

WRITING SAMPLE



The Ohio Statehouse in Columbus, Ohio, Jan. 21, 2024. Photo by Jack Tatham | The Post

NEWS

Ohio politicians, student senators push against restrictive transgender youth law

By Olivia Gilliland

January 30, 2024 | 11:43pm EST

On Jan. 24, the Ohio Senate voted to override Gov. Mike DeWine's veto against Ohio House Bill 68. The bill limits access to essential healthcare needs for transgender youth, including restricting transgender minors from receiving gender-affirming care and preventing transgender girls from taking part in girls' and women's sports.

With a Republican supermajority in the statehouse, Dewine was expected to follow his Republican legislature by signing the bill. Despite his veto, the decision was ~~overruled~~ by a 65-28 vote in the Ohio House and a 24-8 in the Ohio Senate, and will take effect April 23.

The bill will restrict transgender minors from puberty blockers, hormone therapy and genital or non-genital gender reassignment surgery. However, the bill includes a grandfather clause allowing trans people who are already receiving care to continue to do so.

Arienne Childrey, a democratic politician and transgender woman is running for Ohio State Representative for the 84th district. Her campaign website said she is running for office for all people.

She described her experiences with gender-affirming care and the ability for her to access these resources.

“Gender-affirming care not only changed my life, it not only saved my life, but it actually made me feel like I had a life worth living here,” she said.

Childrey is running against Angela King, an incumbent Republican house member who co-sponsored Ohio’s drag ban bill, House Bill 245 – which prohibits certain adult cabaret performances, including drag queen shows.

“I will tell you as somebody, who is dedicated to staying here and fighting ... all the kids, all of the youth don't have the ability to fight for themselves, I do and I will ... But for those of us that can stay an fight, not only should we, I think we have an obligation to do so,” Childrey said.

Childrey said the effects of the legislation may make people of the trans community feel isolated and excluded in Ohio.

“I think that adults need to keep in mind that, despite what they might think, when they speak, our youth are listening,” she said. “(The bill) gives a signal to youth that are not trans ... that there is something wrong, not something different, something wrong (with transgender people).”

Micah McCarey, director of Ohio University’s LGBT Center, said he is not allowed to comment on pending legislation.

Student Senate LGBTQIA+ Commissioner Willow Downard, who is a transgender student, said the commission is working to make gender-affirming care resources more available in the LGBT Center.

She said some people may be reluctant to go into the center for one reason or another, but she and the rest of the commission are working to make it a more accessible area.

“A lot of what we do is advocacy-based,” she said. “Part of what we also do is work with the school body to enforce change on campus to be more inclusive and generally better with the community”

Downard suggested that finding an intentional community, both in-person and offline, can benefit students looking to explore their identity or get involved with advocacy.

You can still meet the people in the community and talk to them and see what you can do yourself to help them in the position that you're in," she said.

Student Senate Governmental Affairs Commissioner Dan Gordillo said he recommends students who are disappointed with a piece of legislation, including HB 68, to go to the Student Senate's office to get help getting in contact with and representative for the Ohio legislature and voice these concerns.

"I'm more than willing to help you find who your legislators are so you can voice your opinion directly," he said.

Since the bill directly affects transgender minors, Gordillo said it probably won't affect OU students, but it will affect those in Athens County.

Despite its passing, the bill faces legal action from the American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio, or ACLU, and strong opposition from democratic leaders and constituents, according to an ACLU press release.

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Cutler Hall sits on the edge of College Green in Athens, Aug. 25, 2022. Photo by Zoe Cranfill | The Post

NEWS

Diversity scholarships remain in review from Ohio Attorney General interpretation

By Olivia Gilliland and Donovan Hunt

February 28, 2024 | 10:37pm EST

Ohio University is reviewing criteria in gift agreements, which can affect students of diverse backgrounds, in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling prohibiting affirmative action policies in college admissions last June. A university spokesperson said OU's actions take into account advice sent to them from other experts in higher education and communication from Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost.

Faculty in the Journalism School have spoken out against the university's decision to pause gift agreements, according to a previous Post report.

According to a university news release, the purpose of the review is to identify gift agreements that can have their language revised. OU is pausing affected scholarships that represent a "small but important subset" of annual awards. During this review, OU has decided that a few scholarships will continue.

The Harvard case only mentioned race-based admissions and mentioned scholarships once in passing. According to Bethany McCorkle, who was quoted in a report by the Statehouse News Bureau, Yost told university leaders in a call in late January that compliance under the Harvard case includes scholarships.

Yost sent a letter in June stating that universities must not utilize race-conscious admissions following the SCOTUS case. He also wrote that citizens are empowered to sue state actors who “violate their constitutional rights,” and employees of institutions will not be entitled to qualified immunity if they are litigated on race-conscious admissions.

“Although the Court did not expressly prohibit race-based scholarships, it indicated that ‘eliminating racial discrimination’ means eliminating all of it,” McCorkle wrote in an email published by the Statehouse News Bureau. “Race-based scholarships discriminate on the basis of race in awarding benefits. Therefore, it would follow that such programs are unconstitutional.”

While the university has officially confirmed scholarships like the John Newtown Templeton Scholarship and the Appalachian and Urban Scholars program will continue into Fall 2024, Andrew Alexander, an alum of the Scripps School of Journalism, set up a scholarship with his wife Beverly, is unsure if his scholarship, the Andrew Alexander Scholarship, will continue.

He said if OU decided his scholarship could not continue to have a preference for people of diverse backgrounds, he would find a way to offer the scholarship privately to bypass the university.

“These types of scholarships are helpful in countering racial discrimination in society,” Alexander said. “From the standpoint of journalism, they're important because if we have diversity amongst students, graduates will have more diverse newsrooms when they get hired, and when newsrooms are diverse, news coverage is more accurate.”

Larry Neumeister, a journalist who attended Ohio University in the late '70s and early '80s and covers the Manhattan federal court for the Associated Press, helped establish the Clarence Page Scholarship for African American Students of Journalism in 2019. He said he had intended the scholarship to go to Black students, but he was told race-specific verbiage could not be used.

Initially, OU suggested going to the NAACP or other outside organizations to set it up privately. However, Neumeister had been told any large scholarship donation through the school would be matched for 50 cents for every dollar.

“I thought, ‘Well, it's almost discriminatory for me to take it to a place somewhere else ... where it won't get that money that scholarships maybe more geared toward white people would get,’” Neumeister said. “The population that the scholarship is intended to serve should not be discriminated against by not getting access to some of that matching money.”

Neumeister said to work around the race-specific language, he complied with requirements but took advantage of the university's offer to name it anything he wanted.

Associate Professor of Political Science Vincent Jungkunz said the university reviewing these scholarships to comply with Yost's guidance demonstrates a backlash against diversity, equity and inclusion efforts in Republican policies.

"If the Harvard decision becomes a precedent that is applied to scholarships, then (the removal of diversity scholarships) is more consequential than the Harvard decision for students of color," Jungkunz said.

According to the previous Post report, some members of the School of Journalism scholarship committee have decided to abstain from voting on scholarship recommendations because they are worried they will not be protected from litigation.

Beyond legal action, Jungkunz said he is concerned the removal of diversity scholarships will affect students' livelihoods and education experience.

"Scholarship is so important ... The relationship between race and socioeconomic status, the ability to pay for college is going to be much more difficult," Jungkunz said. "That's where it's going to be really consequential for students from these various diverse backgrounds."

Jungkunz said there are a few options the university can take to continue to offer these scholarships. One is the pool and match system.

Pooling and matching puts all scholarship donations into a pool and distributes them based on merit. The source of the money and the student receiving the scholarship are only connected after the university conducts a race-neutral review.

Jungkunz said Chief Justice John Roberts keeps the door open on race-based admissions in the wording of the Harvard case. He said the case stated universities cannot give any boost to people of diverse races, but applicants can write a narrative about how race impacted their lives in a meaningful way. He said the same reasoning can be used for scholarships if they are based on the Harvard case.

While there are growing concerns about the potential for legal actions toward faculty members, Jungkunz said he was unsure how the courts would react to a case like this.

"I don't think that individual faculty who sit on a committee and process these things would likely face any kind of legal action," Jungkunz said. "What would be more likely is that ... the division at the university who deals with scholarships ... would be sued."

Jungkunz said because Yost's letter threatens litigation against faculty, it could bankrupt them if they are held liable. "It puts a shadow of legal jeopardy upon a lot of people," Jungkunz said.



New Leaf Market in Nelsonville. Provided by New Leaf Marketplace.

NEWS

New Leaf Justice Enterprise offers Athens County residents affordable housing options

By Olivia Gilliland

April 9, 2024 | 11:37pm EDT

Athens County's newest housing nonprofit, New Leaf Justice Enterprise, strives to provide economic justice for Appalachian regions with 3D-printed, affordable and sustainable housing opportunities.

The New Leaf Justice Enterprise, located at 485 Richland Ave., is a project of the Survivor Advocacy Outreach Program, or SAOP, and the Ohio Department of Development's Appalachian Community Grant Program funds the project. The Ohio Department of Development Governor's Office of Appalachia awards and administers the funds.

The program provides participants with childcare, housing, case management, counseling and supported employment activities.

Athens County ranks below both state and federal housing ownership rates at 59.8%, Ohio's rate is 64% and the national rate is 66%, according to the Ohio Housing Finance Agency.

Because of the county's low rates, the program operates through a comprehensive Social Determinants of Health, or SDOH, and Social Determinants of Work, or SDOW, improvement strategy that deploys holistic services across the affordable housing continuum of care.

Before utilizing resources, program participants complete a pre-intake interview with one of New Leaf's community partners such as ACEnet, Rural Action, OhioMeansJobs or Ohio University.

Within the first six months, participants are given workforce development and financial empowerment resources and housing opportunities if applicable. After receiving those training sessions, participants may begin work for New Leaf, earning up to \$15 per hour for another six months.

After holding a position within New Leaf, participants are guided toward a long-term employment solution and look outside for housing opportunities. Participants can remain in New Leaf housing for two years or longer, whereafter they are guided in purchasing an advanced or traditional house.

Executive Director of SAOP, Jennifer Seifert, said the organization is about more than just housing. The goal is to empower clients to live successful, independent and violence-free lives. "It's ultimately about serving people and not necessarily a community because communities are composed of individual people," Seifert wrote in an email.

In a 2023 Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation **report**, Athens County recorded 84 domestic violence incident charges.

According to the New Leaf Justice Enterprise **website**, approaches like New Leaf are critical to addressing generational poverty because experiencing trauma, incarceration or substance misuse uproots survivors from the community, destabilizes households and significantly impacts the brain functioning and overall health of an entire family. New Leaf's approach works to restore the family's roots, and ultimately the community, so both can thrive.

Seifert said she's noticing more communities around the area coordinating and supporting one another around the affordable housing issue. She said that solving the housing problem takes an organized effort from the state, local and federal government, and profit and nonprofit entities.

The New Leaf program consists of three major components: free housing for two years that

gives residents autonomy; supportive services ... and living-wage employment that includes workforce development training so that residents graduate into meaningful and sustainable careers,” Seifert wrote in an email.

Erica Flanders, Athens County Metropolitan Housing Authority, or ACMHA, coordinator of property management and administration said her organization also offers families self-sufficiency services. Flanders said ACMHA partners with agencies like Hopewell Health Centers Inc. and Integrated Services Roweton.

“If we run across somebody and we see them struggling with some mental health issues, and they give us permission, we can make a referral,” Flanders said. “Those agencies would provide the transportation or behavioral health side of things.”

Seifert said the biggest thing SAOP is working on right now is using 3D printing to bring environmentally friendly, cost effective and efficiently built housing units to Southeast Ohio in a way that serves the needs of individuals and communities.

“This technology has the promise to not only address the affordable housing issue, but that it can also become an economic driver as we train people on the technology and grow this new and innovative industry here in Appalachian Ohio,” Seifert wrote in an email.

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Vice Presidential nominee J.D. Vance and wife Usha Vance address the crowd outside Middletown High School before speech. July 22, 2024. Photo by Olivia Gilliland | The Post

NEWS

J.D. Vance makes first solo appearance at rally in Middletown

By Olivia Gilliland

July 22, 2024 | 9:24pm EDT

Ohio's U.S. Senator J.D. Vance addressed constituents in Middletown after being selected as Donald Trump's vice presidential running mate last week. The rally was Vance's second on the campaign trail but his first as an individual and took place shortly after President Joe Biden announced his exit from the race.

Supporters of Trump and Vance lined the sidewalks of Middletown High School where the rally was held – some arriving as early as 9 a.m. and waiting more than 3 hours to get inside. Mary Ann Stelzle, an attendee from Mason, said she came because she admires Vance's story. "I think he is on a good path," Stelzle said. "But (I hope) that he stays on the good path and can just work for the people and not for the government."

Stelzle also said she believes Vance will be a good compliment to Trump and wants to help get them both elected to office because of their stance on issues like the economy and immigration.

Vendors like Don Anderson echoed these sentiments with Trump-Vance apparel and souvenirs for attendees to purchase while waiting in line. He said it was time for people to get together and do the right thing.

“J.D. Vance is a local guy, we’re very proud of him and proud to be in the area,” Anderson said. “We’re doing our best to come out here and get with everybody. I think there was a much bigger crowd than we anticipated.”

Despite the crowd's general enthusiasm, several attendees expressed frustration about the lack of water, shade and restrooms available to the public. Others were upset with the choice of venue; it reached capacity with less than half the crowd inside. Some were there to show their disapproval of the Trump ticket.

Susan Bidwell, an attendee from Middletown, said she was there for her seven grandchildren. “I think it is important to protect them and their future,” Bidwell said. “I was also a public educator for 30 years and children listen and children respond, and I’m concerned about the message that he’s sending.”

Bidwell stood on the corner with other protesters holding signs that read “Roe Roe Roe your vote” and “Grab them by the ballot.”

Before taking the main stage for his speech, Vance addressed the crowd gathered outside the school. His impromptu address sparked chants of “Vance” and “U-S-A” that carried into the auditorium.

Vance’s speech focused heavily on his upbringing in Middletown. He recalled memories of his grandmother’s gun collection, his high school math teacher and some local delicacies such as Milton’s Donuts.

"I love this town, and I'm so grateful to have been formed by it," Vance said. "My life wasn't that different than a lot of people in Middletown. It was tough, but it was surrounded by loving people."

In a statement by Middletown City School District, Superintendent Deborah Houser said J.D. Vance exemplifies the aspirations the district holds for every student.

“As a graduate of Middletown High School, J.D. Vance has achieved success in his chosen career,” Houser said. “Middies will rise to achieve anything they put their minds to.”

Vance's speech was not just a trip down memory lane. He called out the Biden Administration and the news organizations for unfair portrayals of Trump and encouraged voters to use their own voices to endorse the Trump ticket.

"We have to push back on every channel that we can," Vance said. "The media is never going to be fair to President Donald J. Trump, but you're going to be fair, so use the voice. Go on social media and actually make the case for President Trump and Vice President Vance."

Vance also praised his running mate Donald Trump for his commitment to the American people and for the opportunity to run as vice president.

"Let's talk about the man who was a business leader, who had billions of dollars, who didn't need any of the sacrifices that public service created, and yet, he went out there and he did it anyway," Vance said. "That's the type of people we want to become public servants, and thank God he served for four years as president of the United States."

Vance concluded the rally by outlining the Trump-Vance platform, emphasizing their position of relevant issues like the economy and immigration.

"Let's re-elect Donald J. Trump," he said, receiving a standing ovation. "Middletown, I love you and I wouldn't be here without you."

WRITING SAMPLE



The sign in front of the District 4 Headquarters of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources on East State Street, Aug. 29, 2024. Photo by Megan VanVlack | The Post

NEWS

Environmental activist uncovers discrepancy between ODNR records, OOGA statement

By Olivia Gilliland

August 29, 2024 | 10:27pm EDT

Correction Appended: A previous version of this article said ODNR had entered 3,000 oil/gas incidents in eight years. The article is updated to say 2,300 incidents as per a source miscalculation.

Environmental activist Jenny Morgan, a steering committee member of Save Ohio Parks and a preschool teacher, started a Facebook page that outlined a hydraulic fracturing accident each day.

Her page uncovered discrepancies between the Ohio Department of Natural Resource, or ODNR, reports and Ohio Oil and Gas Association, or OOGA, statements. Morgan said she started the daily accident report as a way of empowering herself and others.

“I could post (old records) every day for how many years, eight years, and then at that point, once I got all of the incidents done, there'd be several thousand more incidents,” Morgan said. “It just feels good to gain this knowledge, and I hope others are gaining knowledge from it. Informed citizenry, that's what it's all about.”

Morgan's reflection comes just a few weeks after OOGA President Rob Brundrett's public radio interview where he claimed fracking was safe and environmentally friendly and supported the lease of new Ohio state parks land to be used for fracking operations.

“I felt like he must be underplaying it,” Morgan said. “It's important, when one is listening to a representative of the industry, to realize that he's really a salesman in a certain kind of way, and so I thought, I'm going to look this up.”

Morgan requested oil and natural gas accident records from ODNR between 2016 and 2024 and found ODNR had entered 2,300 oil/gas incidents in those eight years. What's worse, she said, is how the ODNR categorizes these incidents.

According to Morgan, the ODNR classifies accidents into five categories: information-only, minor, moderate, major and severe. The criteria for each level is based on factors such as the duration of the incident, the resources needed to respond, the quantity of materials spilled and the level of impact on public safety and the environment.

If an event is classified as an information-only accident, the situation can be controlled and stabilized in less than 4 hours with little to no resource needs.

Minor events result in minimal public safety or environmental impact, while moderate events cause considerable impact. Major events, like those of K&H injection wells runoff, create sizable public safety or environmental concerns. Severe accidents result in significant public safety or environmental impact with uncontrolled impact that will take 24 hours or more to contain the hazards.

Despite these guidelines, Morgan said she still questions the accuracy of some accidents' classification.

“Today, I'm looking at a spill that is 50 barrels of oil spilled,” Morgan said. “The release breached the dike wall, continued across the leased road and into an agricultural field, so that's definitely in the environment ... and yet, ODNR says that a 30-day post-incident report is not required.”

Concerns like Morgan's are not new to members of OOGA, such as Mike Chadsey, the director of external affairs. Chadsey said a large part of his job is educating people on the specifics of fracking.

“Things that are not often understood can be confusing or concerning, and so I've always responded to those (concerns by) trying to explain the physics and the geology, the chemistry and the science,” Chadsey said. “I understand the concern. I appreciate the concern ... I would argue some of it is intentionally confused because we are somewhat of an often discussed industry.”

Chadsey argues the nearly 80-year-old practice is like any industrial process – it has risks. He said that while the OOGA does not support any energy sector more than another, it advocates for public policies and regulations that mitigate risks associated with fracking, including worker safety and environmental protections.

“We lead a group called STEPS, which stands for service, transmission, exploration, production and safety,” Chadsey said. “We meet quarterly with usually about somewhere between 75 and 100 folks show up, and we talk about safety concepts.”

He also suggested people of varying fracking opinions should have conversations about what the process means for their community.

“It's just a different perspective,” Chadsey said. “There's maybe a partisan tint to it, and energy across the board should not be partisan. Whether you support it or oppose it, or like it or don't like it, or understand it or don't understand it, continue to engage in the process.”

Although the process is controversial, there are nearly 16,000 acres of Ohio state parks up for lease approval. Chadsey said he hopes to continue to see the success of the oil and natural gas industry in the coming years.

“The one thing that does separate oil and gas from coal, wind, solar, hydro and nuclear, is that those harness the wind, other things to make electrons,” Chadsey said. “You can't make anything from wind electricity except electricity ... that's not to take away from that, but oil and gas makes electricity, but we also make products.”



The City of Ostroh flies the U.S. flag outside of its city building to celebrate the U.S. Independence Day. Photo provided by Liudmyla Kozak, Head of the External Relations Department for the City of Ostroh.

NEWS

Athens, Ostroh partner, promote international cooperation, prosperity

By Olivia Gilliland | For JOUR 4760 October 14, 2024 | 9:40 EST

While it has been 963 days since Russia invaded Ukraine, it has been just six days since Dr. Eduard Balashov, rector of the National University Ostroh Academy in Ukraine, visited Athens and Ohio University. His visit is the latest display of international cooperation between the National League of Cities' Sister Cities, Ostroh and Athens, who continue to expand their relationship to create meaningful opportunities for international prosperity.

During his time in Athens, Balashov visited with city officials and university leaders to discuss the future of the sister cities' partnership as well as sign a memorandum of understanding. In both meetings, Balashov shared his optimism for the opportunity, most notably highlighting the prospective relationship between OU and NUOA.

“This opens up new opportunities for academic exchange, joint research and mutual learning between our universities,” Balashov wrote in a press release. “It is especially important that this

cooperation takes place at a time when Ukrainian universities demonstrate their resilience and ability to adapt in the difficult conditions of war. We are grateful to our American partners for their support and willingness to cooperate."

According to the Interim Associate Provost of Global Affairs Gillian Ice, the Ohio University is always open to forming partnerships and international collaborations that support its mission.

"International partnerships are a critical part of campus and curriculum internationalizations," Ice said. "They open the doors for students to explore new cultures, learn new skills, language learning and collaboration. They often become a pathway for international students to complete a degree at Ohio University, supporting our access mission and helping to add cultural diversity to campus."

Ice added that cultural organizations, like the International Student Union can be a good first step into global affairs for students. She cautions them however, to engage with cultures respectfully and sensitively.

Anastasia Maynich, owner of Maynich Consulting and an emergency and crisis management expert, is from Ukraine. She echoes Ice's sentiments.

After moving to the U.S. in 2000, she served in the U.S. Army, seeing the frontlines in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In her experience as a civilian and as a soldier, she said, the need for international support as a result of war has skyrocketed.

While medical equipment and personnel are important, Maynich said relief efforts should not overlook items such as diapers, over-the-counter medication and toys.

"People tend to forget because they concentrate on very big efforts," Maynich said. "How do you accomplish a big effort? You start small."

She also said programs like the NLC's 'Sister Cities' program is a good way of exposing people to the additional support they may need as well.

"That exchange program is actually a brilliant idea to expose children to the American ways," Maynich said. "The English language especially is going to go a long way after the war efforts because all of the aid (was in English). (It's) basically the universal language for the Ukrainians."

As a former Soviet republic, Ukraine shares cultural, economic and political roots with Russia, despite a long history of nationalistic violence. According to the Council on Foreign Affairs, the current Russia-Ukraine war is a manifestation of renewed geopolitical rivalry and has only deepened their ideological divide in recent years.

“History is, of course, important to Ukrainians, and that's what they're fighting for,” Maynich said. “They’re fighting for their land, they’re fighting for their rights. Teaching people about the history of Ukraine (through programs like Sister Cities), it will be an absolutely fantastic idea.”

SISTER CITIES TIMELINE



Athens Mayor Steve Patterson experienced the Russia-Ukraine ideological divide first hand while visiting Ostroh as a part of the Sister Cities cultural exchange earlier this year. During his tour of the Ostroh Academy, Patterson encountered an air raid siren and was forced to shelter in place with students from the city's oldest university.

“The thing that just kept flooding over me was, this is (their) daily life,” Patterson said. “This is what (they) are experiencing day in, day out over in a country that is dealing with a conflict - an invasion - that was again ... completely unwarranted.”

Since his visit Patterson has spoken at city council meetings, hosted conversations with OU classes and participated in external programming to educate and raise awareness for the conflict in Ukraine. He also began brainstorming ways to support the region on a local level such as with donations of solar panels and clothing.

Patterson’s experience in Ostroh was so influential he even spoke with President Joe Biden at an NLC conference about it. According to Patterson, they spoke about the gratitude and desperation of the Ukrainian people as well as encouraged Biden to send additional supportive measures to the region.

"This isn't a relationship just based upon the challenges that Ukraine is seeing right now as they're repelling an unjust invasion,” Patterson said. “It's looking into the future and, with the expectation that Ukraine is going to succeed in maintaining their sovereignty and recognition as an independent nation, we will continue to build these relationships.”

According to the NLC’s website, the program aims to promote peace through mutual respect, understanding and cooperation creating global relationships based on cultural, educational, informational and transactional exchanges and encouraging citizen diplomacy.

Letters and resolutions by the Ostroh and Athens city councils recognizing important historical events highlight the success of the partnership formed by the program thus far.

“This day symbolizes not only the birth of your great nation but also the triumph of democracy, freedom, and equality — values that we deeply share,” a letter celebrating the U.S. Independence Day from the Ostroh City Council read. “Your country has always been and remains a beacon of hope and inspiration for many nations around the world, including Ukraine.”

The letter added Yahodka’s appreciation for the Sister City relationship and the future it may provide community members.

“This friendship is a vivid example of how communities from different parts of the world can unite for the common good, exchange experiences and provide mutual support,” Yudokha wrote. “On this festive day, we wish all citizens of your city and all Americans peace, prosperity and continued success. May the spirit of freedom and unity, established by your ancestors, continue to inspire new generations to great achievements.”

In response to the letter sent by Ostroh's city council, all members of the Athens city council introduced a resolution congratulating Ostroh on its independence day on August 24.

“Athens City Council hereby extends warm congratulations on Ukrainian Independence Day,” the resolution read. “Athens City Council hereby confirms its intention to work with Liudmyla Kozak to arrange an online meeting between Athens and Ostroh City Councils to further the ties between cities and to learn from one another about our municipal government functions.”

According to Balashov, he is ultimately leaving Athens with useful information to share with university staff and students as well as city leaders.

"The cooperation between Ostroh and Athens is an example of how international partnerships can be effective and mutually beneficial, even in difficult times," Balashov wrote. “We value this connection and believe that together we will be able to achieve even more in the educational and scientific space."