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Kyle Thaller gets a leg up on public service career as a U.S. Senate Page

By E. BRUCE DAVIS
Observer staff

When 17-year-old Kyle Thaller of Gainesville and now a senior at Patriot High School discovered his Type 1 diabetes would prevent him from attending the US Naval Academy to follow in his father's footsteps, he found another opportunity for unique public service – during a Presidential Impeachment and the beginning of a pandemic.

The 100-strong US Senate is called the "Most Exclusive Club in the World." As one of 30 Spring-session Senate Pages, Kyle began on Jan. 26, but due to COVID-19, as a Page, returned home in early April, virtually finishing Senate Page School on June 5.

There were 16 Republican Pages and 14 Democratic Pages—Republicans hold a majority in the Senate.

Usually split equally, there were 16 male and 14 female Pages, as one female unable to attend was replaced by a male.

While in Washington, DC, Pages lived in the Daniel Webster Hall, five blocks from the Hart Senate Office building, and attended classes in its basement at the Daniel Webster Senate Page School.

"I took classes in Honors Algebra 2, Honors US History, Honors English Literature and Honors Chemistry," Kyle said.

"All of the teachers were fantastic and were always there to help us."

His typical day started upon waking at 5 a.m., donning his uniform and eating breakfast at 5:30, before arriving for 6:15 classes.

He stayed in school until 8 or 8:45 a.m. Pages were required to arrive an hour and 45 minutes before morning session that convened at either 8 or 10, to set up the Senate floor.

Democratic Pages, which included Kyle, were split into two groups of seven, alternating daily duties.

Kyle said, "For example, one day my group would be late shift and stay late to help the Senate until it adjourned for the day, no matter how late it went. The other group would leave for Webster Hall at 6 p.m. and do homework. Then, the next day, we would be early shift."

His goal was to be the greatest Page ever.

Duties included setting up the Senate Chamber, holding doors for Senators, delivering copies of bills to each Senator's offices and setting up their desks prior to their speeches.

"One of us would get a copy of the speech from the Senator's staffer and set it up on [his or her] desk, a second person would re-



Courtesy Photo

Kyle Thaller in his US Senate Page uniform with lapel pin and name tag

trieve a lectern from the Senate lobby and finally someone else would get a glass of water for the Senator from the cloakroom," Kyle explained.

They later cleaned Senators' desks, with one making copies of the speech, returning one to the Senator and another to the Senate Parliamentarian for inclusion in the Congressional Record.

During the Impeachment Trial, Kyle's supervisor gave him the extraordinary task of delivering notes between Democrat and Republican Senators, because he was the only Page who knew every single Senator's name and face.

He sat attentively on the rostrum to quickly identify which Senator signaled to send a note. He became one of the most recognizable Pages because of this honor.

He added, "Another one of my duties during Impeachment was delivering the questions from the Senators to Chief Justice [John Roberts], which was always super cool."

"It also was very nerve-wracking, as I had to get up very quickly and walk as fast as I could, get the question from the Senator and then walk down the main aisle and give it to the Chief Justice, all while the

whole world was watching me on international TV, not to mention every Senator in the chamber."

Kyle, a Type 1 diabetic, donated some of his page earnings along with test strips, glucose meters, insulin, needles and outside financial support to two diabetic clinics in Juba, South Sudan through his "Kyle's Campaigns for Change" (KCC).

He became interested in Sudan when the Navy assigned his father, Mark, to duties there.

He discovered the Page program after talking to Congressman Rob Whitman (VA-01) in May 2019 about his Sudan program. Kyle liked the idea of someday being a congressman.

He said, "I asked my Dad about internships I could do for my congressman, and he told me to look some up."

Although the House Page program had been discontinued, he realized the Senate Page program was still going strong.

He applied on Nov. 10, 2019, to Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, Virginia's US Senators, provided his resumé, a cover letter, letters of recommendation, and a high school transcript.

"My letters of recommendation came from Dr. Constantine Jervase Yak, a member of Parliament from South Sudan who helped me with KCC and served as my mentor for everything in South Sudan," Kyle said.

Other letters were from Adam Daniels, his, AP World History teacher at Patriot, Thomas Sutliff, AP English teacher and Andy White, who coached Kyle in 10th grade with his PWCS Global Leadership Conference Keynote Speech.

After interviews with and being considered by the staffs of both Virginia Senators, Kyle accepted his page nomination from Senator Warner, who offered first.

Kyle developed relationships with some Senators.

His favorite was Sen. Cory Booker, who asked Kyle how his days were going and what he

thought of his Page experience and with whom he traded jokes.

Kyle also liked interacting with West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin.

Kyle met Vice President Mike Pence and said, "It is an honor to meet you, sir."

Pence replied, "Good to meet you, too."

He also got close to President Trump, during a press conference following budget discussions with Senate Republicans and just before he made his State of the Union address.

Kyle was thrilled to realize desks he cleaned after the Impeachment, included the Illinois desk, which had Barack Obama's signature, and Sen. Elizabeth Warren's desk which had "John F. Kennedy 1953-1959" inscribed in it.

Kyle said, "My hand was trembling as I touched the signature. It was that humbling."

Kyle added, "For me, the impeachment trial changed my life. I witnessed the reason democracy was created, to ensure that the common people's voice and not kings or rulers, would be heard."

He learned to always stand by what you believe in.

He said, "All of the Senators do this every day when they go to the Senate floor. They debate, trying to convince others that their ideas should be heard, and that these ideas are best for helping our country."

"Of course, I know that there are party politics involved, but overall, all they want to help the country. That's what I want to do when I enter public service; stand by my beliefs, try to have others hear and share my point of view, and help our country."

"My top college choices are UVA, William and Mary, Washington and Lee, Duke, Vanderbilt, and Harvard, because of their terrific politics and political science programs," Kyle said.

He aspires to become a Virginia State Senator, then Governor, before serving as a US Senator, and eventually becoming Senate Majority Leader.

Sharing values and ideals of each party, Kyle is unsure which party he would represent.

"I am hoping that, maybe, people like me can bring the two parties together," he said.

A dozen Pages are working on his project to help South Sudan's Minister of Federal Affairs promote federalism throughout the country while developing a new constitution.

Kyle will return to Patriot HS in the fall, but virtually, for at least nine weeks. He will miss reuniting with school friends but believes virtual studying may allow him to travel to help South Sudan.

Kyle, born in Boston, MA and now living in Gainesville, attended Glenkirk ES and Gainesville MS, before going to Patriot HS.

He enjoys reading about history, politics, chess, and biographies of famous leaders and politicians, weightlifting, running, doing chin-ups and playing competitive ping pong.

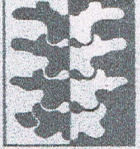
Kyle has a brother and two sisters. His mother, Kate, teaches FACS at Bull Run MS.

"As Kyle's parents, we have tried our best to inspire, coach, teach, and nurture as much as possible. However, over the years, we must admit that Kyle has often inspired us, too; to reach for the stars and to never give up," Mark said. "This has also occurred with Kyle's siblings, Joshua, Rachel and Bridget. Kate and I are blessed to witness such character and fortitude in our own children."

To aspiring Senate Pages, Kyle said, "If you're just doing it to get into a good college or improve your resumé, don't even bother applying."

"The Senate Page Program is for people who either want to go into public service or the military. Do something that makes you unique among all the other applicants."

He said he and other Pages, "Deeply love our country and want to change the world through leadership and public service."



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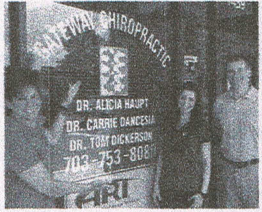
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