

## **SCR 23**

### **Creates a ceremonial relationship between the State of Oregon and Cherkasy Oblast, Ukraine**

#### Personal Testimony

Chair Manning, Vice-Chair Thatcher, Senator Woods, Senator Brock Smith, Senator Meek,

My name is Britt Conroy, and I serve as the Director of Public Policy at Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. My EMO colleague, Edward Buck-Shannon, will provide our organization's statement in support of SCR 23.

I am here before you today voicing my personal support for SCR 23.

As Oregonians, we are fortunate to already have a special relationship with Ukraine.

First, Yulia and DAWN have established strong ties to Cherkasy Oblast, bringing Oregon goodwill, expertise, medical supplies and more to those who I hope will soon be our sister state partners. DAWN's work, and the values so evident in their work, deserve our admiration and support at every turn.

Second, Corvallis, through its decades-long partnership with Uzhhorod in far western Ukraine near the Hungarian border, is one of roughly 22 communities in the U.S. with a sister city in Ukraine.

Uzhhorod is a beautiful city, set on a tree-lined river that meanders through the town, a community of generous, thriving, welcoming residents. Over the years, scores of delegations have formed robust bonds traveling to each other's cities, bringing knowledge, insight, business connections and more.

Way back in 1995, I was fortunate to be one of ten youth who traveled from Corvallis to Uzhhorod to carry out volunteer projects. What a thrill to be in the midst of the creation of a new democracy, of a people emerging from under the thumb of decades of occupation and dictatorship. Just that summer, President Kuchma had signed legislation to create the country's constitution, which wouldn't be finalized for another year.

Our ten host siblings then returned to Corvallis to volunteer.

My host brother has been on my mind this week and is the reason I am here today. A goofy, skinny, extremely bright teenager, he grew up to become a successful IT professional and a father. In the first hours of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in the early morning Ukraine time, my host brother and I exchanged a flurry of messages. As bombs fell near his family's home in Kyiv, he wrote he would spirit his family out of the country as soon as the bombing ended that morning. He was convinced his mother, however, would never leave, bearing in her old age the savagery that was to come.

I heard from my host brother just a couple months ago. Pictured in combat fatigues, he had voluntarily left his children, his wife, his work to defend everything he holds dear. He was on his way to the front line. I have not heard from him since.

The establishment of a sister state relationship under SCR 23 is a point of deep pride for me as an Oregonian, and as an American.

Thank you for your support of this bill.

Britt Conroy

Portland, Oregon