members fleeing danger.

“I just want people to be aware that there are things that they can do,” Sullivan said. “They can put pressure on our government, on our elected officials to go beyond sanctions.”



Ukrainian-American children stand on the Peace Arch with signs of support for Ukraine during a rally on Feb. 27. (Hailey Hoffman/Cascadia Daily News)

LOCAL

Invasion weighs on Ukrainians in Whatcom County

Some feel helpless, some want the US to do more

By KAI UYEHARA
Staff Reporter

Ukrainian immigrant Lyubov Farmahey has had to turn off the TV news this week.

If she watches too long, she said Friday, the Bellingham mother of five struggles to sleep. When she does finally fall asleep, she has nightmares about her homeland under siege from neighboring Russia.

Farmahey, 31, is one of many Whatcom County residents with relatives living in Ukraine, which is facing perhaps the biggest aggression in Europe since the end of World War II.

“It’s very scary for me for them to live there,” said Farmahey, who has been in Bellingham for 16 years.

As Russian troops entered parts of the capital Kyiv on Friday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy beckoned his fellow

countrymen to stay and fight.

“You cannot give up the capital,” he said in a video message. “We must survive this night.”

Tensions were high for Ukrainian Americans in Whatcom County who said Friday all they can do is pray and watch from a distance.

“God’s probably the only one that can figure it out and stop it,” said Nazar Gamdysey of the Ukrainian Evangelical Church that is temporarily located in Ferndale.

Farmahey also expressed a feeling of helplessness as Russian armored vehicles rolled through parts of Ukraine making it difficult for donations and supplies to reach her compatriots.

“So for us, to help them right now is just prayer,” Farmahey said. “Nothing will help, no donations, nothing because everything

is closed.”

Gamdysey, who has uncles living in Russia and Ukraine, said the conflict takes a toll on Ukrainians and Russians alike in Whatcom County. At his church, Ukrainian and Russian Americans congregate together as brothers and sisters, he added.

Gamdysey, 41, said the church leadership does not want to take sides but instead come together as a community to pray for relatives in Ukraine.

He said having uncles living in warring countries makes the conflict feel like families fighting.

“You don’t know what to say,” said Gamdysey, who lives in Blaine. “You just want it to stop.”

Farmahey has shielded her youngest three children from the news, worried they might suffer from nightmares like she has been experiencing. But her teenage

boys are aware of the invasion and feel the pain as much as their mother.

“My son told me yesterday, ‘We are so lucky that we moved here,’ because my four brothers would be in the war right now,” Farmahey said. “Maybe my dad would be in the war too.”

The Slavic community is worried about speaking publicly because of possible repercussions for relatives living in Ukraine.

One immigrant who has lived in the United States for almost three decades asked that his last name not be used because of concern for family in eastern Ukraine. But Jacob, 54, of Custer, wanted the world to know how much pain his fellow immigrants feel.

“It’s hard to see that the rest of the world is just watching,” Jacob said. “Sanctions don’t stop the rockets that are falling on

Ukrainian cities.”

Liliya Kovalenko, president of the Ukrainian Association of Washington State, started fundraising campaigns as soon as Russian troops launched an offensive Thursday.

She and her husband Maksym Kovalenko want to see more done by the international community.

“We need NATO troops to help us because while sanctions are a long-term solution, we need help right now,” Liliya Kovalenko said.

She and her husband have called for sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin and “every oligarch and propagandist” in the country as well as the Russian central bank.

They want to see a major escalation with NATO air support.

“Ukrainians are doing what they can, and they’re fighting back, but right now, we have to support them, we have to give them

more,” Maksym Kovalenko said.

Liliya Kovalenko worries that the conflict will reach her parents’ home in western Ukraine near the Polish border.

“At first, I thought that maybe that’s the safest place in Ukraine to live, but right now, there is no such thing as a safe place in the country at all,” she said.

Maksym Kovalenko expressed shock that Putin sent troops into his homeland even though Russia invaded and eventually annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014.

“I believed that it was saber threatening until the last moment, I honestly believed that,” he said. “I believed that Putin was coward enough not to do a full invasion. I was wrong.”

Donations can be made at the Ukrainian Association of Washington State’s website and on its Facebook page.