

—Slug:.....COMM-0852.bratt.WWAC\_Ukraine  
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—For section.....News  
—Format.....News - byline and dateline  
—Dateline.....Brattleboro  
—Article Number:.....43062

**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Juggled the paragraphs about the packages to make the story land better. Also found some dispute over the casualties. Not that anyone will care, and the actual numbers are beside the point, but I gently added some ambiguity and some attribution.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 After four years of war, Ukraine stands firm

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 In visit to Brattleboro, Lithuanian Ambassador Gediminas

3 Varvuolis talks about his nation's efforts to help its besieged

4 neighbor

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

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6 As the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of

7 Ukraine approaches, stories about the largest and deadliest

8 conflict in Europe since World War II are rarely seen in daily

9 news reports in U.S. media.

10 But, for one night in Brattleboro, people remembered  
11 this fight that began Feb. 24, 2022, and why it matters.

12 "There is a certain amount of 'war fatigue' in the U.S.  
13 and Europe," said Gediminas Varvuolis, ambassador of the  
14 Republic of Lithuania to the United States.

15 But Brattleboro, he said, is a place "that cares a lot about  
16 justice and truth. The fact that you are all here really symbolizes  
17 that there are still a lot of dedicated people in the United States in  
18 places like this."

19 Varvuolis came to Brattleboro to speak to some 80  
20 people at a Feb. 5 fundraiser for Ukraine co-hosted by the  
21 Windham World Affairs Council, Saxtons Distillery, and Kerry  
22 Secret, honorary consul of Lithuania to Vermont.

23 "This is our fourth fundraiser we've had to do because,  
24 ultimately, it is necessary," said Christian Stromberg, the  
25 distillery's founder and owner. "It's a nice reminder to those who  
26 are fighting for an independent Ukraine that, at least this little  
27 town in Vermont, we haven't forgotten."

28 "When given the opportunity, people show up for what is  
29 really important," said Secret.

30 Varvuolis said the people of Ukraine, after four years of  
31 all-out Russian aggression, "they have been defending themselves  
32 so bravely and courageously."

33 They have also been defending the people of Europe and  
34 "all of us, in the free world," he said.

35 "They understand what it is to fight for freedom,"  
36 Varvuolis said. "All of our values are based on freedom and  
37 democracy. And, in Lithuania, we have a strong feeling for what's  
38 going on in Ukraine."

39 Lithuania and its Baltic Sea neighbors Estonia and Latvia,  
40 were under Russian control from the end of World War II in 1945  
41 to the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Varvuolis said Russia  
42 still holds a grudge against Ukraine and the Baltic states turning  
43 away from them and turning toward Europe and becoming

44 independent, prosperous, and more democratic countries in the  
45 process.

46 “For us, it’s a very internal matter,” he said. “Ukraine is  
47 resisting, and we, as Lithuanians, are to trying support them.”

## 48 **Stepping up**

49 With its support amounting to nearly \$1.9 billion,  
50 Lithuania is among the top five European Union (EU) countries in  
51 terms of contributions.

52 The country has delivered more than 300 generators and  
53 more than 700 transformers to Ukraine since the start of the war.  
54 This includes two powerful autotransformers capable of  
55 supplying energy to hundreds of thousands of households to help  
56 make up for the energy infrastructure that has been destroyed in  
57 Russian aerial attacks.

58 Varvuolis said Lithuania has also become a major trans-  
59 shipment point for liquified natural gas (LNG) from the United  
60 States. These tankers have become critically important, since  
61 Russia has destroyed 60% of Ukraine’s gas production capacity in  
62 the past year.

63 “The energy sector is under huge strain,” Varvuolis said.  
64 “The most terrible thing is that these [Russian] attacks are  
65 deliberate. They know that after what they do that people will  
66 freeze. People will suffer.

67 “I don’t know what you can have on your mind if you  
68 adopt this kind of tactic — that if you cannot win on the front  
69 line, you hit the rear so people suffer and you feel like you’ve  
70 achieved something,” Varvuolis said. “I don’t know how you  
71 would qualify this mentality.”

72 Varvuolis also cautioned that Russia’s aggression is not  
73 confined to Ukraine and that it is actively “testing the boundaries  
74 and preparedness of other countries in the region” through hybrid  
75 attacks ranging from random drone incursions to sabotage  
76 attempts to disruptions of cyber infrastructure.

77 “We’ve been dealing with this for a long time,” he said.

## The butcher's bill

The human cost of this war has been considerable.

According to figures by the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) and the UK's Ministry of Defense, more than 1.2 million Russian soldiers have been killed or wounded over the past four years, with an additional 60,000 missing.

The AFU does not release its official casualty figures, and they are in dispute. *The Wall Street Journal* reported last fall that about 80,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed and around 400,000 have been wounded. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has disputed those statistics, claiming in February that 46,000 soldiers have perished in the war and that 390,000 have been wounded.

As for civilian deaths, figures from the United Nations show about 15,000 Ukrainians and around 400 Russians have been killed. Nearly 41,000 Ukrainians have been wounded in Russian attacks, with another 16,000 held captive, according to the Ukrainian government.

"Sooner or later, the active phase of the war will stop, there will be some kind of truce, and then we need [to help] rebuild the country," Varvuolis said. "The extent of damage that has been inflicted on Ukraine is beyond imagination."

While he described Ukrainians as a resilient people and said that they've managed to keep their economy afloat during the invasion, it will take a massive effort by the EU to get Ukraine back to where it was before 2022.

## 'You need partners and allies'

Varvuolis said Lithuania strongly supports Ukraine joining the EU "sooner rather than later, hopefully by 2030." He also hopes to see Ukraine have the same type of security arranged that Lithuania has with the U.S. through NATO.

Lithuania has hosted U.S. troops since it joined NATO, and Varvuolis said that "it's a nice deal."

111            “We are happy to host them and offer whatever they  
112 need. Having them is truly, truly essential,” he said. “One reason  
113 why Russia will never dare to cross the NATO line is because of  
114 the presence of U.S. troops in the countries that border Russia.  
115 This is the best guarantee that there will be no hot war between  
116 NATO and Russia.”

117            At the same time, Varvuolis said his country realizes that  
118 all European nations have to take on greater responsibility and  
119 upgrade its military capabilities, especially given the increasing  
120 sentiment by the current U.S. administration that it can go it  
121 alone.

122            “There has to be honest burden sharing,” he said.

123            “It’s important for NATO to stay united and for this  
124 transatlantic bond to continue,” Varvuolis said. “It is not in the  
125 benefit of the United States to go it alone. The United States will  
126 need allies. The world is so interconnected, and you need  
127 partners and allies.”

128            However, if the U.S. were to walk away from NATO,  
129 Varvuolis said that “NATO would no longer exist. It’s that  
130 simple.” At the same, he said he believes that it would never  
131 happen.

132            He also believes that the war will end only if there are  
133 security guarantees for Ukraine that are backed by Western allies,  
134 and he also suspects that Russia can’t be relied upon to keep its  
135 word.

136            “You can’t get guarantees from your torturer and  
137 occupier,” Varvuolis said.

138            When asked what gives him hope for Ukraine, he said it  
139 was “the Ukrainian people. Young Ukrainians. Brave Ukrainians.  
140 The level of resilience of Ukrainian society.”

141            “If human beings can overcome such strains as  
142 Ukrainians are doing these days and still function, this gives me  
143 hope — that human nature can go far if it has a purpose,”  
144 Varvuolis said. “And they have a purpose. They are fighting for  
145 freedom and independence.”

## Care packages for the troops

146

147 Immediately after the talk, siblings Secrest and Stromberg  
148 hosted a solidarity cocktail hour and bonfire called “Warmth in  
149 the Cold: An Evening for Ukraine.”

150 Together, they hoped to raise \$10,000 to send 200 winter  
151 care packages to Ukrainian soldiers through Blue/Yellow USA, a  
152 nonprofit initiative to provide aid to Ukraine.

153 Those packages will include essentials, requested by  
154 front-line troops, include a mini cookstove, rechargeable hand  
155 warmers, wool socks, and fleece mittens and gloves, along with  
156 instant coffee and snacks like protein bars and beef jerky.

157 And, Secrest said, “because a touch of sweetness can lift  
158 the spirit, each package also includes a piece of Vermont maple  
159 candy — a taste of Vermont kindness from our community to  
160 theirs.”

161 A message of encouragement will also be printed and  
162 included in the package, so a phone translation app can bring  
163 those words to life.

164 Monetary donations for winter care packages can be  
165 made through the end of March at [bit.ly/851-ukraine](https://bit.ly/851-ukraine), or  
166 [lithuaniavermont.com](https://lithuaniavermont.com).

167 “When we talk about soldiers in Ukraine, you need to  
168 remember that two-thirds to three-fourths of them were civilians  
169 like you and me before the war,” said Secrest. “Imagine you were  
170 a teacher and now you’re sitting in a cold single trench on the  
171 front line in –20 degree weather.”

172 The packages will be “filled with essentials to keep them  
173 alive and give them a little bit of hope,” she said.

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