Durbin In Lithuania, Sweden, Spain To Discuss Support For NATO & Baltic States, Opposition To Russian Aggression

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VILNIUS—U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL), Co-Chair of the Baltic Freedom Caucus and the Senate Ukraine Caucus, is in Vilnius, Lithuania, today as part

of travel to three European nations to discuss congressional support for the transatlantic relationship and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as continued Russian aggression and interference in western democracies.

In Vilnius, Durbin received the Aleksandras Stulginskis Star Award—only the second individual and first American to receive this award. The new award honors Aleksandras Stulginskis, former President of Lithuania who served from 1920-1926 and was a strong advocate for a democratic republic. It was granted to Durbin for his decades-long support of Lithuanian independence and democracy and his promotion of parliamentary values. Durbin's mother was born in Lithuania and came to the United States with her mother and siblings in 1911.

In his remarks to the Lithuanian Parliament, or Seimas, Durbin traced Lithuania's modern evolution from occupation under the Soviet Union, to the re-establishment of Lithuanian independence in 1990-91, and Lithuania's role today as an established democracy with a vibrant free market and a defender of democratic values throughout the world. Durbin recalled seeing all three of these stages of Lithuanian history in visits to that nation in 1979, 1990, 2011, and today. Durbin heralded Lithuania's economic progress, including its decision to cut off Russian energy sources so that its future could not be held hostage for fuel, and said that the United States will stand with Lithuania's neighbor, Ukraine, until the Russian war is over.

"One-hundred-and-eleven years ago, a young mother in Jurbarkas said goodbye to everyone and everything she had ever known, gathered her three small children, and sailed for America, to join her husband. In her arms, she carried their youngest child – a 2-year-old daughter. That little girl, Ona Kutkaite, was my mother. My mother never saw this beautiful land of her birth again. But she carried Lithuania in her heart. She prayed for Lithuania's freedom. And she taught her three children to be proud of our Lithuanian heritage. If my mother were here today to see her son accept this honor named for President Stulginskis, one of Lithuania's great patriots, she would be astonished – and deeply moved. As am I," Durbin said upon receiving the Aleksandras Stulginskis Star Award.

Today, Durbin also met with Speaker of the Seimas, Viktorija Cmilyte-Nielsen; President of Lithuania, Gitanas Nauseda; Belarusian opposition leader, Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya; and the Mayor of Jurbarkas (hometown of Durbin's mother), Skirmantas Mockevicius.

Later this week, Durbin will travel to Sweden with Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Thom Tillis (R-NC), Mike Rounds (R-SD), Chris Coons (D-DE), Deb Fischer (R-NE), Roy Blunt (R-MO), and Joni Ernst (R-IA), for meetings with senior government officials. The Senators will represent the U.S. Senate in meetings with NATO allies and

aspirant countries to underscore U.S. support for NATO. Finally, the Senators will travel to Madrid, Spain, as a bipartisan delegation to the NATO summit.

"Whether Putin is driven by delusions of restoring the Soviet Union or is simply seeking to create chaos and sow dissension among Ukraine and NATO allies is unclear. But here's what is clear: the strength of the NATO alliance and the courage and resilience of the people of Eastern Europe in their fight for freedom and democracy," said Durbin. "My message this week to our European friends is very simple: you are not alone."

Photos of Durbin receiving the Aleksandras Stulginskis Star Award are available here.

A link to Durbin's speech to the Lithuanian Parliament upon receiving the Aleksandras Stulginskis Star Award is available here (Durbin's speech begins at 20:55).

A PDF of Durbin's speech as prepared for delivery is available here.