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## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Kathy Parkison, right, with other election monitors in Ukraine.

### Vice chancellor returns from election monitoring in Ukraine

**KOKOMO, Ind.** — An Indiana University Kokomo vice chancellor calls monitoring the May 25 elections in Ukraine “a good experience,” but she is glad to be safely home.

Kathy Parkison, interim vice chancellor for academic affairs, and her husband, Rob Pfaff, an administrator at St. Joseph’s College, were among 1,200 volunteers who served as official monitors with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Both were posted to election sites in western Ukraine, away from the pro-Russian unrest that has plagued the country for months. Two teams of election monitors, eight people who were in eastern Ukraine, have been missing since shortly after the election.

Parkison never felt unsafe, but followed security protocols while in Ukraine, including texting an update every time she and her teammate, an immigration specialist from Poland, changed locations.

Parkison said the OSCE prefers that monitors not comment on the elections, because they only experience what happens in one region.

“It would be like observing in Howard County, and making inferences to the election for the entire United States,” she said. “It just doesn’t work.”

As a monitor, she watched for fraud and voter intimidation, among other activities, working to ensure a fair election, the first since Ukraine’s parliament ousted its president and called for an early presidential election. There were 21 candidates, and all ballots were on paper, and had to be counted by hand after the polls closed.

Parkison watched as ballots were counted, then had to accompany the team that transported the ballot boxes to a central location, where they were counted again, and make sure totals had not changed.

Parkison was posted to the Khmelnytsky province, an agricultural region that reminded her of home.

“It’s a beautiful country, gently rolling fields,” she said. “It’s Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa, but with canola instead of corn and soybeans.”

Unlike the Midwest, however, Ukraine has high unemployment and poor infrastructure. Parkison visited a castle 30 miles from the town she was assigned, and the journey took two hours, because of poor roads.

As an economist, Parkison doesn’t see the situation getting better anytime soon.

“Until the whole political situation settles down, companies aren’t going to invest the multimillions it would take to open a factory,” she said. “They don’t want to risk losing that kind of investment.”

She found the people to be friendly and welcoming.

“Ukrainians are very hospitable, very nice,” she said. “I’m a farmer, so I can talk about crops and soil with them. I love the country, I love the people, and I love the food.”

After the election, monitors returned to Kiev, the capital, where she and Pfaff were able to do some sightseeing. They visited St. Sophia Church, which was built in the 1100s, and walked through Maidan Nezalezhnosti, or Independence Square, which has been a traditional site for political rallies since the start of Ukraine's independence movement, in 1990.

Overall, the OSCE concluded the election was conducted with only minor problems, despite the hostile security environments in two eastern regions and attempts to derail the process by armed groups in that part of the country.

*Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.*

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