

This interview was conducted by Marta Farion on May 26, 2020

Interview of Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi

Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi represents the Illinois' 8th Congressional District which covers the northwestern suburbs of Chicago, where many Ukrainian-Americans live, Schaumburg, Palatine, Arlington Heights, Elk Grove Village, Elgin, Hoffman Estates, Carpentersville, East Dundee, and others. He serves on the House Oversight Committee and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

Raja Krishnamoorthi was born in New Delhi , India . His family moved to Buffalo, New York when he was three months old. As immigrants, the family went through economic hardships and focused on education. In 1980 the family moved to Peoria, Illinois, where Raja's father became a professor at Bradley University. Raja was a valedictorian of his graduating class at Richwoods High School . He then attended Princeton University , where he earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and then received a Juris Doctor degree from Harvard Law School .

Thank you Congressman for accepting this invitation for an interview. Faced with the highly charged political climate in Washington, can the bipartisan support of sanctions against Russia continue? Will you continue to support sanctions against Russia?

The short answer is yes. I have and will continue to support sanctions against Russia and Russian leaders for the invasion and occupation of Crimea and its invasion of Ukraine. For example, in January 2019 I voted in favor of a House-passed joint resolution of disapproval in an effort to block the Trump Administration from lifting sanctions on a Russian oligarch with ties to Vladimir Putin.

But to address your question a little deeper- unfortunately, it does appear we are at an unprecedented time in American history where opposition to Russian aggression, which is diametrically at odds with our core democratic values, is not a position supported by all federal elected officials. I do believe that the Ukrainian-American community is counting on federal elected officials to stand up for them and for democracy, and I am committed to doing so for years to come.

Thus far, the US has condemned Russia's occupation of Crimea as an illegal act. Will this position continue in light of the apparent friendship between the presidents of the US and Russia? Can the president lift sanctions without the approval of Congress?

This is an important question. In short, how sanctions are lifted depends on how sanctions were first implemented. In other words, if sanctions were implemented by Congressional legislation, then it will require Congressional legislation to overturn those sanctions. But if sanctions were implemented through Presidential Executive Orders, then the President does reserve the constitutional authority to reverse the executive order and effectively unilaterally lift the sanctions. In this case, Congress could still theoretically enact congressional legislation overriding the President's action (but acquiring the votes necessary to override the will of the President is historically very challenging, especially in the current political climate).

As it pertains to sanctions against Russia for its annexation and occupation of Crimea, it is important to note that these sanctions were first imposed by President Obama through a series of Executive Orders in December 2014. While the current President does possess significant power to overturn previously imposed sanctions, I am confident that keeping up the public pressure and raising awareness about these issues makes a significant difference. That's why your work, through the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, is so instrumental in shaping public policy outcomes to protect American allies.

For Ukraine and the countries of Eastern and Central Europe and the Balkans, American support of NATO and EU is a matter of national security. With the US retreat from these institutions and our allies, there is confusion whether America will defend these countries against Russian attacks. What is your perspective on these issues?

I believe it is extremely important that the United States do everything in its power to protect our alliances from Russian aggression. In fact, as a member of the House Intelligence Committee, I have authored and passed into law legislation that addresses this particular important issue.

In December of 2019, my bipartisan legislation, the Keeping Russian Entrapments Minimal and Limiting Intelligence Networks (KREMLIN) Act, which I co-led with Congressman Chris Stewart (R-UT), passed Congress and was signed into law by President Trump. This law requires the Director of National Intelligence to produce three intelligence assessments on the political intentions of Vladimir Putin's regime in the wake of its attempts to sabotage elections across the world. These assessments would address 1) the intentions of Russian political leadership against NATO allies, 2) potential responses to an enlarged United States or NATO presence in eastern Europe, and 3) potential areas where the Russian government could exploit weaknesses and divisions amongst the governments of Western adversaries.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the Donbas, more than 14,000 were killed by Russian military and their surrogates, more than a million people have been forced to flee their homes to the west of Ukraine. The Ukrainian-American community wants assurances that the US will continue to support Ukraine. Will you support military aid to Ukraine so that Ukrainians can defend themselves?

Yes. As I stated as a Member of the Intelligence Committee, the United States is the most powerful ally Ukraine has, and I believe it is instrumental that we provide them with the necessary resources to defend themselves. In fact, I questioned senior members of the Trump Administration, including Dr. Fiona Hill and former Ambassador William Taylor, who stated their grave concern that our relationship with Ukraine is increasingly becoming a political issue rather than an important national security issue. I agree that supporting Ukraine should be seen as a national security issue, not just a political one, and will continue to support military aid to Ukraine.

Will you support sending more US ships to the Black Sea as part of the NATO exercises with allies and partners to show a strong resolve to Black Sea security? Our communities are concerned about the Russian navy fleet's

massive presence in the Black Sea, and its ramifications for Ukraine's security and also for US interests in the Middle East and Europe.

Yes. In January 2019, the U.S. sent naval ship Fort McHenry to the Black Sea, the first ship to visit since Russia seized Ukrainian vessels in the Kerch Strait in November 2018. The Navy stated "USS Fort McHenry's transit into the Black Sea reaffirms our collective resolve to Black Sea security and enhances our strong relationships with our NATO allies and partners in the region." I am in firm agreement with this sentiment and will support policy initiatives that strengthen Black Sea security.

As previously mentioned, I authored successful legislation (The KREMLIN Act- H.R. 1617) which instructed the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) to prepare and submit multiple intelligence assessments related to Russian aggression against NATO allies. I am also a proud original cosponsor of H.Res. 291, a House resolution which recognizes and laments the vital role NATO plays in enhancing U.S. national security. Simply put, NATO is a critical partner and European ally in our collective efforts to counter ongoing Russian aggression and interference.

Support for strengthening Ukraine's civil society is even more important now that Russia is using hybrid warfare, disinformation, control of media, and cyber attacks. Will you support financing for USAID programs in Ukraine for civil society programs, including education, development of small and medium business, energy diversity, land reform?

During my time in Congress, I have supported each SFOPs (State and Foreign Operations) Appropriations bill, which includes robust funding to support USAID programs in Ukraine. I am also a proud cosponsor of H.R. 2023, the Protect European Energy Security Act, legislation which requires the State Department to report on its efforts to promote energy security in Ukraine and the EU. This includes outlining efforts to decrease dependence on Russian energy sources in an effort to address energy diversity, security, and land reform.

You were a child when you came to the United States with your family from India and you attained the American Dream becoming a US congressman. What was the main reason for your success in America as an immigrant?

I certainly owe a lot to my parents who immigrated to the United States when I was very young in search for a better life for my family. In fact, growing up, my father, who at the time was on his way to achieving a fulfilling career as an engineering professor, told me I could be anything that I wanted to be... I could be a mechanical engineer, a civil engineer, or an electrical engineer!

Jokes aside, Marta, I do believe my family's story is emblematic of the American dream, and is a story that so many hardworking people in the Ukrainian-American community could relate to. When I was young, my family experienced times of financial struggle, and for a brief period participated in the federal food assistance program. However, through hard-work and determination, in addition to practicing good values like treating others with respect and giving back to the community, we persevered. Today, my father is a professor at Bradley University, my brother is a

physician at UChicago Medicine, and I am honored to serve the people of Illinois 8 th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Congressman, I noticed that your name is not on the roster of the Congressional Caucus on Ukraine. Will you become a member and join the Ukrainian Caucus?

Absolutely, and thank you for bringing this caucus to my attention. As of this week, I am now officially a member of the bipartisan Congressional Caucus on Ukraine.

During this Covid19 pandemic, like the entire nation, our community is worried about healthcare protection, unemployment and economic upheaval. Our community has a large proportion of doctors, nurses, and medical personnel working as first responders, and small business owners, truck drivers, and independent contractors. What can be done so that financial assistance goes to those who really need it?

This is an extremely important question. For a full breakdown on actions I've taken to support medical and healthcare workers, small business owners, and independent contractors, I would encourage your readers to visit my website at **krishnamoorthi.house.gov** to sign up for my e-newsletter or follow me on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to receive periodic updates on my activities in Washington, D.C.

To provide a few anecdotes of my work on these important issues, I helped craft and voted in favor of the CARES Act, the recently enacted law which appropriated \$200 Billion for hospitals, health care workers, and health research. Now, I am leading the bipartisan effort in Congress to ensure we provide mental health resources for our healthcare workers, and I helped secure key provisions in the House-passed HEROES Act which strengthened investments in these critical programs.

In addition, the CARES Act legislation authorized the creation of the Paycheck Protection Program, which I have supported funding to the tune of nearly \$1 trillion in order to provide emergency relief to small businesses across the country. Importantly, this program facilitates loans to independent contractors, something that was unprecedented with SBA programs prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the PPP program, as well as the EIDL program, are far from perfect, I have continued to work with constituent businesses and individuals to ensure all eligible entities can receive the relief they desperately need and deserve. On this point, I encourage your readers to contact my office should you need assistance with a specific COVID related issue.

However, my work is not explicitly confined to drafting and passing legislation. As Chairman of the House Oversight Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy, I have dedicated a significant amount of work to investigating problems related to the COVID pandemic. For example, I led the investigation into serology "antibody" testing, and prompted FDA to revamp its policies to clear the market of over 100 fraudulent tests that would put American public health in jeopardy. I am also using my leadership position to spark reforms in numerous other areas of public health and economic interest, including but not limited to testing, PPE, travel insurance

refunds, COVID consumer scams, airport screenings and security, and effective vaccine development.

Thank you, Congressman, for this extensive interview. Best wishes in your further work.