

Senior Balances School and Political Ambitions

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SENIOR BALANCES SCHOOL AND POLITICAL AMBITIONS

Kendal Zylstra, a senior accounting and business finance major, likes to stay busy.

He's a student assistant for the Defender men's basketball team, a tax intern at De Koster & De Koster PLLC, a senior analyst for Defender Capital Management, a co-chair for the College Republicans, and a treasurer for Student Government.

Also, this spring, Zylstra is running for Iowa House District 4. If elected, Zylstra will be the youngest member of the Iowa House of Representatives.

Over the past few months, Zylstra has put thousands of miles on his car by driving around Lyon County and northern Sioux County to speak with constituents. He has sent out mailers, put up lawn signs, attended events—"doing everything I possibly can to get my name out there," he says. "I've met with small groups of farmers, spoken with the Lyon County Pork Producers, gone to local banks to talk with employees, and more."

Zylstra has been interested in politics his entire life, but what reinvigorated his love of politics was the opportunity to help Representative Randy Feenstra ('91) with his 2020 campaign for Iowa's Fourth Congressional District.

"I mostly did grassroots campaigning, like making phone calls and speaking at public events on Representative Feenstra's behalf," says Zylstra. "Being in high-pressure situations was exciting, and I realized that I could handle difficult conversations and speak well."

With his own political campaign in full swing, Zylstra feels like a good representative of a typical Iowa House District 4 resident. "I'm from Larchwood, I lived by Hull for a while, and I attend



JAMIN VER VELDE ('99)

"I want young people to get involved and engaged in politics," says Kendal Zylstra. "Many people wait until they're older, but I've been following politics since I was a kid."

Dordt, which is in Sioux Center. I'm from here—I was born here, I go to school here, and I work here. This place is what I'm all about."

When it came time to choose a major, Zylstra was drawn to accounting and

accounting or financial sectors. He is interested in legal work; he has even been accepted into a couple prestigious law school programs this fall.

"At this point in my life, I am in a personal situation where I've been able to run for state representative," he says. "I have other professional goals that I ultimately want to achieve other than going to the legislature, but I feel like I'm truly representative of where I live, so I want to run. Iowa needs legislators like me who truly understand the challenges that Northwest Iowans face."

It's been tough to balance his final semester of college with running for political office.

"I really relish Sunday as my day off, and for the other six days of the week, I go hard," he says. "Yes, I'm really busy, but I think it'll be worth it in the long run, and I feel like I'm doing what God wants me to do."

Zylstra says that studying at Dordt has helped him to gain a vast array of experiences, making him a more well-rounded political candidate. For example, as co-chair of the College Republicans,

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— Kendal Zylstra

finance. And, given that two of the strongest industries in Northwest Iowa are agriculture and banking, Zylstra says his accounting and finance double major translates well into his political ambitions. "I'm a numbers person, and I have good analytical skills," he says. "It's important to understand and articulate commodities and other aspects of banking. I'm able to do that, thanks to my majors and the fact that I grew up on a farm."

Ultimately, Zylstra wants to work in

Zylstra is able to help with facilitating on-campus and community events during the last election cycle. He has been involved in Student Government all four years at Dordt, from representing his residence hall to serving as Student Government president. He's also thankful for the opportunity to get to know faculty members and other students well.

"Senator Jeff Taylor is a wonderful professor; his classes are really enjoyable," adds Zylstra.

Dordt has shaped him as a leader, he says. "If you're going to be a state representative, then you should have leadership qualities. I've been able to develop and discover those as I've been here at Dordt."

In the end, Zylstra didn't win the race; he received 2,201 votes (48 percent), whereas his opponent received 2,421 (52 percent). Still, he is grateful for the experience.

"What we accomplished was considered impossible by many, and we certainly have a lot to be proud of," he wrote in a Facebook post. "I knocked on over 3,400 doors and met with thousands of people throughout this process. I'm encouraged by the people I met and am excited about the future of Northwest Iowa."

What will he do now? He's not sure yet. As a planner, he says that "kind of freaks me out a little bit, because most of my friends have their post-graduation plans in place. But I trust that God will lead me to what's next."

SARAH MOSS ('10)



JAMIN VER VELDE (99)

Zylstra was one of 370 students who walked across the B.J. Haan Auditorium stage on May 13 and graduated.

Dale Vos has worked as a division manager of a midsize retail agriculture business, a farmer, a consultant for Iowa State University, and a production engineer.

DEFENDER CROPS SOW SEEDS OF GROWTH

Defender Crops, a new agriculture technology class, gives students a chance to manage 80 acres of crop land at Dordt's Agriculture Stewardship Center (ASC). This class provides students with the opportunity to make all kinds of decisions on how best to steward the land, from production to business to marketing management.

"The students decide on all inputs with the advice of the agronomy team at Hull Coop," says Dale Vos, instructor of agriculture technology.

The class pays rent for Dordt's land and custom rates for the equipment used. "This is a new approach to the class and makes it very realistic. Students will learn to manage profits and losses throughout the years," says Vos.

In the past, all decisions at the ASC were typically made by the farm steward. With this new program, students gain more responsibility and hands-on learning experiences at the ASC.

Andrew Eisenga participated in Defender Crops this year. He grew up on a family farm in McBain, Michigan, so he's very familiar with farming.

"Our main crop is potatoes, but we also grow wheat, corn, black beans, green beans, and hay," he says. "I hope to go back to my family farm and start full-time there."

Thanks to Defender Crops, he was able to continue honing his skills. This past year, he enjoyed being able to plant 20 acres of corn at the ASC.

"My favorite part about Defender Crops is that we as students get to make the decisions and do all the work that goes with it," he says.

Sophomores like Eisenga determined what seed to use, figured out the tillage plan, and picked the fertilizer. They then sent the plan to the freshmen, who—working alongside Vos—made sure the plan was ready to go for the spring.

"The students decided the crop rotation based on profitability, not popularity," says Vos. "That was a struggle for them because many of them just wanted to plant corn, but that wasn't the best management decision. They decided on tillage practices; that was another struggle because they like to run tractors in the field."

The students also had to learn about sharing equipment as well as how to adapt to weather and other challenges.

"It was a blessing to watch the students grow in their knowledge and abilities over the course of the year," says Vos. "This class helps our students gain the skills they need to succeed in the ever-changing agriculture industry."

BETHANY VAN VOORST