



Congress shouldn't rubber stamp Biden's \$33 billion supplemental for Ukraine

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Two weeks ago, President Biden announced another \$1.3 billion in aid to Ukraine — \$800 million in military assistance and \$500 million in humanitarian aid. Vladimir Putin's savage and grinding invasion of Ukraine has created a disaster, the Ukrainian people have responded valiantly in the defense of their homeland, and it is in our national security interests for America to assist them.

But as the president also announced, the money already appropriated by Congress for this purpose is almost exhausted, so he is asking us for additional funds.

Last Thursday that request came in at an eye-popping \$33 billion, with no explanation of how the president's request went up by more than \$30 billion in a week, or with any acknowledgment of the historic, unprecedented scale of this request.

To date, there has been precious little debate over Ukraine as Congress has raced to comply with requests from the White House given the grim developments in that country. But there is a pattern emerging of incremental responsive half measures from the administration, rather than a coordinated strategy to effectively deter Putin's aggression, and of throwing money at the problem in the absence of a true plan.

Given the extraordinary size of President Biden's most recent request, it is well past time for Congress to stop being a rubber stamp and start exercising proper oversight by demanding answers to some fundamental questions—first and foremost being “what is the overarching purpose of this assistance?” Is it to mitigate the suffering of the Ukrainian people? To destabilize Russia? Or is it to actually achieve victory for Ukraine by expelling the Russians and maintaining the country's sovereignty? Until there is clarity on these critical points it would be irresponsible to just blindly accept this proposed expenditure, putting aside the absurdity of tying it to COVID relief and including a path to citizenship for Afghans, among other unrelated measures.

Once we have established a strategy, Congress can assess the wisdom of and best manner of funding it — being mindful of our constituents. The vast majority of the shocking seven-point rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) since President Biden's inauguration predates the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While it is true Republicans have also been guilty of profligate spending, it is dwarfed by the record-setting, bloated expenditure of the last year, with some three trillion dollars artificially injected into the U.S. economy with the predictable result of runaway inflation. Now this.

We have to stop spending money we don't have, and as the wealthiest country on the planet this should not be an impossible goal. We understand that Vladimir Putin's Russia is no friend to the United States. We support President Biden's decision to assist Ukraine. But all Americans need to know how this enormous chit is going to be paid for.

We must also not be backed into a Hobson's choice between \$33 billion and nothing. Before adding additional funding to the Ukraine pot, the administration must reasonably reprogram funding that already exists to the issues that are pressing today. Since 1992, USAID has contributed over \$3 billion to Ukraine. It would be prudent, for example, to look at things such as USAID's April 22 “reaffirmation” of its commitment of \$131 million still unspent in development assistance. This money can be reallocated — as any prudent leader would do — away from programs like \$12.6 million for climate change and tens of millions of dollars toward democracy promotion and applied to the current emergency.

On the domestic front, President Biden appears to believe that any price hike that results from Putin's invasion of Ukraine is inevitable pain Americans must simply bear if they do not want to import Russian energy and so subsidize Putin's aggression. The president has left untouched the most powerful tool in his non-military arsenal: America's ability to flow energy into the global markets to stabilize prices. We are sadly behind on this objective due to the president's prioritization of radical environmental policies that undermine that very ability from the first day of his administration when he cancelled the Keystone Pipeline, followed by more than a year of persecuting and frustrating additional investments in the energy sector.

This must all end immediately: the president must free energy producing states like our home states of Texas and Pennsylvania from chilling federal regulations and unnecessary barriers — and fully unleash American energy production. Moreover, the president should encourage — nay, demand — that our European allies not only step up their funding for Ukraine, but open up their own energy production, from fracking to nuclear power. At a bare minimum, Congress should not authorize any additional funding requests until the Biden administration agrees to do everything it can to surge our domestic production to counter Putin without unnecessarily raising prices for Americans here at home.

Congressional debate over this supplemental request cannot be reduced to binary options of giving the president everything he requests on the one hand and failing to defend our ally Ukraine from Putin on the other—which is one reason this request cannot be coupled with other matters such as COVID relief funding. Of course we must help Ukraine, but we must also be mindful of our increasingly crippling debt and harvest our own God-given natural resources to buffer the American people from unnecessary economic distress while we do so.

Neither remedy is going to be quick or easy given the hole we have dug, but that is no reason not to get to work immediately. President Biden's formal request for \$33 billion in additional funding for Ukraine is an excellent opportunity to set our own fiscal house in order and reclaiming our energy dominance as a condition precedent and important analogue for responsibly defending America's interests abroad.