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Tolerance Week

Former Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad attended exhibit grand opening. LOCAL A2

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Bishop Heelan High School hall inductees announced. SPORTS B1

Florida suit

The Disney Company files suit against Fla. Governor DeSantis. NATION A7

Thursday, April 27, 2023

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House GOP passes debt package

LISA MASCARO AND KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans passed sweeping legislation Wednesday that would raise the government's legal debt ceiling by \$1.5 trillion in exchange for steep spending restrictions, a tactical victory for Speaker Kevin McCarthy as he challenges President Joe Biden to negotiate and

prevent a catastrophic federal default this summer.

Biden threatened to veto the Republican package, which has almost no chance of passing the Democratic Senate in the meantime. The president so far refused to negotiate over the debt ceiling, which the White House insists must be lifted with no strings to ensure America pays its bills.

The bill passed by a razor-thin 217-215 margin.

"We've done our job," McCarthy said after the vote.

"The president can no longer ignore" the issue of federal spending limits, he said. "Now he should sit down and negotiate."

While the House debated the bill Wednesday, Biden indicated he was willing to open the door to

talks with McCarthy, but not on preventing a first-ever U.S. default that would shake America's economy and beyond.

"Happy to meet with McCarthy, but not on whether or not the debt limit gets extended," Biden said. "That's not negotiable."

Passage of the sprawling 320-page package in the House is only the start of what is expected to

become a weekslong political slog as the president and Congress try to work out a compromise that would allow the nation's debt, now at \$31 trillion, to be lifted to allow further borrowing and stave off a fiscal crisis.

The nation has never defaulted on its debt, and the House

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JESSE BROTHERS, SIOUX CITY JOURNAL

Petro Takalo, right, and his wife, Yuliia Olshevska, fled from Ukraine after Russia invaded in early 2022, leaving behind family, friends and their country's national badminton team. They now live in Boyden, Iowa, with Ryan Oostra who sponsored them, and seek ways to continue playing the sport they love.

Refugees leave behind family

Ukrainians forfeit sport for safety

BOYDEN, Iowa — Petro Takalo left Ukraine with little more than the clothes he was wearing.

One bag. A few extra clothes. And his badminton racket.

Seeking refuge in the days after Russia's Feb. 24, 2022, invasion of their country, Petro and his wife, Yuliia Olshevska, fled in uncertainty. First to Poland, then Germany and, finally, the United States.

More than four months after arriving in Boyden, they continue to settle in. They're learning a new language and adjusting to a life now absent of much of



NICK HYTREK

their family, many of their friends and the sport that brings smiles to their faces when you mention it.

Badminton, a sport popular in their home country, is little more than a backyard game here.

They knew this before coming to Iowa, but that doesn't make it any easier for two accomplished players who have represented their country in international play. Badminton brought Petro and Yuliia together, and it's hard to be pulled away from a sport that captivated each of them the first

time they played it in school.

If not for badminton, they likely never would have met.

Petro, 29, grew up in a central Ukraine city named Poltava. Yuliia, 23, is from Kyiv, the nation's capital. Petro joined Ukraine's national badminton team in 2010, Yuliia in 2014. They lived at a training center in Dnipro and were married in 2021.

When Russian missiles began landing nearby on the first day of the invasion, the couple sought safety.

Yuliia went to Poland with Petros' sister while Petro stayed behind. Excused from military service because of a hearing impairment, he was planning to stay, but his coach told him

to join Yuliia. After hours of crowded travel by car and train, Petro made it to Poland, walking the final three miles in wintry weather to the border, then waiting for two hours for clearance to cross.

Petro and Yuliia reunited in Germany, where they were provided an apartment and trained with Ukraine national badminton team members who had relocated there.

In August, Petro's brother Artem called, telling Petro he and his family were going to the United States through a U.S. government relocation program for Ukrainian refugees. Artem urged Petro and Yuliia to come too.

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Supervisors deny bonuses for support staff

CAITLIN YAMADA cyamada@siouxcityjournal.com

SIOUX CITY — Since June 2022, the Woodbury County Attorney's Office has been struggling with short staffing, with a third of its department vacant at the peak.

Initially, the board approved giving 4 percent raises to staff, paying hiring bonuses, creating a summer internship program, giving automatic vacation time, shifting a position to create a new deputy and starting new hires at a wage step equivalent to their experience, to help fill empty positions.

Now, Woodbury County Attorney James Loomis is seeking bonuses for the support staff who have been taking on extra work because of the shortage. Loomis requested to give \$2,000 bonuses to eight county attorney's office employees who put in extra work. He proposed paying the bonuses from fines collection money, which he has discretion over.

The board denied the request, stating they did not want to set a precedent and citing a similar request from County Sheriff Chad Sheehan that was also denied.

In January, Loomis said the department was missing six staff members, a third of the total staff. A full-staff attorney's office is 18 individuals. The openings were for four felony persecutors and two indictable misdemeanor prosecutors. He said he believed a large number of vacancies were

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The Mini

Rather than spending billions on sending rockets into the wild blue yonder to determine where or how life began, just buy and read the Bible.

- JOHN KOOIMAN, ORANGE CITY, IOWA

Weather
Cloudy and breezy
High 72 • Low 48
FORECAST • A3

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Refugees

From A1

They declined. The European Deaf Badminton Championships were in September in Lithuania, and Petro and Yuliia, who both are hearing impaired, weren't going to miss it. During the tournament, Petro's brother called and again asked him to come to America, where his family had settled in Sioux Center.

Petro and Yuliia had three days to answer.

"Going to America was not an easy decision," said Yuliia, an only child whose parents were against the move.

Without telling their parents, the couple decided to come to the United States, but had no one here to sponsor them.

Ryan Oostra had gotten to know Artem and his family. Through them, he learned of Petro and Yuliia's predicament. Someone had to help.

"It challenged my faith. Through a lot of prayer and a lot of reading the Bible, I decided to sponsor them," Oostra said.

After living in Germany for nine months, the couple, who knew little English, boarded a plane and, after a 30-hour trip, landed in Sioux Falls on Dec. 7, greeted by Petro's family and Oostra.

"I was happy, but it was hard to say goodbye to my family," Yuliia said in her ever-improving English.

They had to say goodbye to badminton, too. Oostra informed them before they arrived there was no badminton in Boyden, or anywhere nearby.

"It's heartbreaking for them not to be able to play, but they understand this is their new reality," said Oostra, who transformed his basement into living quarters for Petro and Yuliia.

Reality now for Petro and Yuliia is attending English classes. Petro has gotten a driver's license and a job at Groschopp, a small motor manufacturer, in Sioux Center. Yuliia also is seeking a job and is taking an online course from a college in Ukraine.

News feeds from Ukraine keep them updated on the war, and they speak regularly with their parents.

Petro was asked to play with Ukraine's national badminton team in the world cup in Bra-



JESSE BROTHERS PHOTOS, SIOUX CITY JOURNAL

Petro Takalo, right, and his wife, Yuliia Olshavska, fled from Ukraine after Russia invaded in early 2022 and now live in Boyden, Iowa, with Ryan Oostra who sponsored them. They're quickly learning English and adjusting to a new life in the United States.



Petro Takalo, left, and his wife, Yuliia Olshavska, fled their home in Ukraine after Russia invaded in early 2022. They now live in Boyden, Iowa, with Ryan Oostra, who sponsored them.



Ukraine native Petro Takalo holds medals he won at the 2022 European Deaf Badminton Championships in September in Lithuania. Takalo and his wife Yuliia Olshavska, also a member of Ukraine's national badminton team, delayed their decision to relocate to the United States because of badminton.

"I think America feels good," she said.

It would feel better with more badminton. Petro, who coached the sport in Ukraine, and Yuliia in March hosted a class at Northwest Iowa Community College in Sheldon to teach the

sport to beginners. They'd like to teach more classes, maybe get people interested in playing regularly with them.

War uprooted their lives. Seeing badminton sprout up in Northwest Iowa would help them feel grounded again.

Debt

From A1

Republican majority hopes to maneuver Biden into a corner with its plan to roll back federal spending to fiscal 2022 levels and cap future spending increases at 1% over the next decade, among other changes.

Facing a revolt from Midwestern Republicans over doing away with biofuel tax credits that Biden signed into law last year, GOP House members relented and allowed the tax credits to stay on the books in their bill.

Republicans also agreed to more quickly launch the bolstered work requirements for recipients of government aid starting in 2024 as proposed by another holdout, Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla.

Republicans hold a five-seat House majority and faced several absences this week, leaving McCarthy with almost no votes to spare in the face of Democratic opposition.

"This bill is unacceptable, it's unreasonable, it's unworkable, it's unconscionable — and it's un-American," said Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., walks from the chamber Wednesday just after the Republican majority in the House narrowly passed a sweeping debt ceiling package at the Capitol in Washington.

York. "That's why we oppose it."

Democrats derided the Republican plan as a "ransom note," a "shakedown" and "an unserious bill" that courts financial danger.

But as McCarthy worked to shore up support, some of the most conservative rank-and-file Republican members who never voted for a debt ceiling increase in their quest to slash spending said they were prepared to do just that, rallying behind the speak-

er's strategy to push Biden to the negotiating table.

Rep. Ralph Norman, R-S.C. said he "wanted double" the deficit savings contained in the bill but would vote for it "because it starts the ball, it gets us in the arena to solve the debt problem."

It's a first big test for the president and the Republican speaker, coming at a time of increased political anxiety about the abil-

ity of Washington to solve big problems amid the need to raise the federal debt limit in a matter of weeks.

The Treasury Department is taking "extraordinary measures" to pay the bills, but funding is expected to run out this summer. Economists warn that even the serious threat of a federal debt default would send shockwaves through the economy.

In exchange for raising the debt limit by \$1.5 trillion into 2024, the bill would roll back overall federal spending and:

- Claw back unspent COVID-19 funds.

- Impose tougher work requirements for recipients of food stamps and other government aid.

- Halt Biden's plans to forgive up to \$20,000 in student loans and

- End many of the landmark renewable energy tax breaks Biden signed into law last year. It would tack on a sweeping Republican bill to boost oil, gas and coal production.

A nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office analysis estimated the Republican plan would reduce federal deficits by \$4.8 trillion over the decade if the

proposed changes were enacted into law.

Several Republicans from the party's right wing, eager for even stricter spending cuts, said the bill was at least a starting point as they prepared to vote for McCarthy's strategy and bolster his hand in talks with Biden. Others though, remained noncommittal or flat-out no's.

Rep. Andy Biggs, the former chairman of the Freedom Caucus, said he wanted Republicans to do more to end deficit spending. Tim Burchett, R-Tenn., said of the nation's nearly \$32 trillion in debt, "that's my major concern."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said House passage of the legislation would be a "wasted effort" and that McCarthy should come to the table with Democrats to pass a straightforward debt-limit bill without GOP priorities and avoid default.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who stepped aside to give McCarthy the lead, said the speaker has been able to unite the House Republicans.

Now, he said, Biden and McCarthy must come to agreement. Otherwise, he said, "We'll be at a standoff. And we shouldn't do that to the country."

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Woodbury

From A1

owed to a lack of a competitive salary package and they were having a hard time finding qualified applicants.

Loomis said since June 2022, the department has only received 4 applications with just a single hire. He said other applicants were lacking in their ability to be prosecutors.

"Attorneys have been moved around to ensure all areas of responsibility are covered and support staff has taken on extra duties to help the attorneys," Loomis said in a report to the board.

Since speaking with the board and getting approval for the changes, Loomis has been able to hire two new

staff members and line up the county attorney's first summer intern. He also said he has seen an increase in applications since the steps were approved.

Now, he wishes to address the administrative staff who took an increased workload due to the shortage.

"The administrative staff within my office has been great," he said in the board documents. "They have never complained. They have always had a positive team attitude and have always been willing to take on more duties and responsibilities."

He added that the office is still short five attorneys and the administrative staff will help bridge the gap and continue to get everything done. The bonuses would

be meant as a reward for the extra work and continued efforts, Loomis said.

The fines collection budget, which Loomis has requested drawing the bonus money from, is generated by the office and stays in the office, it is not part of the general budget. Loomis said there is approximately \$160,000 currently in the fund.

"My request is simply that the board grant approval in the interest of transparency and being upfront with both the board and the citizens in Woodbury County," he said.

Board members expressed concern about setting a precedent for other elected officials and the future use of fine collections or other discretionary funds.

The board also cited a de-

cision in June 2022 to deny Sheehan from giving supplemental pay for his percentage deputies. The supplemental pay would have been for the extra time the five deputies spent on the new Law Enforcement Center project, and on radio and IT work, Sheehan said.

He proposed using a total of \$49,600 of his fiscal 2022 budget to pay for the supplements. The board voted 4-1 to deny the request.

Loomis argued the situation was different because Sheehan was proposing using budget funds, while his proposal is funded from his office.

Supervisor Mark Nelson was also concerned about the public perception of using funds collected from fines for raises.