

# The Journal Times

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**DANIEL COLE, ASSOCIATED PRESS**

Three generations of women from right, Svetlana, Lisa and Ludmilla, who originally fled from Odessa, Ukraine, arrive at the train station in Przemysl, Poland, after crossing the border in Kroszow, Poland, Tuesday. U.N. officials said Tuesday that the Russian onslaught has forced 2 million people to flee Ukraine. Several men with Racine ties are hoping to wait out the invasion in Odessa.

# Safe, but in the path of war

### Ukrainians with ties to Racine discuss survival amid Russian invasion

**RACHEL KUBIK**  
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It was 5 a.m. on Feb. 24 when Igor Tymoshenko woke up to the blaring of air raid sirens in Poltava, Ukraine. He ran to the basement of his apartment.

"We were all saying, 'What's going on? What's happening?'"

Like a lot of Ukrainians, the 32-year-old Tymoshenko didn't actually believe the war would happen, that President Vladimir Putin would actually launch a mass invasion from Russia into Ukraine.

The worldwide response in support of Ukraine is a sign of unity not seen in recent history.

A local couple is among the millions stepping up to support Ukrainians in different ways.

### Helping their 'kids'

For the better part of the past two decades, Caledonia residents Kam and William Buhler have kept in touch with former orphans from Ukraine. The Buhlers also are close with Tymoshenko, who spent the 2005-2006 school year with the Buhlers in Racine as



**SUBMITTED PHOTO**

From left, Kam Buhler, Andrei Yudin, Vyacheslav "Slava" Koval, Mikhail "Misha" Pozhar, Vitalii Potsurai and Peter Panin, the group's translator, smile for the camera at a restaurant in Odessa in 2012.

**"The human life is big valuable, much valuable, than money, than house, than apartment ... I can do anything, I can give all what they need, if war stop. The money, human life and child life is much valuable, it doesn't have a price. Life is non material valuables."**



**Slava Koval, of Odessa, Ukraine**

a foreign exchange student.

For the past 15 years, when the Buhlers talk to their Ukrainian "kids," as Kam calls them, they'd chat about their families, their jobs, their lives. Just catching up.

Now? "We talk about the situation: Where are you now? Are you safe?" said Kam, a native of Hong Kong who has lived in the Racine area since the 1980s. "We are very close. Every day, once you know the news, you're concerned. It's

very close to home to me."

Kam said she feels fortunate that she can connect with her kids. "The phone really help to shorten the distance a lot."

### Starting an overseas connection

In 2006, after visiting an orphanage in Odessa in southern Ukraine, Kam set up her bank account to wire money overseas in order to sponsor five children: Vitalii Potsurai, Mikhail "Misha" Pozhar, Vyacheslav "Slava" Koval, Andrei Yudin and Olga Korotnyan.

Korotnyan has since lost touch. Potsurai, Pozhar and Yudin are still staying in Odessa, which borders the Black Sea. Koval has moved to a village outside of the city. He did not disclose exactly where he is now living for safety reasons, other than to say he is staying at his wife's grandfather's home with family.

"From start of war, they are 24 hours on the line, on the phone, each hours they write me, call me," Koval said of the Buhlers' continued presence, noting the only times they don't talk are when they are sleeping. "Each evening we call each other, try to speak and support each other."

Tymoshenko said he still considers the Buhlers to be part of his family.

Please see **UKRAINE**, Page A4

# Congress backs off plan to cut COVID funds

**MITCHELL SCHMIDT**  
Lee Newspapers

MADISON — Congressional leaders have stripped from an omnibus budget bill a provision that would have cut an estimated \$225 million from Wisconsin's federal coronavirus funding after the measure faced considerable backlash from state leaders, including Gov. Tony Evers.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced Wednesday, hours after the more than 2,700-page Consolidated Appropriations Act was unveiled, that a provision to provide about \$15.8 billion in coronavirus aid — funding



**Pelosi**

announcement came hours after Evers, a Democrat, blasted the proposal, which he estimated would reduce the state's American Rescue Plan Act funding by about \$225 million. State officials were already told last May by the U.S. Treasury Department that

that would have been partially offset by taking back unspent state aid from previous federal allocations — had been cut from the proposal.

The announcement came hours after Evers, a Democrat, blasted the proposal, which he estimated would reduce the state's American Rescue Plan Act funding by about \$225 million. State officials were already told last May by the U.S. Treasury Department that

the state's original \$3.2 billion allocation of federal funds would be reduced to \$2.5 billion and split into two payments. Evers said the reduction in funds unfairly penalizes states like Wisconsin that already received reduced funding, a decision that was based largely on state unemployment rates last year.

"When the American Rescue Plan was signed, Americans — including Wisconsinites — heard the message from federal leaders loud and clear: help is on the way," Evers wrote in a letter to congressional leaders. "On be-

half of the people of Wisconsin, I urge you to reconsider. Further downsizing these investments would impede our state's recovery and would needlessly create uncertainty, potentially putting at risk the progress we have made."

Pelosi said the provision was ultimately removed from the bill after it faced resistance from both Republicans, who wanted the COVID-19 funding to be entirely offset by previously allocated dollars, and Democrats, who fought to keep those funds.

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# Evers calls on Congress to suspend fed gas tax

**ERIC A. JOHNSON**  
Lee Newspapers

With average gas prices in Wisconsin nearing \$4 per gallon after jumping more than 50 cents in the last week, Gov. Tony Evers on March 8 urged the U.S. Congress to act by suspending the federal gas tax.

A Tuesday afternoon check of the GasBuddy.com USA National Gas Station Price Heat Map showed average per gallon gas prices of \$3.939 in Walworth County, \$3.97 in Rock County, \$3.966 in Racine County, \$3.928 in Kenosha County and \$3.925 in Waukesha County, with Milwaukee County having crossed the \$4 threshold at \$4.004.



**Evers**

In a joint letter to U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, U.S. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and U.S. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Evers joined Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, and Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolfe in urging quick passage of The Gas Prices Relief Act of 2022, which would lower gas prices through the end of 2022.

According to the American Automobile Association, the average price of gas in Wisconsin is currently \$3.942 per gallon compared to \$3.377 just one week ago on March 1 and \$2.646 per gallon at this time one year ago. The Gas Prices Relief Act would help bring down gas prices by suspending the federal gas tax, which is 18.4 cents per gallon, until Jan. 1, 2023. Additionally, the Gas Prices Relief

Please see **EVERS**, Page A4

# GOP kills Evers \$150 rebate plan

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**

MADISON — Wisconsin Republicans killed Gov. Tony Evers' election-year \$150 refund proposal Tuesday, ending a special session the Democratic governor called before it ever began.

Evers, who is up for re-election in November, wants to give every Wisconsin taxpayer \$150 from the state's projected \$3.8 billion budget surplus. He called a special legislative session to approve the plan during his State of the State address last month.

Republican leaders in both the Senate and Assembly gavelled the start of the special session and then quickly ended it without debate or any votes.

Evers touted the proposal as a way to help deal with inflation and rapidly rising gas prices. But Republicans dismissed it as an election-year stunt and said they want to hold onto the surplus for the next Legislature, and they hope a Republican governor, to spend.

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# Ukraine

From A1

“They’re very dear to me. They’re worried about the situation,” Tymoshenko said.

## Cutting ties with ‘regular’ life

Koval, 34, reported he is safe and OK, thanks to God and Kam.

He’s been working as a lawyer from home because a lot of in-person court processes stopped due to the war.

Most Ukraine residents are not allowed to leave their homes or turn on lights from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.

Some people have been gathering wood to burn inside their homes as heat. Food shortages are becoming a larger problem nationwide. More than 2 million Ukrainians have fled the country in the last three weeks; it’s the fastest-growing European refugee crisis since World War II.

Tymoshenko works in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. He’s mainly lived in Ukraine as a citizen but has spoken Russian his whole life. He’s always had friend and family ties in Russia — sometimes relationships lasting 20 or more years. Tymoshenko went to school with some Russians during his exchange year.

“Now we don’t have friends in Russia,” Tymoshenko said. “We all consider them to be enemies. They support what Putin is doing to Ukraine. We have this soul connection between us, and you support what your president is doing to Ukraine. Now we are all patriots of Ukraine, ready to fight till the end, it is unbelievable.”

One silver lining to it all, though, Koval said, is every Ukrainian supporting each other. They are cook-

ing food or making clothes for soldiers.

People in Poltava made explosive Molotov cocktails to “greet” Russian soldiers if they invade on foot or in vehicles.

Koval has noticed more people praying and going to church, and criminal activity seems way down — excluding the invasion that has been rife with war crimes, including the bombings of hospitals and orphanages.

“Everybody united for the resistance against Russian aggression, against Russian military soldier and the invasion in Ukraine,” Koval said. “Ukraine change to better ... now everybody wake up, everybody change inside, change to better, change to kindness. We are together and we are like one people, we are complete, we are a team, we are family and we are a good country and we will fight this enemy together.”

## Empty shops, bombings

Ever since the invasions started Feb. 24, stores have been empty.

“A lot of people go to the shop and buy everything,” Koval said. “Shop is empty, no produce, nothing.”

As major cities have been bombed, Poltava doesn’t have anywhere to get supplies from, Tymoshenko said.

Tymoshenko said his city is running out of medicine. His grandmother has asthma and needs an inhaler to breathe. The two went to 20 pharmacies around the city looking for the product, but couldn’t find any.

His grandmother’s breathing issues also don’t allow her to stay in a bomb shelter for very long, putting them both in danger.

Tymoshenko has heard sirens all around the city. Refugees from



SUBMITTED

A store in Poltava, Ukraine, is only lightly stocked with supplies as people have purchased many of the items during the ongoing Russian invasion, which has severely disrupted supply lines and led to shortages of food and medicine.

other cities have also come to Poltava.

“The situation is getting worse and worse,” Tymoshenko said. But comparing to other cities, Poltava, which had a pre-war population of about 284,000, is still safer. But it cannot accept any more refugees. “Poltava is too small to accept this amount of people coming from other cities.”

Koval said he heard two bombs in the air Monday evening right by his apartment. They hit within 10 minutes of each other. They were so loud, his ears stopped working, he said.

“It was very, very, big, loud and high noise like explosion,” Koval said.

Three people in Odessa died because a rocket destroyed an apartment, Koval said. However, he said his No. 1 focus is not the safety of his apartment.

“The human life is big valuable, much valuable, than money, than house, than apartment,” he said. “I can do anything, I can give all what they need, if war stop. The money, human life and child life is much valuable, it doesn’t have a price. Life is non material valuables.”

## A helping hand

Kam has been following the news closely, watching for Ukraine updates.

“The situation is getting worse than I thought actually,” she said.

Bill called the Russian war on Ukraine a “terrible, terrible situation.”

“Before, I had a rough idea where Ukraine is. Now I know its boundaries very well,” Bill said. “It’s a situation that’s very difficult to figure out what you should do as a country to step in and protect other countries.”

Kam has been continuing to wire money to some of her Ukraine connections, especially as the war is ongoing. Kam helped Koval pay for produce last week.

“They could always use some extra financial help,” Kam said.

Kam’s been to Ukraine a few times, the last time being in 2012, and noticed its peacefulness.

“I don’t know how to imagine, I don’t know what it look like now,” Kam said. “Talking to my kids, it sound terrible because of the bombing.”

Kam said the only thing she wants for Ukraine right now is peace and that everything goes back to normal.

## U.S. joining in?

Tymoshenko said a lot of locals hope the war won’t be long — most are hoping it’ll be another month or so before it’s over.

“We’re hoping it’s going to end as soon as possible,” Tymoshenko said. “We are actually hoping our western partners are going to help us to pressure Russia to stop this thing.”

He watches U.S. news and sees that most Americans’ concerns lie with the skyrocketing gas prices.

“There is no time to think about gas prices, if it’s \$5 or \$6 per gallon, there’s someone else’s life (in danger) on the other side of the world,” Tymoshenko said. “It will not stop. There is no time to argue whether you do it or you don’t do it.”

Koval also hopes the U.S. joins in on the efforts to protect Ukraine’s borders. He said he believes if other countries don’t join in against Russia, they might be the next victims.

“This is stupid war and this war is dead end,” Koval said. “Ukraine can get victory, Ukraine can win. This is destiny of Ukraine, to be forced avengers.”

# Evers

From A1

Act would require the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Treasury to monitor the program and take appropriate enforcement actions in order to ensure oil and gas companies pass saving from the gas tax suspension onto consumers, rather than using it to

increase their profits.

The legislation would also ensure solvency of the federal Highway Trust Fund by requiring the U.S. Department of Treasury to transfer general fund dollars to offset revenue lost from the suspended gas tax. This provision would protect the Highway Trust Fund’s ability to finance construction and maintenance projects on roads,

bridges and highways under the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

“From rising costs in grocery store aisles and at gas pumps to affording the costs of childcare and caregiving, I know folks and families are feeling the pressure of everyday costs going up,” Evers said. “Wisconsinites can’t wait for relief—they need help

today. I’m urging Congress to find common ground and take action now to help lower gas prices so we can make sure families, farmers and small businesses can make ends meet.”

The governor’s letter comes after the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics recently reported the national inflation rate had reached its highest point in four decades.

The governor also recently announced a plan to use a portion of the state’s \$3.8 billion projected surplus to provide a \$600 surplus refund to every Wisconsin family of four,

provide targeted relief for childcare and caregiver costs, and invest in education while holding the line on property taxes.

After Republicans in the Legislature indicated they wanted Wisconsinites to wait for these tax dollars to be returned until the next biennial budget is passed in summer 2023, Evers signed Executive Order No. 156, calling the Legislature to meet in a special session on March 8 to take up his plan. The special session lasted only a couple seconds, with the Senate quickly gaveling in and gaveling out.

The Gas Prices Relief Act

would suspend the 18.4 cents per gallon federal gas tax until Jan. 1, 2023; require the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Treasury to monitor the program to ensure oil and gas companies pass along savings at the pump to consumers; encourage the secretary to take appropriate enforcement actions to ensure consumers see these savings; and maintain the integrity of the Highway Trust Fund by requiring the U.S. Department of Treasury to make general fund transfers to keep the Highway Trust Fund solvent.

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# Congress

From A1

Pelosi said a vote on the revised bill was still planned for Wednesday, as it includes “emergency funding for Ukraine and urgent funding to meet the needs of America’s families.”

“It is heartbreaking to remove the COVID funding, and we must continue to fight for urgently needed COVID assistance, but unfortunately that will not be

included in this bill,” Pelosi said in a statement.

The use of federal COVID-19 funds has become a recurring point of pressure between Evers and the GOP-controlled Legislature, primarily in recent years as the federal government pumped billions of stimulus dollars into the state to help address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Republicans have made multiple failed efforts to secure control over those dollars or dictate the use of the

federal funds. Currently, the governor has sole discretion over how federal funds are spent.

Legislative Republicans earlier this year passed a constitutional amendment, SJR 84, that would prohibit the governor from allocating any federal dollars without first securing legislative approval.

Such a measure would need to pass the Senate and Assembly in two successive sessions before going to voters in a referendum. The governor cannot veto a constitutional amendment.

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