Environmental activist highlights growing activism in Russia

The Jackson Foundation, together with the UW Jackson School’s Ellison Center for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies (REECAS), featured Russian environmental activist Evgeniya Chirikova recently at a UW event. Chirikova received the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize for her actions mobilizing fellow Russians to oppose a major highway project that would have cut through Khimki Forest—federally protected land. Despite having no personal experience with grassroots activism and without a culture of activism in Russia, Chirikova still felt compelled to act to save the forest near her home. Her efforts spearheading protests resulted in a year-long delay in the highway’s construction and ultimately protected a large swath of the forest despite the highway being built.

At the Jackson School event, Evgeniya spoke about recent environmental and political protests in Russia and the awakening of civil society in Moscow and around the country. She said, “We are living in a fantastic time of transformation of Russian civil society.” Russians had become passive due to the harsh conditions of living in the Soviet Union, she explained, but environmental concerns began to serve as a catalyst for grassroots action. And in time, campaigns have emerged around issues such as saving other forests, public spaces, and park land. These movements have continued to spread as Russians strive to protect their labor rights through burgeoning trade unions representing positions ranging from medicine to flight attendants to truck drivers, while ordinary citizens and activists ran and won seats in local Moscow city elections.

Adding a cautious note Chirikova said, “Citizens want power—it’s a new trend, a new stage of development of Russian civil society, but the price of protesting is high.” It can be dangerous to be an activist in Russia. After being arrested and detained numerous times and facing various false claims, Chirikova moved to Estonia for her safety and now leads Activatica.org, an online news platform highlighting Russian grassroots activism. Through her organization she also hopes to bring international attention to Russian activists, which can provide them with a degree of protection.

She believes passionately that citizens’ participation in grassroots movements can change mindsets and that one day this may lead to greater demands for democracy. She concluded, “I await my chance to return to my motherland. It’s my big dream. I want to return to help organize a normal democratic country.”

The audience included UW faculty, students, and staff; several Jackson Foundation Board Members; representatives from a local nonprofit; and members of the public.

Finally, we want to note our appreciation for Jackson Leadership Fellow Leah Missik’s role in introducing us to her friend Evgeniya Chirikova and assisting us with the event. This discussion would not have happened without that connection.
I have been serving as the Interim Executive Director during this time of transition at the Foundation. You will see in these pages that as this process unfolds, we continue to move our work forward as we implement our mission and programs. We are excited by the new opportunities that lie ahead!

We felt inspired recently by Evgeniya Chirikova, whom we hosted during her speaking tour through the U.S. A brave and innovative Russian environmental activist, she now helps to build grassroots citizen activism in Russia. She spoke movingly about the challenges and successes facing her homeland today.

The Jackson Fellows continue to have impact. Six Fellows joined the Board of Governors this fall and now bring their perspectives and voices to the strategic planning and executive director search processes, as well as the Foundation’s business. Last July five Jackson Fellows travelled to Houston to give Leadership “Scoop talks” to Sister Cities International’s Youth Summit. And we are eager to report that several of our Fellows won local elections this fall, joining a growing number of Fellows in our program who serve as elected public service leaders.

We deeply appreciate your support and hope to hear from you.

Carol Vipperman
Interim Executive Director

New members join the Foundation’s Board

The Jackson Foundation Board of Governors recently added six new members, all drawn from the Jackson Leadership Fellows alumni network: Alex Adams, Tom Bugert, Radha Friedman, Michele Frix, Priya Saxena, and Kiana Scott. The new board members bring a wealth of professional experience and new perspectives to the Foundation’s governance. We welcome them into their new roles and appreciate their willingness to contribute to our work.

Several new board members weighed in about their appointments:

I feel grateful to have had the Fellows experience, where I developed a deep appreciation for the Foundation and its mission, and now the opportunity to serve as a member of the Board. It is an honor to work alongside my peers and my mentors to tackle tough problems. Service on this Board provides an invaluable learning, leadership, and growth opportunity that is a highlight in my career.

Alex Adams

Joining the Jackson Foundation Board of Governors is an honor. Bringing six Fellows Program alumni to the Board shows the Foundation’s real commitment to invest in growing leaders. I’m excited to work with the other board members to increase the Foundation’s impact throughout the country and right here in Seattle.

Priya Saxena

It’s an exciting moment to join the Board as the Foundation navigates this period of transition: addressing important questions through strategic planning, welcoming a new generation of leaders to the Board, and cementing how we can most effectively advance the Jackson values through the Fellows program and beyond.

Kiana Scott
In creating the Leadership Fellows program, the Jackson Foundation hoped to share Senator Jackson’s values and principles with a younger generation. We exceeded that goal with the growing number of Fellows working in government, nonprofits, and business. An unexpected outcome, however, has been the number of Fellows seeking and winning public office.

Washington State Senator Joe Nguyen (D-34), elected last year, serves as the first Vietnamese American in the Senate. On November 5, two more Jackson Fellows won their races: Andrew J. Lewis will join the Seattle City Council and Sam Cho will serve on Seattle’s Port Commission. Recently Brandon Hersey received an appointment to the Seattle School Board.

Many Fellows commented that the Fellows program and the Jackson Foundation community gave them the support and confidence to run. Lewis said, “Getting elected to represent over 100,000 people in a crowded field of candidates requires organizing, outreach, working closely with a team, and constantly soliciting and responding to feedback – all skills foundational to the Fellows program. My Fellows’ experience prepared me to run and will help me serve the people of Seattle.” Cho, also a first-time candidate, shared, “It is such an honor to be a part of Scoop Jackson’s legacy, not just as a Fellow but now as an elected official. I hope I can continue to live out his values as I embark on this political journey.”

Washington State Senator Hans Zeiger (R-25) and Washington State Representative Kristine Reeves (D-30) already held office when they joined the program. Kristine commented, “We spend a lot of time, energy, and money getting people elected in our state yet almost no time, energy, or money helping them learn how to be effective civic leaders. I am honored to be part of the Jackson Fellowship program that is investing in my becoming a better leader, part-time citizen legislator, and full-time working mom.”

Nguyen expressed, “Senator Jackson fought for Washington’s values, yet still maintained productive dialogue across the aisle. This skill has become lost in politics recently, but there is hope. The success we see with Jackson Fellows as they pursue public office is certainly related to the late Senator’s principles of bipartisanship and dogmatic conviction of service to the people.”

Although the program does not focus on how to run for office, it attracts those interested in public service leadership. We are proud that our Fellows, elected and non-elected, carry forth the Senator’s principles and values in their careers and community.
Fellows on the Move

Lylianna Allala recently joined the city of Seattle as an Equity and Environment program manager. Marc Berger was appointed chair of the Washington State China Relations Council’s Board of Directors. In September, Stephanie Celt joined the Washington State Department of Natural Resources as an Executive Policy Advisor. Ariana Muirow moved to the Criterion Institute, a nonprofit think tank that works with social change-makers on how to engage with and shift financial systems. Joe Nguyen was named one of Puget Sound Business Journal’s 2019 40 under 40 leaders. Shin Yu Pai was featured in SeattleMag.com as one of their season’s class of local literary luminaries. Kristine Reeves received the Ruth Kagi Award for Excellence in Early Learning from the Casey Family Programs for her work in the Washington State legislature. Priya Saxena has launched Equitable Future Consulting. Kiana Scott and Tamara Power-Drutis launched an occasional series in Crosscut.com examining media coverage of Seattle-area elections. The arguments presented in the series rely on their respective academic expertise and knowledge of issues related to gender and politics. Emily Wittman was named as the President and CEO of Aerospace Futures Alliance. Matthew Combe, Christina Sciabarra, Brandon Hersey, Stephanie Celt, and Radha Friedman gave “Scoop” leadership talks at the Sister Cities’ International Youth leadership Summit in Houston, Texas. Washington State Senator Hans Zeiger announced his run for an open seat on the Pierce County Council.