

UpFront: Milwaukee's Ukrainian sister city under siege, liaison says

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Milwaukee's sister city in Ukraine, Irpin, is under siege by Russian forces — a dire situation, according to one of the city's liaisons in Milwaukee.

"I can categorize it as a humanitarian disaster right now," Boris Nayflish said on WISN's "UpFront," produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com. "In the last six days, the city had no water, no electricity, no heat."

Nayflish said he has been in near-constant contact with the city's mayor and deputy mayor, who said thousands of residents remain missing.

"They either are under the rubble of the fallen buildings or they're unaccountable," Nayflish said. "We can't find them or locate them."

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Nayflish said he is planning a trip including a delegation from Milwaukee when conditions improve. He added Irpin's mayor has invited Milwaukee's mayor to be part of the trip.

Nayflish said Milwaukee is working to establish a recovery and rebuilding fund. Plus, St. Michael's Ukrainian Catholic Church in Milwaukee is continuing to collect supplies like medicine and clothing.

"All the help, all those supplies will pour into Ukraine as soon as it's possible," Nayflish said. "For me, it feels like your house is on fire, and you know your loved ones are in that house and you can't reach them. You just have to watch as they burn. And that's how many Ukrainians feel right now watching it from a distance."

Wisconsin's longtime Secretary of State Doug La Follette says the country's

elections are in “crisis,” adding calls to hand over control of the state’s elections to his office are fueling his desire to seek reelection.

“I’ve always opposed it, but this is the first time it’s been serious,” La Follette said from his office in the basement of the State Capitol. “And the reason it’s serious, let’s be quite honest, our country is in crisis when it comes to elections. And if they are successful in 20 some states at electing Trump supporters to the office of secretary of state, and they control the governors in those states and the Legislature, they can easily change the result of the next presidential election. That is serious stuff.”

The 81-year-old has served as Wisconsin’s secretary of state consecutively since 1983 and also served from 1975 to 1979. Throughout the decades, his office has lost considerable influence and staff.

La Follette still signs off on the state’s electors, and did so in 2020.

“The Democratic electors were brought to me as one of my remaining duties, and I authorized the governor’s signature on the list of electors,” La Follette said. “And then I was presented later, not at the same time, by Republican electors. As you know in several states, they got together and decided to submit Republican electors to support Trump, and they brought them to the office, and I smiled and put them in a drawer and forgot about them.”

La Follette acknowledged this upcoming election could be his most challenging if he runs and said his biggest personal challenge would be collecting 3,000 signatures to appear on the ballot given the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several Republicans have announced their candidacy, including Rep. Amy Loudenbeck, R-Clinton, and Jay Schroeder, who ran in 2018.

Some local election officials are decrying the Legislature’s failure to get a bipartisan bill to Gov. Tony Evers that would have allowed cities to begin processing absentee ballots the day before Election Day.

“I wish some of those fringe elements of the Republican Party actually read the bill and understood it,” Milwaukee County Clerk George Christenson said. “It provides a class I felony for any sort of nefarious activity, willfully divulging results early. And furthermore, within the bill, it was set up to where you cannot tally results. You’re

just processing results.”

The legislation died in the state Senate as the session came to an end.

“There is quite frankly some misinformation out there but nevertheless, the public had a concern so we’re back to ground zero with ballot drops with the bill being pulled off the calendar,” said Sen. Steve Nass, R-Whitewater. “But the people spoke.”

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