

**[Remarks at a rally about the Russian attack on Ukraine, March 16, 2022.]**

These remarks are in honor of my Ukrainian grandmother, Antoinette Fries.

I've got a simple message for you today: People power can win.

"Democracy" is Greek for "people power." We've forgotten that. Dictators, strong-men, are strong; authoritarians have authority. Or so they claim.

But look at what's going on in Ukraine. Putin has more tanks. He has more jets, more missiles, more artillery. Three weeks ago, all the experts were telling us he'd conquer Ukraine in a couple of days.

But Putin doesn't have people power. Not only did he fail to conquer Ukraine in a couple of days; right now it looks like he may never conquer Ukraine. The people of Ukraine are willing to die to stop him and save their democracy. And much of the world is adding its power to theirs.

I don't know how the horrible war in Ukraine will end. But it's already reminded us that democracy, people power, can win. We should be supporting charities that are helping the Ukrainian people. And we should be pushing our government to do everything possible to support Ukraine.

But we're also part of a struggle for democracy in our own communities. We don't need to take up Kalashnikovs to fight for democracy in Carbondale. But democracy is under threat in our country. And we have to fight for it. Vote for people who support democracy not only abroad but at home. Get involved in politics yourself. Start local. If you're a student, get involved in student government. Or join an RSO that fights for democratic values. If you're on staff, get involved with shared governance, or get active in your union.

Knowledge is a powerful weapon for the people. Learn how to tell history from myth and news from propaganda. Take and teach classes that make you a better democrat.

For people power isn't just stronger: it's smarter. No one person can run a nation wisely, or a state, or a university. The people we choose to lead us need our wisdom; we have to be willing to tell them things they may not want to hear, and they have to be willing to listen.

Involvement in student government or a union on campus won't seem heroic, not in comparison to the heroes of Ukraine. But the more democratic we make our own communities, the stronger we will be, and the more we'll be able to contribute to people power around the world.

People power can win. We can win in Ukraine, we can win in the United States, and we can win in Carbondale. Seek learning and experience to empower yourself as a fighter for democracy. *Slava Ukraini*. Glory to Ukraine, and glory to people power.

--David M. Johnson