

WOMEN LEADING THE WAY: THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT IN BELARUS

HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CYBER OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

March 17, 2021

Serial No. 117-9

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



Available: <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/>, <http://docs.house.gov>,
or <http://www.govinfo.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

43-701PDF

WASHINGTON : 2021

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York, *Chairman*

BRAD SHERMAN, California	MICHAEL T. McCAUL, Texas, <i>Ranking Member</i>
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey	CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia	STEVE CHABOT, Ohio
THEODORE E. DEUTCH, Florida	SCOTT PERRY, Pennsylvania
KAREN BASS, California	DARRELL ISSA, California
WILLIAM R. KEATING, Massachusetts	ADAM KINZINGER, Illinois
DAVID CICILLINE, Rhode Island	LEE ZELDIN, New York
AMI BERA, California	ANN WAGNER, Missouri
JOAQUIN CASTRO, Texas	BRIAN MAST, Florida
DINA TITUS, Nevada	BRIAN FITZPATRICK, Pennsylvania
TED LIEU, California	KEN BUCK, Colorado
SUSAN WILD, Pennsylvania	TIM BURCHETT, Tennessee
DEAN PHILLIPS, Minnesota	MARK GREEN, Tennessee
ILHAN OMAR, Minnesota	ANDY BARR, Kentucky
COLIN ALLRED, Texas	GREG STEUBE, Florida
ANDY LEVIN, Michigan	DAN MEUSER, Pennsylvania
ABIGAIL SPANBERGER, Virginia	AUGUST PFLUGER, Texas
CHRISSY HOULAHAN, Pennsylvania	PETER MEIJER, Michigan
TOM MALINOWSKI, New Jersey	NICOLE MALLIOTAKIS, New York
ANDY KIM, New Jersey	RONNY JACKSON, Texas
SARA JACOBS, California	YOUNG KIM, California
KATHY MANNING, North Carolina	MARIA ELVIRA SALAZAR, Florida
JIM COSTA, California	JOE WILSON, South Carolina
JUAN VARGAS, California	RON WRIGHT, Texas
VICENTE GONZALEZ, Texas	
BRAD SCHNEIDER, Illinois	

JASON STEINBAUM, *Staff Director*

BRENDAN SHIELDS, *Republican Staff Director*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CYBER

WILLIAM R. KEATING, Massachusetts, *Chairman*

SUSAN WILD, Pennsylvania	BRIAN FITZPATRICK, Pennsylvania, <i>Ranking Member</i>
ABIGAIL SPANBERGER, Virginia	ANN WAGNER, Missouri
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey	ADAM KINZINGER, Illinois
THEODORE DEUTCH, Florida	BRIAN MAST, Florida
DAVID CICILLINE, Rhode Island	DAN MEUSER, Pennsylvania
DINA TITUS, Nevada	AUGUST PFLUGER, Texas
DEAN PHILLIPS, Minnesota	NICOLE MALLIOTAKIS, New York
JIM COSTA, California	PETER MEIJER, Michigan
VICENTE GONZALEZ, Texas	
BRAD SCHNEIDER, Illinois	

LEAH NODVIN, *Staff Director*

CONTENTS

	Page
PHOTOS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD	
Photos submitted for the record from Mr. Smith	7
WITNESSES	
Tsikhanouskaya, Sviatiana, Belarusian Human Rights Activist and Politician	23
INFORMATION REFERRED	
Information referred to from Mr. Fitzpatrick	33
APPENDIX	
Hearing Notice	47
Hearing Minutes	48
Hearing Attendance	49
RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD	
Responses to questions submitted for the record	50

WOMEN LEADING THE WAY: THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT IN BELARUS

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, ENERGY, THE
ENVIRONMENT AND CYBER,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC,

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:32 a.m., via Webex, Hon. William R. Keating (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. KEATING [presiding]. The House Foreign Affairs subcommittee will come to order.

And without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any point. And all members will have 5 days to submit , extraneous material, and questions for the record, subject to the length limitations in the rules. To insert something into the record, please have your staff email to the previously mentioned address or contact full committee staff.

Please keep your video function on at all times, even when you are not recognized by the chair. Members are responsible for muting and unmuting themselves. Please remember to mute yourself after you finish speaking.

Consistent with House Resolution 965 and the accompanying regulations, staff will only mute members and witnesses, as appropriate, when they are not under recognition, to eliminate background noise.

I see that we have a quorum present. I will now recognize myself for an opening statement.

Pursuant to notice, we are holding a hearing today entitled “Women Leading the Way: The Democratic Movement in Belarus”.

I will begin my statement. In the days leading up to August 2020 and the Presidential election that day in Belarus, one after another, the Presidential candidates who opposed Alexander Lukashenko were jailed or forced out of the country. The election then took place without international observers under the control of State-owned media and in an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

On the actual election day, Sviatiana Tsikhanouskaya stepped in for her husband, Siarhei Tikhanouski, a typical activist and blogger who was jailed just a few weeks before. During the election process, independent sources found that Sviatiana Tsikhanouskaya received more votes than the incumbent Lukashenko, and when the election results came in, it was clear to Belarusians and the international community at large that the election had taken place in fraudulent conditions and that Lukashenko could not claim victory. Yet,

Lukashenko claimed himself to be President, underestimating the will of the Belarusian people and the strength of Sviatiana Tsikhanouskaya.

After 26 years of dictatorial rule, the Belarusian people had had enough. They gathered in the streets en masse, peacefully demonstrated against the Lukashenko regime and for their right to a new, free, and fair election. They organized themselves through new means of technology, sharing information over applications like Telegram.

And what is so striking for many of us in the U.S. was that they were led by a coalition of women who called for solidarity with Sviatiana Tsikhanouskaya. Unfortunately, these peaceful demonstrations were met with State-sponsored violence that was organized and mandated by the highest levels of government. Security forces began to beat and detain hundreds of peaceful demonstrators, crack down on independent journalists, and intimidate opposition leaders.

The Lukashenko regime took Sviatiana Tsikhanouskaya into a government building, directly threatened her and her family, and thus, forced her into exile in Lithuania. Later, activists like Maria Kalesnikava were kidnapped and attempts were made to force them out of the country as well. And finally, journalists like Katsiaryna Andreyeva and Darya Chultsova were arrested and jailed for simply filming peaceful demonstrations.

Authorities have arbitrarily detained and physically, sexually, and emotionally assaulted tens of thousands of peaceful protestors, journalists, and civil society members. Today, hundreds remain in detention, and many have recounted experiencing torture, sexual violence and rape, beatings, and other ill treatment. At least eight protestors have been killed.

And today, the Belarusian people mark 221 days of resistance against brutal authoritarian oppression. It has been over 7 months in a fight to establish a rule of law and achieve a democratic future for their country.

We in Congress must stand with the people of Belarus as they push for democracy. We must recognize the sacrifices made daily by peaceful protestors who take to the streets, knowing full well that they will face harassment, intimidation, unlawful detention, or worse. And we must salute the courage of the women of Belarus who in a highly patriarchal society have shown strength, determination, and leadership, standing at the center of organizations like Coordination Council, in an attempt to establish a dialog with the Lukashenko regime and initiate new, free, and fair elections.

Our expert witness today knows all too well the challenges posed by autocratic regimes who benefit from corruption and whose close friends and allies only support repressive tactics.

Yet, the continuous fight for democracy around the world is real and can take different forms. We have watched some countries, such as those in Central Europe, who have fallen into the trap that is democratic backsliding and illiberalism. We have watched as authoritarian States have used the pandemic to gather even greater control over their citizens, such as the recent arrest of almost 200 opposition leaders in Moscow. And we here in Washington have had to confront the fragile nature of our own democracy, as just

months ago, violent, armed insurrectionists stormed the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to halt the democratic process for a free and fair election.

In times marked by challenges to democracy at home and abroad, one democracy must lend its hand to another. Helping democratic allies across borders and oceans can ensure that societies seeking to establish democratic, often in the face of anti-democratic threats, can prevail. A network of support, and the ability to communicate with that network, is a necessary component to democratic strength. That is why we, the transatlantic community and the U.S. Congress, must stand in unity and support the democratic movement in Belarus and all those who fight to establish or protect their democracy abroad.

That is why last September I held a hearing before this subcommittee on the democratic awakening of governments. That hearing included firsthand accounts of images of violence inflicted upon the Belarusian people by security forces, with introduced resolutions condemning the human rights abuses by Lukashenko and praising the bravery of the Belarusian citizens. We have also passed the revised version of the Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act, authored by Representative Chris Smith, which expanded the robust set of sanctions and authorities related to Belarus at the President's disposal.

Yet, while we have taken these steps forward, it is the peaceful protestors on the ground in Belarus and the Belarusian diaspora around the world from Vilnius to Cape Cod that continues to drive movements and democracy forward and to keep this fight for democracy in Belarus alive.

With that being said, I am pleased to welcome the woman who has become the leader of the democratic movement in Belarus, Sviatiana Tsikhanouskaya, as our expert witness today. She did not plan to run for President. However, as she has said, she has shown up for her people because her people showed up for her. Her steadfast courage, dedication, and tenacity is remarkable, and I look forward to our discussion.

I now turn to the ranking member for his remarks, Mr. Fitzpatrick.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Good morning, and thank you, Chairman Keating.

Today, we gather to recognize the bravery of our witness, Sviatiana Tsikhanouskaya, and her inspiring campaign to promote democratic aspirations in the people of Belarus. You and historic peaceful protestors have stand down overwhelming odds and lit a fire to a renewed democratic spirit in Belarus. And this movement is now shining a light on the authoritarian shadow that has covered the citizens of Belarus during Alexander Lukashenko's rule.

I would also like to acknowledge the Coordination Council, its members, and all the Belarusian citizens engaging in the noble pursuit of a free and democratic society. And it is worth noting, as we recognize International Women's Month, that exceptionally brave and daring women are leading this democratic revolution in Belarus.

Mrs. Sviatiana Tsikhanouskaya and thousands of women like her have proven to their country and the rest of the world that the fu-

ture is in their able hands. These freedom fighters are not seeking unreasonable terms. They seek legal process. They seek freedom of expression and information, and they seek freedom from the harassment of an oppressive state. And they seek freedom to chart their own future.

Following the August 9th election, the people of Belarus wanted their voices heard in response to the dictatorial actions of Lukashenko. In response to these citizens' peaceful protests, Lukashenko's security forces responded with excessive force, the use of chemical riot dispersion methods and measures, and detained citizens completely without cause. Plainclothes police officers have engaged in increasingly aggressive and brutal crackdowns of those who are peacefully protesting the election results and its resulting movement.

International monitors estimate that more than 32,000 Belarusians have been temporarily detained and imprisoned, and nearly 300 political prisoners remain behind bars as of this hearing this morning. According to a report by the European Parliament last year, at least 10 demonstrators have been killed by government forces or died while in custody under suspicious circumstances.

The harrowing account of our witness describes the situation of jailed protestors that, quote, "have been rounded up and housed like cattle in tiny, overcrowded jail cells without access to water, sanitization, or any normal sleeping positions," going on to say that, "torture is now commonplace."

Lukashenko has smothered free speech in Belarus and manipulated the media to suppress the surge in his opposition and conceal the tactics of his oppression. Russian propagandists were flown in to work for State-run TV in Belarus. Meanwhile, independent journalists have faced intimidation and imprisonment. Local critics of the regime face trumped-up charges and are imprisoned for speaking truth to power.

And as the illegitimate regime in Belarus continues to normalize a litany of human rights violations, the calls for Mr. Lukashenko to step down and recognize a new, free, and fair system of elections is gaining momentum worldwide. A group in my home State of Pennsylvania even organized a rally in Pittsburgh in a snow-covered day this year to raise awareness of the plight of their loved ones. And as such, the United States, in coordination with its European allies and partners, must be vigilant and robust in our support for Belarus and their civil society and those who are persecuted by the Lukashenko regime.

In line with the Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act of 2020, which I cosponsored, we must continue to demand the end of Lukashenko's violence and the release of all those wrongfully detained, and continue harsh sanctions for those complicit in these human rights violations. The illegitimate Lukashenko regime must, once and for all, step down and allow for free and fair elections to be held. The people of Belarus are demanding the right to chart their own future, and their voices deserve to be heard.

I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. I would like to thank the ranking member.

And without objection, I would like to recognize Representative Smith, who is the author of the Belarus Democracy Act, for a brief statement.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Chairman, thank you so very much for inviting me to be and allowing to be part of your panel, and to Brian Fitzpatrick, as well as to you, for the great work that you gentlemen are doing and this subcommittee. Your resolution that is pending, I think, will, again, reiterate the bipartisan, bicameral support of Congress behind Tsikhanouskaya and the rest of the human rights activists and defenders in Belarus.

The leadership that you have shown and that the people of Belarus have shown, despite incredible odds, despite the fact that the bullies are out there beating, arresting, torturing, and even killing the best and the bravest and the brightest of Belarus.

The picture, Mr. Chairman, that you have painted, as well as the ranking member, is both bleak and hopeful—bleak because Lukashenko is still in charge, but hopeful because the people of Belarus have you to champion their dreams, and that goes for this leadership led by women who are in exile, some of whom are in exile; others, sadly, are in prison.

My work on Belarus goes back to really the 1990's. And in 2004, I authored the Belarus Democracy Act, which really has become the template for Magnitsky holding men and women in the Lukashenko regime, both in terms of visa denial and making them unable to participate in any kind of economic relationship with the U.S. and U.S. banks. I did it again in 2006, 2011, and as you pointed out, the 2020 Act, which reiterates and expands and puts an emphasis on sovereignty, because we know that the Russians are eying Belarus in a way that is reminiscent of what they did with the Crimea and other parts of the Ukraine.

Again, according to the representative of the OSCE, the Belarusian authorities have filed at least 141 politically motivated cases against women. Forty-nine are currently in detention or under house arrest. Another 75 are suspects in politically motivated criminal cases, and thousands of other women have fled Belarus in fear for their safety. Despite all of this, the image of Belarusian women in white has become iconic, representing the hopes of all Belarusians for a better future.

Again, thank you for this timely hearing. And again, it gives us all an opportunity to say we are in solidarity with these incredibly brave women and men.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Representative Smith, and thank you for your longstanding work on this important issue.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Mr. KEATING. I will now introduce our witness. Ms. Sviatiana Tsikhanouskaya is a central leader of the democratic movement in Belarus and a human rights activist who challenged Alexander Lukashenko at the 2020 Presidential election. This Belarusian election was fraught with widespread fraud and followed by unjustifiable violence.

In the months following, Sviatiana Tsikhanouskaya has been a symbol leader of the Belarusian protests and has contributed great-

ly to promoting and organizing positive change in Belarus, both through her domestic and international engagement.

The Europe Parliament recognized the fight of Belarusian people for democracy and freedom, led by Sviatiana Tsikhanouskaya, by awarding her, among other leaders, the prestigious annual Sakharov Prize. She has also received a series of international awards for her courageous struggle against the authoritarian regime of Lukashenko.

I will now recognize, and State my pleasure at joining us, Ms. Tsikhanouskaya, for 5 minutes. And without objection, your prepared written statement will be made a part of the record.

Ms. Tsikhanouskaya, you are now recognized for your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF SVIATIANA TSIKHANOUSKAYA, BELARUSIAN
HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST AND POLITICIAN**

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. Good morning, everyone.

Chairman Keating, Ranking Member Fitzpatrick, Honorable Representative Smith, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, first of all, I would like to extend my Saint Patrick's Day greetings to all of you. Mr. Keating, as you may know from me, Ireland has had a very special place in my heart.

Mr. Smith, thank you for being here with us today. We deeply appreciate your tremendous support for Belarus throughout decades, including all four Belarus democracy acts that you introduced and helped enact.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit pictures for the record.

Mr. KEATING. Without objection, we can display those pictures as you begin your testimony.

[The information referred to follows:]





Pic. 3 Photo by Dzmitry Barushka (2020)

TUT.BY











Pic 14. Yelena Leuchanka Photo by Mitchell Layton/NBAE via Getty Images







Pic. 1 Photo by Naakeja Budzhan (2020)





Pic. 9 Death of Alexander Tarakovsky (2020, Associated Press)



Pic. 10 Journalists Daria Chultsova and Kaciaryna Andreeva (2021) (Photo: AP)



Pic. 11 Raman Bandarenka who was murdered by police officers with no insignia in his courtyard (2020) (Photo: Gettyimages)

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. Thank you.

So, I am deeply grateful for the great honor of addressing you on behalf of the Belarusian people. I am here to give voice to the thousands of Belarusians who face injustice, intimidation, and brutality, and who still continue to protest daily.

It has been more than 7 months since Belarus has begun the united peaceful protest movement, which was met with unprecedented violence from the authorities. Over 32,000 people have been detained. More than 2,500 criminal cases have been initiated. Over 1,000 cases of torture have been documented by human rights NGO's. And there are 290 political prisoners at the moment. At least eight protestors were killed.

Not a single government official has been held accountable for the brutality, repression, torture, and murder. Amidst the injustice, the brave women of Belarus became a symbol of hope and resilience for our country.

Seventy-three-year-old Nina Baginskaya has been protesting against the regime since the 1990's, despite the detentions by police and raids on her house.

Miss Belarus 2008, Volha Khizhinkova, and basketball star Yelena Leuchanka spent 42 days and 15 days, respectively, in detention in unsanitary and humiliating conditions for peacefully protesting.

Women wearing white dresses and carrying flowers formed the first human chains a shield for male protestors. Their desire to protect was stronger than their fear of being detained and tortured. Yet, they could not protect everyone.

On 10th August, Alexander Taraiovsky fell, the first victim of police brutality. He was shot point-blank by a police squad in Minsk.

Two female journalists, Darya Chultsova and Katsiaryna Andreieva, were sentenced to 2 years in prison for doing their job, livestreaming a vigil for the peaceful protestor Raman Bandarenka, who was murdered by the regime cronies in his own backyard for protecting our national symbols.

With those stories, it was straight that we are dealing with a human rights crisis of unprecedented proportions for Belarus that keeps worsening day by day. But the people still persist.

Our workers united in strike committees. Our doctors and professors stood up for their colleagues who were fired for their political views. Our professional athletes raised awareness all over the world. Principled police officers and investigators resigned. Neighborhood communities have become the place for a grassroots movement.

Yet, all of this is not enough. Lukashenko still has the resources to retain power. So, the United States should insist on stopping the violence, releasing the political prisoners, restoring the rule of law, and launching a genuine dialog between the legitimate representatives of Belarus and the regime.

At the same time, it is not words, but actions that matter. We call on the U.S. to enforce sanctions against State-owned enterprises, the judiciary, and oligarchs. Sanctions are one of the most effective measures. We call on the U.S. to use its diplomacy to isolate Lukashenko by curbing international agreements and com-

merce between the Lukashenko regime and other countries. We call on the U.S. to help with international mediation through the OSCE.

We call on the U.S. Congress to consider increasing the support for the pressing needs of Belarusians. People of Belarus require support, especially the civil society, the human rights defenders, the independent media, and the businesses. All of them have been repressed by the regime.

As the European Union has drafted a comprehensive plan to support Belarus during the transition and after free and fair elections, we call on the U.S. Congress to join this work in order to start developing a joint Marshall Plan for Belarus.

I am bound by the view of the majority of Belarusians to make this happen, and I call on the United States of America to join me on this mission. My nation is facing a humanitarian crisis. People are suffering and dying right now. Belarusians need you as never before.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Tsikhanouskaya follows:]

Women Leading the Way: the Democratic Movement in Belarus

Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee for Europe, Energy, the Environment and Cyber

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Leader of democratic Belarus

March 17, 2021

Chairman Keating, ranking member Fitzpatrick, distinguished members of the Subcommittee,

I am deeply grateful for the great honor of addressing you on behalf of the Belarusian people. It is my moral obligation and duty to testify before you about the gross human rights violations and the ongoing relentless political repression by the Belarusian government officials and police.

I am here to give voice to the thousands of Belarusians – women and men – who face injustice, intimidation, and brutality and who still continue to protest daily. It has been more than seven months since Belarusians have united within the peaceful protest movement – the largest and most resilient in Belarusian history.

Amidst the massive assault of the repression machine, the brave women of Belarus became a symbol of hope and resilience for our country. Women became the embodiment of the aspirations of Belarusians, the face of the democratic movement, giving a boost to the peaceful protest in pursuit of justice, democracy, and dignity as the core components of change.

It is ironic that I had been allowed to run for president last year just because the regime saw me as an unlikely competitor, primarily because I am a woman. I had not had the ambition to become a politician and run for office. It was my husband, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, who had such a goal. After he was jailed in May 2020, I decided to restore justice and filed papers to register my candidacy to pave the way for new free and fair elections. I was joined by two admirable, strong women Maryia Kalesnikava and Veranika Tsepkala. Aliaksandr Lukashenka once said: “Our Constitution is not suitable for a woman. Our society is not ready to vote for a woman. Because the Constitution gives a lot of power to the president”. We carry on proving how wrong he was.

Maryia and Veranika represented two alternative candidates, Viktor Babaryka and Valery Tsepkala, who were not allowed to compete for the presidential office, just like my husband. Together we rallied across the country.

Endorsed by independent political forces, we became the voice of millions of Belarusians, united in their desire for change and justice. An incredible number of people supported us and inspired us to

go forward. They were our primary motivation to carry on despite all the challenges and threats from the authorities.

To defend our people, Veranika Tsepkala kept campaigning in the cities and towns even when she was threatened with her children being taken away.

To defend our people, Maryia Kalesnikava tore her passport to pieces to avoid being deported from Belarus. Now my courageous friend is imprisoned, facing 12 years in jail on trumped-up charges. But even behind bars, she remains the symbol of our fight for dignity and freedom.

Our story served as an inspiration for many other women in Belarus who stepped up as true leaders of their community. And their stories have inspired us to go on.

Women wearing white and carrying flowers formed the first human chains – a living human shield for male protesters – in the streets of Belarus after the three nights of violence following the election. Their desire to protect was stronger than their fear of being detained and tortured.

73-year-old Nina Baginskaya represents the perseverance of the Belarusians who want to be heard. She has been protesting against the regime since the 1990's despite the detentions by police and raids on her house.

Miss Belarus 2008 Volha Khizhinkova and basketball star Yelena Leuchanka spent 42 days and 15 days respectively in detention in unsanitary and humiliating conditions for peacefully protesting.

These are just a few of the stories of courage and integrity in the face of the regime's brutality.

We are dealing with a human rights crisis of unprecedented proportions for Belarus, worsening day by day. This crisis is enabled by the complete collapse of the rule of law.

As of today, over 32,000 people have been arrested in Belarus since the 9 August presidential election. More than 2,500 criminal cases have been initiated against journalists, human rights defenders, activists, and peaceful protesters. Over 1,000 cases of torture have been documented by human rights NGOs. There are 287 political prisoners in Belarus. At least eight protesters were killed. Meanwhile, not a single government official has been held accountable for the brutality, repression, torture, and murder.

This is how it all started.

The presidential election of 9 August was a farce. The available evidence speaks volumes: thousands of documented electoral fraud cases – among them photos of ballots, protocols, witness testimonials, audio recordings of manipulations. Despite all the manipulations, Aliaksandr Lukashenka was unable to win the majority of votes, which is confirmed by numerous facts collected by national and international organizations, as well as by alternative vote counting data

(projects "Zubr", "Voice", exit poll data at foreign polling stations). Independent sources show that I received more votes than the incumbent. Therefore I'm speaking not on my behalf, but on behalf of millions of Belarusians.

Following the fraudulent election, hundreds of thousands of Belarusians took to streets across the country and have continued peaceful protests for months.

On 10 August, **Aliaksandr Taraikousky** fell the first victim of police brutality. He was shot point-blank by a police squad in Minsk.

Henadz Shutau was executed by the police officers without any insignia in Brest. In all its absurdity last month he was posthumously found guilty of disobeying a police order, while his killers – real criminals – remain unpunished.

Another peaceful protester, **Aliaksandr Trotsky**, was detained for allegedly hitting a traffic police officer with his car. During the detention, he was barbarically beaten and tortured. While the policeman had been alive and well, Aliaksandr was sentenced to 10 years in prison for driving away while unidentified people in balaclavas were threatening him with guns.

Raman Bandarenka was murdered by the regime cronies in his own backyard for protecting our national symbols. This case shook Belarus while the regime tried to silence the doctor, Artsiom Sarokin, who, under pressure from the regime, declined to falsify the autopsy and disclosed Raman's death's true cause.

Despite these horrifying stories of suffering and injustice, our people persist in their peaceful protest.

Our brave workers united in strike committees and showed that they are the backbone of the economy. On October 26, 2020, we – as a nation that wishes to be heard – have made a collective effort: workers from all over the country decided to go on a strike. While striking, some of them carried on with their responsibilities (work-to-rule), and others didn't (classical strike). Belarusian classical strikers demonstrated commitment: they let their employers know about their intention to strike in advance. The workers faced political repression no matter how essential, or qualified, or irreplaceable: some of them were fired, some – jailed, some – fined.

Our doctors and professors demonstrated remarkable integrity in standing up for human dignity for their colleagues who were fired for their political position. As a gesture of solidarity, professors joined the strike, even though they knew they would face repression. Some of them were fired, some quit, some experienced pressure from the administration. The universities expelled the students who publicly expressed their political beliefs.

Medical workers formed chains of solidarity, demonstrating support to other strikers. The medics could not go on a full strike during the pandemic, and so they found a way to show solidarity

responsibly: they would stand outside of the hospitals in chains for several minutes in non-working hours. The pro-dictatorship media has made it seem as though the doctors tried to abandon their responsibility to make the sick suffer – the opposite of the reality. Thus, the medical workers were also publicly condemned while being completely innocent.

Our professional athletes raised awareness about what is happening in Belarus all over the world and created the Belarusian Sports Solidarity Foundation. They auction their medals, gather donations, promote the foundation to help their politically repressed colleagues in need financially, juridically. They also aid the sportsmen who were forced to leave the country and organize sports practice abroad.

In the wake of the crackdown on peaceful protesters, several state-run media organizations collectively resigned from their work, refusing to broadcast obvious lies that were in complete contradiction with easily observable facts and evidence of mounting police brutality. The regime reacted not by starting to reveal facts but by flying in an army of propagandists from Russia readily willing to lie.

Scores of principled police officers and investigators resigned to form the ByPol organization that united former security forces officers with the goal of putting an end to the impunity of their former colleagues in Belarus. Because of these officers and investigators, the general public received access to documentation of the orders leading to the human rights violations and the overwhelming violence across the country. The release of documents helped Belarusians understand the cruelty and inhumanity of the orders that were given to the armed forces leading to massive outbursts of violence. In one of the leaked audio-recording Deputy Minister of the Interior Karpenkov explained to his subordinates what to do with demonstrators: *“Maim him, Cripple him, Kill him. Shoot him right in the forehead, shoot him right in the face. As the president said, if he comes at you – you shoot him. Point-blank: to the legs, to the stomach, to the groin. The president got us covered”*.

In autumn and winter, the protest has developed despite the unspeakable repression. Despite the fact that every demonstrator could end up in a prison cell, the protesters have teamed up with neighbors and showed how autonomous they are working in a horizontal and coordinated way. Neighborhood communities have become the place for a grassroots movement to grow and strengthen. I speak to them regularly, and these people’s energy and stamina give me so much hope.

I have this hope despite the crackdown unleashed by the Belarusian authorities.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has issued a report documenting “massive and systemic” human rights violations and calling for those responsible for torture and other abuses to be brought to justice. The UN Human Rights Council has indicated a “long-standing, chronic pattern of systemic violations and impunity”.

Journalists have faced unprecedented persecution and ill-treatment. Two female journalists, Darya Chultsova and Katsiaryna Andreyeva were sentenced to two years in prison for “organizing actions

grossly violating public order”. They were doing their job livestreaming a vigil for the peaceful protester Raman Bandarenka.

There have been several police raids on the offices of independent civil society organisations, among them Viasna Human Rights Centre, the Belarusian Association of Journalists, and Belarus Solidarity Foundation. Dozens of human rights defenders, journalists, and members of independent trade unions were detained. Belarusian authorities also searched the homes of activists and their relatives, confiscating phones, laptops, money and credit cards. They did not spare the feelings of children, pregnant women, and the elderly. Why? Because they could. Lukashenka has placed Belarus on a path to destruction for the sake of his unlimited power.

But he does not have any power over the spirit of those courageous people who are behind bars today.

Ihar Bantser, musician and activist from Hrodna, announced a hunger strike at a court session on March 3, expressing his protest against an unfair trial. He is facing up to three years in prison.

Natalia Hersche, a Swiss-Belarusian citizen who was sentenced to two and a half years in prison for taking off a riot police officer’s mask, is also on a hunger strike protesting against inhuman conditions in prison.

Facing a three-year prison sentence, Ihar Losik, a famous Belarusian blogger, cut his wrists in front of the investigator and announced a second hunger strike. His life is in jeopardy. He is only 28 years old. My heart is bleeding when I think of his wife, Darya who has been courageously advocating for his release.

My country is in crisis, and that is why I urge you to act – you, the elected representatives of the American people.

We value the principled stance the US took in supporting the people of Belarus. We need your support in building a New Belarus. Our demands remain the same: the immediate end of violence and repression, the release of all prisoners, and holding free, fair, internationally observed elections by Autumn 2021. I am bound by the will of the majority of Belarusians to make this happen.

In Belarus, a mob is in power. They are government officials, judges and prosecutors, riot police, presenters, and propagandists on state TV. They are the ones who should safeguard the order, who should provide unbiased information. But in fact, they are the accomplices of violence and repression.

I am proud that our protest remains peaceful. Freedom of assembly and association, freedom of speech are our constitutional rights. This is not a conflict between the state and the opposition. This is a conflict between the state and its citizens, between an illegitimate government clinging to power and the majority of the population demanding democracy.

In cooperation with other democratic forces, my team and I prepared the strategy of victory where we described our priorities and main steps on the way to free and fair elections.

We already succeeded in the delegitimization of Lukashenka and the consolidation of resources of democratic forces. We appreciate the international community's principled stance on the 2020 election, refusing to recognize its officially declared results as legitimate. The US called the elections "fraudulent." The EU concluded that the election campaign was "neither free nor fair" and did not recognise Lukashenka as a legitimate leader. Many other countries have not recognized the legitimacy of Lukashenka's presidency either.

At the moment, the military, the police and secret services, civil servants, and the state apparatus, as well as politically passive citizens, remain the main pillars of Lukashenka's support.

To get out of the zero-sum game we need more resources to mobilize diverse social groups. We are finalizing the development of an inclusive IT-platform "Strategy of Victory". Everyone can join different tasks on this platform to contribute to our peaceful revolution.

We need to bring the rule of law and independent judiciary back to Belarus. This can be done through international investigations and universal jurisdiction to initiate new cases on the crimes against Belarusians. We also created the Unified Crime Registration Book to gather evidence of crimes for sanctions lists and future impartial trials. Rehabilitation programs are also put in place to support arrested and persecuted Belarusians.

Another dimension of our work includes the creation of a positive program of changes for a new democratic Belarus. It consists of a new Constitution with a clear division of powers, the development of roadmaps of reforms in public administration, economy, law, education, the consolidation of civil society initiatives to strengthen local initiatives.

We also aim to ensure an inclusive political process to represent people's interests through digital referenda and virtual public discussion platforms. We work on the expansion of communication channels with civil servants and security forces. Along these lines, the Coordination Council has developed the Concept of National Reconciliation that outlines the steps we will need to take to ensure a smooth transition to a democratic society.¹

Now we must create conditions for national dialogue, reconciliation, and new elections. To achieve this, we need to create pressure on the regime by the international community, including the US.

¹ The concept of law reinstatement and national reconciliation. (2021, March 1). Retrieved March 16, 2021, from <https://rada.vision/en/the-concept>

Since 1991 when Belarus regained its independence, the US has been a staunch supporter of our country's sovereignty. Belarusian independence and sovereignty are in danger now. Supporting democracy and human rights in the world is a longstanding US foreign policy priority. Democracy and human rights are under attack in Belarus. This combination of negative factors requires focused, effective, and consistent policies by the US.

The US was one of the first countries to impose sanctions and visa bans against senior government officials responsible for manipulating the presidential election, human rights abuses, political repression, and the crackdown on independent media and civil society.

Notably, the Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act of 2020, initiated shortly after the crackdown began, was adopted within just three months with overwhelming bipartisan support in the Congress. It paved the way to broader measures to address the situation in Belarus, including sanctions, assistance for civil society and independent media, and efforts to reveal the scale of financial abuse by Lukashenka and his cronies.

We believe that the United States as the free world leader has an exceptional standing to lead by example and possesses unique leverage to align the positions and coordinate the international community's practical steps regarding Belarus's situation. The international empathy for Belarusians pursuing freedom and democracy is overwhelming and it should be converted into practical measures.

Sanctions are among the most effective measures sending a strong signal to the regime. The US should consider resuming the Treasury sanctions under Executive Order 13405, currently suspended, against specific state-owned enterprises – altogether 9 of them.

Sanctions should also aim at the so-called wallets of Lukashenka – oligarchs who support Lukashenka and in return, directly benefit from their loyalty. Such measures should also target those who have been at the core of the repression machine: judges, prosecutors, investigators, state propagandists, and the management of the Belarusian Bar Association intimidating lawyers who defend political prisoners. Some lawyers – like Maxim Znak – are in prison, others were stripped of their licenses, severely limiting the right of Belarusians to legal defense.

Some countries might want to capitalize on the weakness of Lukashenka by advancing their interests contrary to the will of the Belarusian people. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the United States, along with the United Kingdom, Canada, European Union Member States, and other like-minded nations, would call on the international community not to sign any international agreements with the Lukashenko regime, since doing so contradicts the will of the Belarusian people and undermines the sovereignty of Belarus. Similarly, contracts to purchase Belarusian state-owned enterprises with an illegitimate president Lukashenka, will be reversed.

We call for additional efforts to implement international mediation, including under the auspices of the OSCE, to resolve the political crisis in Belarus. This way, we would welcome a constructive role of all states, including Russia, on the basis of respect for the sovereignty and independence of Belarus.

Belarusians require support, especially the civil society, the human rights defenders, the independent media, the people, and the businesses. All of them have been attacked and/or repressed by the regime. I call on the United States Congress to consider increasing the support for the diversified pressing needs of Belarusians.

As the European Union has drafted a Comprehensive Plan to support Belarus during the transition and after elections, we are calling on the US to join this work in order to start developing a joint Marshall Plan for Belarus.

Based on the experience of the previous political crises in Belarus, it is of utmost importance to maintain consistency in the adopted policy. The US should insist on the full implementation of measures constituting the progress in resolving the ongoing crisis: to stop the violence, to release the political prisoners, to restore the rule of law, and to launch a genuine dialogue between the legitimate representatives of Belarusians and the regime. This dialogue should lead to new free and fair elections under international observation. This would allow Belarusians to rightfully choose their leaders in a competitive process and ensure that the results of the elections are credible and recognized by the international community. Most importantly, Belarusians must accept the results for a peaceful transition of power to open a new chapter in the political life of Belarus.

Thank you.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you very much for that very moving and very important testimony.

I will now recognize members for 5 minutes each. And pursuant to House rules, all time yielded is for the purpose of questioning our witnesses.

Because of the virtual format of the hearing, I will recognize members by committee seniority, alternating between Democrats and Republicans. And if you miss your turn, please our staff know and we will circle back to you. If you seek recognition, you must unmute your microphones and address the chair verbally.

I would just ask, is Representative Sires still with us? I know he had to leave. I was going to yield my time to him. Evidently, he has had to leave. So, I will start by recognizing myself.

The role of women in the movement for a democratic and free Belarus is really the theme of what we are talking about in terms of the democratic movement that is there. And this is unique in that respect, and it is effective and it is important. And it has really captured the attention of the world.

And I would just like to ask you, what specifically you have seen as the role of women in spearheading this effort for free and democratic elections and a democracy in Belarus? What can you tell us in more detail about that specific role of women?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. Actually, the women played a huge role in this revolution. And first of all, the fact that three women led this pre-election campaign in spite of all other prohibitions for women to fight. We three women, we are put in this position instead of our men, and it was really the regime's mistake that they underestimated women of Belarus.

Our ex-President always told that our constitution is not for women, that women will never be able to lead the country, but we managed because women, especially Belarusian women, are really strong. And when our women were put in such circumstances, when they had to show how strong they are, they showed the most bravery that the whole world was inspired of.

And after 3 days of hell the regime made in Belarus after the election date, and thousands of men had been detained and tortured in jails, our women had to stand in front of our men, just hide the men behind them to protect them. So, our wonderful, peaceful women showed to the whole world that we are brave and we manage everything, only because we want a better future for our children, and we ready to defend not only our children, but our men as well.

Mr. KEATING. I think this effort has changed the dynamics, gender dynamics, in the country as well. It goes far beyond this movement itself.

Now you recently released a liberation plan of yours. Can you highlight the most important aspects of that and how the U.S. can be useful in seeing that plan come to life?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. I think that the women of this revolution after the election, and before the election, we thought that we need new elections because the previous election was falsified, and just to step out of this political and humanitarian crisis in Belarus, we need new elections. But we need these new elections through peaceful dialog with the regime.

But we see that the regime does not respond to our calls for negotiations. And that is why we are systematically, continuously putting pressure on the regime and his cronies. Inside the country, these are protesting movements, demonstratives, different initiatives. People are not giving up. And despite of this tremendous level of violence from the regime, people are continuing to fight.

But, of course, we need international support as well. We need international pressure because democratic countries cannot close their eyes on what is going on in Belarus and they have to stand for the values of the democratic countries, for human rights, for dignity. And it is the institution in Belarus, it is a challenge not only for Belarusians, it is a challenge for European countries, for the USA, for Canada, just to prove that the values are not just words; that they want, that they have to stand for these.

And we are a wonderful country, and we are on our own path for democracy. So, we call on you, stand with us in this difficult time and do your best for one more nation, proud nation, to become a democratic country.

Mr. KEATING. Well, thank you. And I also want to thank you for meeting with Ambassador Julie Fisher. I spoke with her just the other day, and we are looking forward to her being recognized, too, by Belarus.

I now yield to our ranking member, Mr. Fitzpatrick, for his questions.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin by asking you, sir, to please enter into the record a letter from the Free Belarus Coalition for Bipartisan and Bicameral Support requesting \$30 million for Fiscal Year 2022, funding to support Belarus' civil society and the organic democratic movement.

Mr. KEATING. Without objection, that will be, per our instructions in the beginning, put in the record. Thank you.

[The information referred to follows:]



March 15, 2021

The Honorable Christopher Coons
Chairman
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Lee
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Graham, Chairwoman Lee and Ranking Member Rogers,

As members of the Belarusian American community, we want to thank you and your colleagues in Congress for your unwavering support for Belarusian democracy. That support has been critical as Belarusians struggle to determine their future and peaceful political transition. To that end, we respectfully urge you to increase the appropriations allocation related to Belarus democracy assistance to \$30 million in the Assistance to Europe, Eurasia and Central Asia account in the fiscal year 2022 budget in accordance with the Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act of 2020 (PL116-260). We also ask for your assistance to ensure that the U.S. State Department and USAID provide increased emergency funds to the Belarusian democratic movement through USAID in the current fiscal year.

Since the illegitimate Belarusian presidential election held on August 9, 2020, Belarusians have organized and mobilized in non-violent resistance against a ruthless and oppressive dictatorship on an unprecedented scale. Protests have continued for over six months despite indiscriminate violence and persecution. The re-activated and emboldened democratic aspirations of the Belarusian society have been met with a vicious crackdown by the illegitimate regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The number of political prisoners is quickly approaching 300. Over 33,000 protesters have gone through the nightmare of the Belarusian penitentiary system for simply expressing their political opinions. The independent media have been targeted as well, with three journalists sentenced to multiple years in prison in February.

Belarus has turned into an unhinged totalitarian state aided and abetted by Russia, which has become a significant risk factor for the U.S. and its allies in the region. As the recently introduced [House Resolution 124](#) underscores, the nascent civil society of Belarus is enduring massive repressions unleashed by the Lukashenka regime and is at risk of complete eradication without significant external support.

Over the course of 2020, the united Belarusian democratic movement coalesced from a myriad of grassroots initiatives. The network of self-organized activist groups and NGOs has been carrying out a range of vital functions, including collecting evidence of human rights violations, providing emergency assistance to victims of political repressions, and distributing accurate information about the situation in Belarus. In addition to that, the Belarusian diaspora has shown immense solidarity with those who have suffered from the regime.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the U.S. Congress to increase its funding to bolster the democratic movement for FY22, and to work to ensure that the U.S. State Department and USAID surge current available funds to defend human rights in Belarus. These are critical steps to implement the Belarus Democracy, Human Rights and Sovereignty Act signed into law at the end of 2020, and



are in accordance with the foreign policy objectives as described by Secretary Blinken in his speech on March 3, 2021 and Deputy Secretary Biegun at OSCE Ministerial Council Plenary Session on December 3, 2020. The funds are needed to support:

- Grassroots initiatives on the ground protecting the rights of various groups within the Belarusian society;
- Newly formed striking workers' committees and independent trade unions;
- Independent media, especially those still working within Belarus under constant threat of criminal charges;
- Countering internet censorship and repressive surveillance technology;
- NGOs and activists collecting evidence of human rights violations and helping those who are persecuted; and
- Victims of the regime, including political refugees and their families.

Thank you for your support of the people of Belarus. As Americans of Belarusian descent who have experienced life under both systems, we truly believe that democracy is worth fighting for.

Sincerely,
Free Belarus Coalition

CC:
 Secretary of State Antony Blinken
 USAID Administrator-Designate Samantha Power
 Chairman Patrick Leahy, Senate Committee on Appropriations
 Ranking Member Richard Shelby, Senate Committee on Appropriations
 Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro, House Committee on Appropriations
 Ranking Member Kay Granger, House Committee on Appropriations
 Chairman Bob Menendez, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
 Ranking Member James Risch, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
 Chairman Gregory Meeks, House Foreign Affairs Committee
 Ranking Member Michael T. McCaul, House Foreign Affairs Committee
 Chairwoman Jeanne Shaheen, Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation
 Ranking Member Ron Johnson, Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation
 Chairman William Keating, House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy & the Environment
 Ranking Member Brian Fitzpatrick, House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy & the Environment
 Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur
 Congressman Chris Smith

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And this is aligned with the bipartisan 2020 Belarus Democracy Act, which calls for increased foreign assistance.

Ms. Tsikhanouskaya, thank you so much for being here with us today. We greatly admire and respect your courage more than you know. You are a beacon of courage, not just for us on this committee, but for the Congress and for the world.

So, ma'am, if you could just state for the record, in furtherance of this request for \$30 million, how will the Belarus assistance be best served by those who are pro-civil society and are pro-democratic initiatives?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. So, first of all, I have to say that your help is very extremely essential in our case, but I have to admit that we need rapid help because people are suffering now in this very moment in jails and on the ground.

And so, through those, democracy can progress, can increase, and appropriate more funding for two organizations working in Belarus. For example, just through traditional and emerging civil society, like traditional, we need to help to NGO's like defend activists now, to media and to activities, and to emerging civil society like Telegram channels, YouTube bloggers, athletes, doctors. And you also can increase budgets for Belarus of American organizations, such as USAID, for example.

But, again, I have to repeat that this is urgent help. You know, just to keep civil society resistance, we need to have them now.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Thank you, Sviatiana.

And to all my colleagues on the committee, I urge strong bipartisan support for this funding request.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. I would like to thank the ranking member.

And the chair now recognizes the vice chair of the committee, Ms. Spanberger.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Thank you very much.

And thank you for being with us here today, Ms. Tsikhanouskaya. You have demonstrated immense bravery and selflessness over the past year and a true commitment to the people and the future of Belarus. Thank you. And I know that those standing up for democratic principles and human rights around the world appreciate your tremendous work and, certainly, your willingness to be a witness here today.

After your husband's candidacy for the election in August was denied, you took on the role and ran against Lukashenko. How has your own vision of your future and leadership evolved since August? And frankly, did you ever see yourself taking on such a prominent role?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. Thank you. You know, I became in this action and campaign a symbol of resistance, a symbol of unity. But, as a matter of fact, life put me in such circumstances that I had to take this responsibility and become a leader of this revolution. And I know that the Belarusian people know who they voted for, and I feel huge support from the Belarusian people.

It is a rather difficult way. You know, I was put in difficult circumstances. I feel huge pressure from propaganda. And I know that all the Belarusian people are feeling tremendous pressure on

the ground. But knowing that I am doing this for the future of the Belarusian people, for my children, for all those who are suffering in jails now, I have to find strength every day of this fight, and I am finding this strength in the Belarusian people. I know that they are fighting and that they are not giving up. So, I have no right to give up as well.

It is difficult, but I am a woman, and a woman is everything.

[Laughter.]

Ms. SPANBERGER. Isn't that so true?

Well, I am curious, then, how has your forced exile affected your ability to interact with the democratic movement back home in Belarus? And how has it impacted your ability to communicate and advocate, and certainly lead, this continued movement?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. You know, it was the usual regime's practice to make the people flee from the country for them to stop struggling. And the same happened to me. I was sent out of the country and I was supposed to stop, but I could not. I could not betray the Belarusian people.

And, you know, the propaganda always say, "Oh, she lost this connection with Belarus. She is an exile. She does not understand everything." But it is not true. And thanks to the internet, every day I have some conferences and some meetings with all the groups in Belarus. I have meetings with doctors, with students, workers, striking committees, neighborhoods. Every day I have to tell people, I have to look into their eyes, I have to inspire them, and they inspire me back. So, for sure, I am not losing this connection. I feel like I am there on the ground through this connection.

But, of course, knowing that I will be jailed as soon as I pass the border, I am sure that here, even in exile, I can do much, much more for the Belarusian people, for the sake of my country. So, I have to stay here and struggle to bear that with the Belarusian people.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Well, I want to thank you so much for bringing your answers to this committee, certainly your experiences. Thank you for your continued work on behalf of the Belarusian people and on behalf of democratic ideals and values. It is amazing to see leaders like you who are fighting for the rights of the people they should be representing and that they want to stand up for. So, thank you again for coming before this committee. Thank you for telling us, as a committee, what we could be doing to support. And I think you have heard so far that you have many American Members of Congress who are paying close attention to your ongoing struggles and the struggles of your people. So, thank you very much.

And, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. The chair thanks the vice chairman.

It is my understanding that Representative Wagner has yielded her time to Representative Smith. So, the chair calls on Representative Smith for his questions.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, and, Ann, thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for this important hearing, so we can reassert, recalibrate, and do even more to help the democratic opposition in Belarus. And Sviatiana certainly epitomizes grace

under pressure, courage under pressure, and we are all inspired, I think, beyond words to do more to assist.

You, in your recent appeal to the United Nations, you and the United States, Sviatiana, asked that political prisoners and trying to support political prisoners, that we sanction prison chiefs, judges, prosecutors, prison guards. And I am wondering, is it your sense that we are doing enough to try to impose those sanctions? Obviously, getting the names of those individuals is extremely important, and the more we have that, the more we can try to hold them to account.

You have also noted the gross mistreatment of the female prisoners, including threatening to take their children away, humiliation of all kinds, beatings, all kinds of assault, humiliation. If you could perhaps elaborate on some of that, because it is outrageous.

I have met with Lukashenko twice. He is a bully. We all know that. I think he is an egomaniac. We all know that.

But, for those who are behind bars, we have to get to find the most effective strategies to intervene, and to do it immediately. In this, bottom line, do you think we are all doing enough, the European Union, the United States, the U.N.? And be blunt. You know, everyone means well. We all mean well. This is totally bipartisan. And again, the chairman I think is doing a great job. His resolution will, again, give us an opportunity to speak out with one voice when that comes up on the floor of the House. Don't worry about being diplomatic. We have got to know, are we doing enough? Sviatiana?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. Yes, I am here. I have to say that I am really grateful for all the actions that Europe and America and Canada did, have done already, because you stand for us in the crucial moment of our revolution, just after the elections. No one country recognized Lukashenko as legitimate. Everybody told that the elections were fraudulent, Lukashenko is illegitimate. And just I ask you at the moment to be consistent in your vision.

And I understand that you have done a lot and you imposed sanctions, individual sanctions. But, you know, what is going on in Belarus, it is my personal pain. And, of course, just to stop this level of violence, just to start negotiations, to start to develop, we need more pressure on the Lukashenko regime. And in this way, I suppose that sanctions are the most powerful leverage to make this regime to respond to our calls for dialog.

And now, we need to widen this list of individual sanctions. These sanctions should be imposed on security forces offices, judges, educational and support officials who support the regime, who in this or that extent were involved in atrocities and humiliation and violence in Belarus.

And also, Congress should also legislate to widen the sectorial sanctions, such as in the oil and gas and the potash fertilizers industries, just to strike at the regime's most important benefactors and prime resources of resilience.

So, we have to put sanctions on those like bullies of Lukashenko that support the regime. And support the regime means supporting violence and torture in Belarus. So, I am sure that you can do more and more. Until this violence stops, we have to put greater pressure on the regime.

Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Representative.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. KEATING. The chair now recognizes Representative Wild.

Ms. WILD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Sorry for the delay in getting my mute off. I appreciate it. Sorry.

Mr. KEATING. Okay.

Ms. WILD. Okay, I am ready to go. I am sorry about that.

First of all, I just want to start by echoing comments made by my colleagues in recognizing your courageous efforts to build a democratic future in Belarus. Your leadership is inspiring.

And my question is about the role of U.S. diplomacy. I would like to know what your thoughts are on the role that might be played by newly appointed Ambassador Julie Fisher in promoting democracy and supporting the democratic aspirations of the people of Belarus. And as she engages with a regime that does not have popular legitimacy, what message would you like our Ambassador to convey?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. Thank you. As a matter of fact, with Julie Fisher, we had a wonderful conversation, and I saw such a huge empathy for the Belarusian people from her. And I understood that she would be the greatest diplomat on the ground ever.

And, of course, we welcome the presence of Julie Fisher on the ground for her to monitor the situation in Belarus. She can visit jails just to see conditions of keeping women and men in jails. They are unhuman, I have to say. She can visit trials, you know, to see that there is no law in Belarus. She can support civil society in different ways.

But a very important moment, Julie Fisher has not given credentials to Lukashenko. He is not the legitimate President and he cannot be considered as a person whom credentials can be given to. So, I am sure it can be done, you know. I mean, she can stay there as a diplomat without doing this action.

Ms. WILD. Thank you.

And I have a little bit more time. So, I also wanted to ask you, you have called on the pro-democracy movement to hold demonstrations on March 25th, on Freedom Day, marking Belarus' declaration of independence in 1918. What I would like to know is, what can we, as Members of the U.S. Congress, and others who stand in solidarity with pro-democracy forces, do that might be helpful to put pressure on the regime ahead of that day or on that day?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. On the 25th of March, it is our independence day in Belarus, and people went out for demonstrations every year. And for sure, this year will not be an exclusion. And moreover, people demand this day will be the beginning of the new wave of demonstrations in Belarus, new wave of protesting movement.

And people really have this in a demand to show them that we are here; we are people that have our rights to vote, to say everything. And, of course, people will go for the rallies, and people are continuing putting pressure by different initiatives.

And just to support these people, the whole world has to show solidarity with them, to be vocal about them, to put these facts on

the reader, that, look, there are some people who are fighting; they are still there, and we have to help them. Just put the repression of Belarus on the agenda. Be with us with any different ways. Talk about us in the social media, in the social networks. You know, put us on the agenda, and we will see this. Because international support is extremely important in our case. We have to know that the whole world is watching us, that we are not alone.

Ms. WILD. Thank you so much. We will do our best to support you.

I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Representative Wild.

Representative Wagner is now recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. WAGNER. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this very important hearing. I am proud to stand with the Belarusian democratic movement as it demands greater freedom and respect for fundamental rights from the authoritarian Lukashenko regime.

I want to thank our witness, Ms. Tsikhanouskaya, for her courage and tireless work for the people of Belarus.

Ms. Tsikhanouskaya, you wrote last year that "Access to information is the strongest weapon" the opposition has. And I could not agree more. Truth is the potent threat to authoritarianism, and shedding light on the abuses perpetrated by the Lukashenko regime advances democracy and liberty for Belarusians. What more can the United States do to support independent media in Belarus and amplify voices that continue to exercise their rights to dissent and free speech?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. Thank you. Yes, you are so right, the media is really important in our case because

[audio interference] in Belarus. You know that this regime has oppressed almost all the independent media in Belarus. They cannot work. The regime did not create international media. They did not allow international media to come to Belarus, just because he had a lot to hide. He had to hide his crimes, violence, and atrocities. And still, just for media to survive in Belarus, they really need great support.

And first of all, you can, at the moment, you can support different YouTubers that are on the ground and out of the country, show us the real situation in Belarus. You have to call to free imprisoned journalists who just have been detained for doing their job. And you can support Telegram channels that also show the real picture, the crowds. And you can support Radio Free Europe on the ground. So, a lot can be done really, and thank you for what you are doing already.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you.

In the coming months, how will opposition's Coordination Council work to sustain the pro-democracy movement in Belarus? How is the Lukashenko government obstructing the Council's mission, and how can the United States best pressure Lukashenko to end political persecution of Council members specifically?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. You know, the Coordination Council was created as they pled for negotiations, and they are building structures inside the country, different working groups that are working with students, with striking committees, with neighborhoods, and all this stuff. And this new form of social groups, pressure social

groups, are extremely important. It is like a new building of democratic organizations. We have never had democracies within our country. It is like grassroots democracy.

And every country can support this organization, these grassroots organizations, like teaching them how to build this democracy, how to be involved in this political competitions, I would say. And we have to start everything. We have to start everything from the beginning, and you can assist us in this.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you very much.

I understand that the Kremlin sent Russian propagandists to work at Belarusian State TV in support of the Lukashenko regime. Are these propagandists still actively working in Belarus, and are their efforts to shape the information domain in Belarus in Lukashenko's favor, is it working?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. You know, after the

[audio interference] violence after the elections, most of journalists were fired from State TV, but they very soon were replaced by Russian journalists. And Russian journalists did not feel the pain that the rest of the journalists felt. And, of course, they could use this propaganda very widely to show me in the bad way, I would say.

But now, I know that the Russian journalists, they already went back to Russia, but, still, propaganda in Belarus is working very hard. They want to discredit me. They want to show that the opposition is splitting, but it is not; it isn't so. And they put much, they put a lot of efforts to show that the opposition like died. And every day we show to the whole world that we are still here, that we are fighting. So, we are fighting with the propaganda as well. They cannot do anything when the opposition is united.

Thank you.

Mrs. WAGNER. Well, thank you. Thank you, Ms. Tsikhanouskaya. We are grateful for your courage.

And I have expired my time. Gratefully, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

The chair recognizes Representative Deutch for 5 minutes.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I want to really extend a deep debt of gratitude to you for holding this hearing today. There are a lot of things that our committee does, and they are all important, but what we are doing today in this hearing, and the message that we are sending to Lukashenko, the message that we are sending to the people of Belarus, the message that we are sending to the Kremlin and to the world, that we are committed to helping to foster democracy, to standing on the side of those who want the ability to live in a democracy. That is as important as anything we will do.

And, Ms. Tsikhanouskaya, there is no one who has done more in Belarus to help accomplish than you. And I want to thank you for appearing before the committee. I want to thank you for your powerful testimony.

We see in the work we do here the constant, relentless threat that authoritarianism poses to democracies and to democratic values. And Belarus and the United States may not be neighbors, but

the struggle in Belarus today is a generational challenge that we cannot afford to look away from. We have to lead.

And as my colleagues have made clear, the U.S. Congress stands with the people of Belarus and we support you as you work to withstand Russian aggression, create a freer, more democratic nation. So, the battle lines of the fight to protect democratic values and human rights transcends State boundaries and peoples. It is imperative that those who stand for democracy everywhere, including here in the United States, recognize one another as partners in this struggle.

And not only am I an American invested in protecting my own country's democracy, I am also, Ms. Tsikhanouskaya, the proud grandson of immigrants from two small towns in Belarus.

And I thank you for your testimony today, and I thank you for your courage and for your determination.

I want to ask you, we have spoken a lot, you have spoken powerfully about the pressure that Lukashenko must feel. Recently, Lukashenko talked about enacting constitutional reforms at a referendum next year and organizing new Presidential elections sometime thereafter. How do you interpret these actions, and what can we do to not fall prey to efforts to shield Lukashenko and others responsible for the jailings, the attacks on journalists and activists, from our actions now? What do we do here with this?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. You know, I have to say that when the regime is at risk, it starts to talk about a new constitution and referendum, and all this stuff. We aren't talking about new elections. We are talking about dialog between society sources and the regime. We need amending of the constitution, but it is not the question now. The question now is solving a political and humanitarian crisis in Belarus. And this amendment of the constitution expressed, that he is talking about, it should take place alongside with new elections or right after the elections. We have to show priorities in our revolution.

So, as for journalists, again, I have to say that journalism is a very important factor in our revolution, and it is important to support them because they are lack of space, you know, in the country. They cannot earn the money just to show us this truth. So, this technical support to journalists is very important.

So, have I missed—

Mr. DEUTCH. No, I appreciate it. As I finish, I just want to thank you again for your courageous leadership.

I want to thank the chairman and the ranking member, Mr. Smith and others who have been helping us focus the world's attention.

And as you approach these Freedom Day protests, as you talk about the need for grassroots democracy, and even as 400 activists have been sentenced to prison, including a 16-year-old suffering from epilepsy who was sentenced to 5 years in prison simply for participating in the protests, please know that it is not just this subcommittee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee, but that the U.S. Congress and the people of the United States stand with you and the people of Belarus in your rightful quest for democracy. And we are so honored by your presence today. Thank you very much.

I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Deutch. Thank you for your strong remarks and incorporating your family background. That was very meaningful.

Representative Titus is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for setting up this amazing meeting. I cannot imagine having a more inspiring witness than we have this morning.

Thank you for your courage and for being here.

I would just ask you if you would maybe elaborate on the plan that you call the liberation plan that you came out with in February. Talk a little bit about maybe your deadlines, what you see as part of that plan. Will you be working with any NGO's or organizations like NDI or IRI to help you with that?

And is part of that plan dealing with COVID? I know that Lukashenko has just pretty much denied COVID and said, "Go to a spa and drink vodka and you'll be Okay." But someone of your stature and your presence could have a lot of impact on addressing that issue as well.

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. You know, the COVID situation is rather, I would say, interesting in Belarus because, when the whole world was struggling with COVID, with the first wave of COVID, our regime told that there was no COVID in Belarus, and even if it is, so you can treat it with "tractors and vodka".

And a moment when the regime did not take care of—there were some people in the spring. The Russians had to take care of themselves. They started to buy this usual mix for doctors and this special proven equipment. They collected money to buy this equipment for hospitals. So, at that moment, again, we had a proof that government does not take care about the Nation.

And now, the situation is also very bad with COVID on the ground, but we know that real numbers are much higher than the government say. And one doctor who dared tell the real numbers was immediately fired from their hospital, just for telling the truth.

And as for our plan, you know, there cannot be deadlines here. Of course, we want new elections to happen on September. For this, we have to start dialog this May. That is why people are beginning the second wave of the protesting movement in Belarus on the ground. That is why this is a very crucial moment for all the international society, for all the countries and leaders and organizations to put maximum pressure on the regime to make him answer our calls for dialog.

So, we have, if we can say so, spring is the beginning of protests. Until May, we have to organize this data platform on the basis of overseeing and start to negotiate about new elections in September or October this year.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you very much.

You have quite a task ahead of you. Are you working with any NGO's on the ground there? Are there any formal organizations? Or is it just kind of spontaneous protests?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. You know, it is very difficult for NGO's to survive in Belarus. They are pressed; they are under constant pressure. And we can say that we have like legal NGO's in Belarus and illegal. I cannot pronounce these words, but this is our reality. And

we are just trying to help, and, you know, the international society is trying to help a different kind of NGO's on the ground, for them to transfer this help to people who are suffering, people who are in prison, people that are fighting. So, we have to like look for new forms of helping these NGO's. It is very difficult to work in the country where there is no law. You know, all the organizations that are helping people are under constant pressure of the regime because they don't want this organization to help.

Ms. TITUS. Yes, they don't even want it to exist.

Well, thank you so much. And thank you for being here and for your courage. Just be careful there. Just be careful.

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. Thank you so much.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Representative Titus.

Representative Schneider is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Chairman Keating. And as others have said, I cannot thank you enough for having this hearing.

And, Mrs. Tsikhanouskaya, I cannot thank you enough for spending the time to share with us your story, but also cannot thank you enough for the inspiration you provide to your country, to the world, for democracy, for courage, bravery, and hope.

I join with my colleagues on this panel who I believe are representative of the entire U.S. Congress, and by extension, to the entire American people, in standing in solidarity with you, with the heroic women leading the way, and with the entire Belarusian people, and the pro-democracy movement.

Personally, my story has connections to Belarus. My maternal grandfather's family was from Brest-Litovsk in Belarus. They came here at the turn of the last century, but we can trace the roots back there.

I take personally extraordinary inspiration from the bravery and the defiance, the resiliency, of the women of Belarus that we have talked about today and of the Belarus people as a whole.

I have three questions we can touch on, try to get into specifics. I will lay them out, and then, you can address them any way you want.

But, first, what can Congress do to best support you and the pro-democracy movement, to support your resolve, the resilience, to stand strong throughout this crisis, until we get to the end we all hope for?

Toward that end, in more detail, what pressure can we apply to the regime? You mentioned sector-specific sanctions. What specific sectors do you have in mind and are there specific entrepreneurs we should be focused on?

And finally, what can Congress, the United States, and our allies do to, in your words, create a positive program for change for a new Belarus?

And I think I may have lost you.

Mr. KEATING. Yes. Could we just pause for a moment?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. It was the button. Sorry.

Mr. KEATING. Perhaps if you could just summarize again quickly, if that is possible. Representative Schneider, could you just—

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I am sorry, were you able to hear me, Ms. Tsikhanouskaya, or do I need to summarize?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. Yes, yes, yes. I just think—I am sorry—help support the Belarusian people or Belarus at the moment; how to be with the Belarusian people? So, first of all, this is like three pillars.

First of all, it is pressure on the regime—sanctions, putting political pressure on Lukashenko politically and economically, and all this stuff.

Second, it is support to civil society—media, workers, medics, any groups of people.

And the third pillar is justice in our country. There is no law at the moment in Belarus. We have to look for justice in other countries. In many cases, investigation of crimes in Belarus have been started on the basis of universal jurisdiction—you know, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic.

So, you can like support the three pillars or through something else you can. And second, you can support the U.N. accountability mechanism for investigating crimes in Belarus. And again, from the USA sectoral sanctions, in such spheres, oil, gas, and potash fertilizer industries are very important. Just if you find any State organizations that are like wallets of Lukashenko, oligarchs that are supporting this regime, supporting violence, and impose sanctions on them, it will be very good, strong leverage on the oppression for the regime.

And as for the future of Belarus, you know, the only thing I want from the future of Belarus is that my children and the new generation feel safe on the ground; that they understand that a person is their highest value for this country; you know, that everybody, every person is responsible for building this new Belarus.

And, you know, having paid such a huge price during this revolution for a new Belarus, I am sure that every Belarusian will do his or her best to stay united in the future and to do everything to come to democracy.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. That is a phenomenal, inspiring answer, and know that we are with you. Know that we are cheering for your country, for your people.

And with that, I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Representative.

Representative Meuser is recognized for 5 minutes. Representative Meuser?

Mr. MEUSER. Yes, thank you, Chairman.

Thank you for attending this hearing with us. It is certainly some compelling testimony.

Ms. Tsikhanouskaya, you wrote in a Washington Post op-ed last year that, “we will continue our boycott of the State apparatus. Many private businesses have stopped dealing with State-owned banks; more will do the same. Whenever possible, businesspeople should delay, refuse to pay and refuse to buy products from State-owned factories.”

Can you describe how things have gone since making those statements? And has it been successful? Has it had some deteriorating factors? Maybe expand upon that a little bit, if you would not mind, Ms. Tsikhanouskaya.

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. So, can you repeat the question?

Mr. MEUSER. Your comments in The Washington Post op-ed that you had written last year regarding boycotting of State-owned businesses and factors, can you please expand upon what support that was met with? Heavy resistance? Problems for you personally? Has it met with any success?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. Well, many people say sanctions can make people suffer on the ground because they will lose their job or something. But people are already suffering. It is not my demand, putting sanctions on the State organizations. It is the people's demand who are working in these organizations. You know, they are suffering at the moment. They have been fired. They are putting on pressure from the regime. They are humiliated or other factors in different ways. They get small salaries and have a lot to do on the factories. But, still, they lead this sanction because people understand that this economical pressure will ruin this regime.

When the regime does not have money to pay to the riot police, riot police will refuse to serve this regime. You know, it is like a circle. If factory does not pay the regime, the regime does not pay the riot police, and the regime does not have support because the only support at the moment the regime has, it is violence—violence executed by riot police. So, people are ready to suffer because of lack of salaries, but they want to change this regime so much that they want the sanctions most of all.

Mr. MEUSER. Okay. And so, the nine Belarusian officials and four entities related to human rights abuses that were sanctioned several months ago, has that been effective and should that be expanded, in your view? Based on what you Stated, we should be engaged in more, heavier sanctions of more individuals as well as entities that are part of this suppression?

Ms. TSIKHANOUSKAYA. Of course, I have to say that we are grateful for all the sanction list you have already enforced. But we see that the number of people is not enough. Because this very narrow circle of people sanctioned, they know how to avoid the sanctions. You know, they don't have assets in your banks already. They know how to avoid this.

But those people, the judges, security forces offices, education and support officials that support the regime, they also to be put on the sanctions list. Because the next time, the next judge will think twice before making a crime against a person or against demonstrators, peaceful demonstrators.

The threat of these sanctions is sometimes even more useful than any other way of pressure on these people. For sure, the sanction list has to be widened.

Mr. MEUSER. Right. Thank you very much.

And, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. I thank the gentleman for his comments.

And just a couple of closing remarks. Our thanks, Ms. Tsikhanouskaya. This was an enormously moving hearing, an unusual hearing in that respect. And your participation and taking the time to talk to us in Congress is so important.

And my colleagues, I want to thank all of them. It is an abnormally busy day today for many reasons, and the participation was extraordinary at this subcommittee hearing.

I would say this: that, Ms. Tsikhanouskaya, you began the hearing with your remarks wishing us a happy Saint Patrick's Day. And I want to think about the words of a very famous Irish poet, Seamus Heaney. And he remarked at one point—and it is a remark that is used quite often by our President, President Biden—when they were talking about a period of troubles in Ireland that was so severe. He said that, “If we winter this one out, we can summer anywhere.”

And I think winter has descended in terms of democracy right on Belarus, and the world knows that and the U.S. knows that. And we are going to weather this winter together, a winter of authoritarian rule, of violence, of intimidation. And we are going to work together with you, hopefully, joining together as a diaspora, as well as government officials. As you go forward with your IT platform and strategy and victory, we will be looking, and perhaps helping, to deal with those issues as you go forward.

But I want to tell you we will continue. The U.S. will fully implement the powers that it can implement for democracy in Belarus. We will work on a continuing basis to stop the violence there, to push for the release of political prisoners there, and to make sure that there is a genuine dialog between the people of Belarus and forging ahead to a legitimate government where people can be represented.

And just in your last few remarks, I think you summed up the goals of all of us in a free world when you just said, What we want most is to pass a better world and better country to our children. And importantly, you said, every person has a responsibility.

So, I want to assure you that we view our responsibility as standing up for Belarus, for democracy. And you continue to inspire us every day. And the work and the effort that you have done, joined by so many courageous individuals, and the hallmark of them, probably in this effort more than many others, of women being involved is so important.

So, thank you so much for being here. We will continue to work with you to make sure that the people of Belarus can get through this winter. And then, when that happens, we can all celebrate democracy all the time in the summer. So, thank you so much.

And with that, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:53 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment, and Cyber

William R. Keating (D-MA), Chair

March 17, 2021

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment, and Cyber via Cisco WebEx (and available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>):

DATE: Wednesday, March 17, 2021

TIME: 9:30 a.m., EST

SUBJECT: Women Leading the Way: The Democratic Movement in Belarus

WITNESS: Ms. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya
Belarusian Human Rights Activist and Politician

By Direction of the Chair

To fill out this form online: Either use the tab key to travel through each field or mouse click each line or within blue box. Type in information.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Note: Red boxes with red type will NOT print.

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Europe, Energy, the Environment, and Cyber HEARING

Day Wednesday Date 03/17/2021 Room Cisco Webex

Starting Time 9:30 Ending Time 10:52

Recesses ☐ (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

William R. Keating

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

To select a box, mouse click it, or tab to it and use the enter key to select. Another click on the same box will deselect it.

TITLE OF HEARING:

Women Leading the Way: The Democratic Movement in Belarus

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See Attached

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

Representative Chris Smith

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

Ms. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Testimony

Representative William R. Keating's Photographs for the Record

Representative Brian Fitzpatrick's Addition to the Record

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 10:52

Clear Form

Note: If listing additional witnesses not included on hearing notice, be sure to include title, agency, etc.

Benjamin Cooper
Subcommittee Staff Associate

WHEN COMPLETED: Please print for subcommittee staff director's signature and make at least one copy of the signed form. A signed copy is to be included with the hearing/markup transcript when ready for printing along with a copy of the final meeting notice (both will go into the appendix). The signed original, with a copy of the final meeting notice attached, goes to full committee. An electronic copy of this PDF file may be saved to your hearing folder, if desired.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

EUROPE, ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND CYBER SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	William Keating, MA
X	Abigail Spanberger, VA
X	Susan Wild, PA
X	Albio Sires, NJ
X	Theodore E. Deutch, FL
	David Cicilline, RI
X	Dina Titus, NV
	Dean Phillips, MN
X	Jim Costa, CA
X	Vicente Gonzalez, TX
X	Brad Schneider, IL

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	Brian K. Fitzpatrick, PA
X	Ann Wagner, MO
	Adam Kinzinger, IL
	Brian Mast, FL
X	Dan Meuser, PA
	August Pfluger, TX
	Nicole Malliotakis, NY
	Peter Meijer, MI
X	Claudia Tenney, NY

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Europe, Energy, the Environment, and Cyber (E3C) Subcommittee
Question for the Record from Congressman Smith for Ms. Tsikhanouskaya
March 17, 2021**

Question:

In my capacity as Special Representative for Human Trafficking Issues to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I have interacted with Belarusian officials charged with combatting human trafficking. Despite making some progress in combatting human trafficking by identifying higher numbers of victims, training law enforcement, and convicting sex traffickers for the first time in eight years, Belarus remains a Tier 3 country in the 2020 TIP report from the Department of State due to continued forced labor trafficking.

Specifically, Belarus has continued to declare so-called subbotniks, mandated service days for civil servants, students, and factory workers. Subbotniks force Belarusians to work on farms or clean streets under penalty of fines, loss in premium compensation and subsidized dormitory housing, and lower exam grades. Belarus' use of forced labor not only violates human rights norms but appears also to be – and maybe you could confirm this – a political tool that can be used against those who peacefully speak in opposition to the Belarusian government.

1. Are *subbotniks* a continuation of state-mandated labor seen across much of Eastern Europe in the Communist era, and would you advocate ending *subbotniks* in a post-Lukashenka government?
2. What other steps should be taken to better prevent and prosecute cases of labor trafficking in Belarus?
3. Were you to run for President, would your administration follow the State Department's 2020 recommendation and amend or repeal the penal provisions in sections 193(1), 339, 342, 367, 368, and 369(2), which can be used to impose forced labor on Belarusians with dissenting views?
4. What actions should be taken to improve the quality of government centers' equipment and caregivers so that victims of human trafficking will have an alternative to private shelters? How would one guarantee that child trafficking victims receive adequate service at state facilities?
5. Do you advocate working with the OSCE to address the concerns related to sex and labor trafficking that are outlined in the 2020 TIP report?

Answer:

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya did not submit a response in time for printing.