



FRONT RANGE

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Musgrave aide saves Russian teen from draft

By Ben Ready

The Daily Times-Call

LONGMONT — A young American man might look forward to 18 as the age of buying smokes and adult magazines. In Vasily Vasinov's native Russia, 18 means the start of two years of mandatory military service.

But thanks in part to U.S. Rep. Marilyn Musgrave's local staff, Vasinov will celebrate his 18th birthday June 18 reunited with his mother and stepfather in Longmont, not en route to a war in Chechnya.

"It's good (here) but very different. But I didn't surprise about this," Vasinov said in a distinct Russian accent of his first impressions of America.

The family met Tuesday in Longmont with Musgrave and her local constituent advocate, Greg Burt, to thank them for flexing a little congressional muscle on their behalf.

In April 2005, Russian-born Longmont residents Yuri Lomanov and Ninel Senatorova filed paperwork

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Ninel Senatorova

to bring Vasinov — Senatorova's son from a previous marriage — to the States. From Internet research, Lomanov learned that processing a permanent residency application through the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (formerly the INS), the National Visa Center and finally the U.S. Embassy in Moscow for final approval would take about three years.

"A lawyer recommended talking to a congressman or senator," Lomanov said. The question wasn't whether America would have Vasinov, but whether he'd get here as an innocent high schooler or as combat veteran two years later.

While favors, bribes and intimidation are as ubiquitous as snow and vodka in their homeland, Lomanov and Senatorova said America actually provides legal channels to cut through bureaucracy.

"There's a huge difference," Lomanov told the Times-Call. "I didn't pay them or I'm relatives with them. We wanted to stay in the legal field. We didn't want to get anything we weren't supposed to get."

The family doubts Burt's messages adorned with congressional letterhead did any good initially. Last summer, Burt and Lomanov sent the CIS letters pleading for them to hurry, also sending articles about the hazing brutality and dangers of serving in

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**U.S. Rep.
Marilyn
Musgrave,**

second from right, meets with, from left, 17-year-old Vasily Vasinov, Ninel Senatorova and Yuri Lomanov in Longmont on Tuesday.

Musgrave's political influence helped expedite Vasinov's permanent residency, helping him avoid being drafted into the Russian Army when he turns 18.

Times-Call photo
by Ben Ready



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the Russian army. Still, CIS officials didn't pass Vasinov's file to the Department of State until October.

But his continued letters and phone calls helped send Vasinov's file to the top of the heap at the State Department, Burt said. Burt also managed to pull strings to expedite Vasinov's March 3 interview at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, the final step in getting his residency.

"It makes a big difference to get a phone call from the congressional office," Burt said.

On March 12, about three months before his birthday, Vasinov's mom welcomed him to America. Their airport reunion was the first time they had seen each other in five years.

"When we met and started to talk, we had the same impressions," Senatorova said. "Like we didn't see each other in three, two days."

No longer dreading his birth-

day, Vasinov is now a junior at Longmont High School who hopes to major in computer science at the University of Colorado after he graduates.

"Already I understand more. Before, I could only say several words to (classmates) but couldn't have some discussion," he said.

Vasinov isn't enrolled in any ESL class and, because he has studied English in Moscow schools the past nine years, said he struggles more in environmental science class than in his mainstream English class.

At the meeting Tuesday, Musgrave said she would soon attend a ceremony recognizing legal immigrants who recently gained U.S. citizenship, and she told the family she was proud her office could help.

"We always worried about you Russians up there," Musgrave joked with Lomanov, who served his own two-year Russian military service in the late 1980s.

"It's so wonderful to talk to each cab driver (in Washington, D.C.) and ask them why they came to this country. It makes me feel good every time I do that."

After the meeting, Musgrave

said she didn't mind helping someone avoid a foreign country's military service.

"I had no reservation, because his stepfather and mother were already here," Musgrave told the Times-Call. "The Russian military is not at all like ours," she added later, referring to the hazing Lomanov described from his experiences.

Wearing faint smiles while trying to understand as much as they could in English, the three immigrants sat on a couch in Musgrave's Coffman Street office Tuesday. They listened as the congresswoman told them historical tales of the capital building, a place they were now welcome to come visit with her anytime.

When asked why he and Senatorova first came to America, Lomanov replied, "I heard this was the land of opportunities and of freedoms, frankly."

"If you are honest and are not hypocritical and hate corruption, you can't live in Russia," Senatorova said. "We are a great example of (immigrating) right."

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