News



The U.S. Capitol is seen in Washington Aug. 15, 2023. The U.S. House approved $95 billion in foreign aid for Ukraine, Israel and other U.S. allies in a bipartisan vote April 20, 2024. House Speaker Mike Johnson supported the package despite threats from far-right lawmakers to force a vote on his speakership. (OSV News/Kevin Wurm, Reuters)

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Washington, D.C. — April 22, 2024
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A bipartisan coalition the U.S. House of Representatives, led by House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., voted April 20 to approve a $95 billion package providing aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan and other U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific region, over the objections of some far-right lawmakers who indicated they would attempt to remove Johnson from his role over the deal.

A large bipartisan coalition of Democrats and Republicans voted in favor of the package despite objections from some Democrats about providing Israel further aid amid concerns about civilian casualties in Gaza, and objections from some Republicans to providing aid to Ukraine as it fends off Russian President Vladimir Putin's unprovoked invasion of that country.

The bills would need to be approved by the Senate and signed by President Joe Biden, who has signaled his support for the measures. Its passage would provide aid that supporters say is critical to allies as they fend off conflict. The Senate is expected to vote on the package as early as April 23.

But a trio of far-right House Republicans have signaled they intend to make a motion to "vacate the chair," or force a vote to oust the speaker, due to their objections to the aid and cooperation with Democrats.

As of April 21, Republican Reps. Marjorie Taylor-Greene of Georgia, Thomas Massie of Kentucky and Paul Gosar of Arizona have all said they support a motion to vacate.

In the event such an effort were to come up for a vote, a slim Republican majority would mean that Johnson would need to win some Democratic votes in order to keep the speaker's gavel and avoid a second historic ouster this Congress, just months after he replaced former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who has since resigned from the House after a short tenure in the job.

Johnson wrote in a post on X, formerly Twitter, that "The House has worked its will."

"We gave our members a voice, provided them with a better process, and ultimately sent a much better policy to the Senate," he said.

Supporters of providing aid to Ukraine say it is in the interest of U.S. national security to help that country fend off Russia's invasion and to prevent the risk of emboldening Putin. Opponents, including the far-right lawmakers who stalled the deal, argue those funds would be better spent on domestic pursuits.

In a post on X, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wrote, "I am grateful to the United States House of Representatives, both parties, and personally Speaker Mike Johnson for the decision that keeps history on the right track."

"Democracy and freedom will always have global significance and will never fail as long as America helps to protect it," Zelenskyy wrote. "The vital U.S. aid bill passed today by the House will keep the war from expanding, save thousands and thousands of lives, and help both of our nations to become stronger. Just peace and security can only be attained through strength."

"We hope that bills will be supported in the Senate and sent to President Biden's desk," Zelenskyy added. "Thank you, America!"

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Biden said in a statement following the vote that "members of both parties in the House voted to advance our national security interests and send a clear message about the power of American leadership on the world stage."

"At this critical inflection point, they came together to answer history's call, passing urgently-needed national security legislation that I have fought for months to secure," Biden said.

"This package will deliver critical support to Israel and Ukraine; provide desperately needed humanitarian aid to Gaza, Sudan, Haiti, and other locations impacted by conflicts and natural disasters around the world; and bolster security and stability in the Indo-Pacific. It comes at a moment of grave urgency, with Israel facing unprecedented attacks from Iran, and Ukraine under continued bombardment from Russia," he continued. "I want to thank Speaker Johnson, Leader Jeffries, and the bipartisan coalition of lawmakers in the House who voted to put our national security

first. I urge the Senate to quickly send this package to my desk so that I can sign it into law and we can quickly send weapons and equipment to Ukraine to meet their urgent battlefield needs."

During House debate on the Israel aid, Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., co-chair of the Israel Allies Caucus and a longtime Catholic lawmaker, said, "the United States must make absolutely clear in both word and deed, not just today, but every day — and without equivocation — that we stand with Israel."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said in an April 20 statement the House vote was "six months in the making."

"The Senate now stands ready to take the next step," Schumer said, adding Democrats and Republicans in his chamber "locked in an agreement enabling the Senate to finish work on the supplemental with the first vote on Tuesday afternoon."

"Today's vote is a watershed moment for the defense of democracy, and I applaud the House for stepping up. Our allies across the world have been waiting for this moment, and I assure them the Senate is on the path to pass the same bill soon," Schumer added. "I thank Speaker Johnson and Leader Jeffries for working together to do the right thing for our country. I know it was a difficult road, but the House is on the right side of history for approving this bill. As I said, the House has acted, now it's the Senate's turn, and the finish line is now in sight. To our friends in Ukraine, to our allies in NATO, to our allies in Israel, and to civilians around the world in need of aid: rest assured America will deliver yet again."

European allies have for several months called on the U.S. to resupply Ukraine's forces with ammunition for the sake of their collective security; at the same time, Catholic agencies reported persecution in parts of Ukraine under Russian occupation.

Ukraine has reported more than 130,365 war crimes committed by Russia to date in Ukraine since February 2022. As part of its invasion, Russia has cracked down on religious communities in Ukraine, damaging or destroying more than 600 houses of worship and religious structures from various faiths. It has also imprisoned, tortured and killed clergy and suppressed expressions of faith, said reports.

"Ukrainians are very grateful to people of goodwill in the global community, and in a special way to Americans who are in solidarity with (Ukrainians') valiant struggle for God-given dignity,'' Metropolitan Archbishop Borys A. Gudziak of the Archeparchy of

Philadelphia, head of Ukrainian Catholics in the U.S., told OSV News. He added that "anything that keeps Russia from advancing in Ukraine is to be welcomed," since such support represents "a defense of life, liberty, and our freedom of conscience."