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Holding Office

Hawaiian Pilot Appointed State Senator

By John Perkinson, Senior Staff Writer

Some say the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in service to others. For F/O Kaiali'i "Kai" Kahele (Hawaiian), that service is reflected in the career choices he's made.

When he isn't helping airline passengers reach their destinations, Kahele flies in the defense of the country as an Air National Guard pilot. Now at the age of 42, the Hilo, Hawaii, resident has decided to pursue yet another service-oriented vocation, this time as a member of the Hawaii state senate.

Unfortunately, Kahele assumed this new role under less-than-desirable circumstances. His father, Gilbert Kahele, previously held the Senate seat until January 26, when he passed away. Deeply saddened but determined to continue his father's legacy, Kahele moved quickly to fill the office.

At his swearing-in on February 17, Kahele acknowledged, "Throughout my life, my father taught me the importance of community service, and I'm honored to carry on his legislative initiatives," adding, "I'm humbled and ready to go."

During his tenure, the senior Kahele had advocated for several aviation-related proposals that struck a special chord with his son. This legislation includes Senate Bill 3072, which if enacted would transfer oversight of Hawaii's 15 airports from the state Department of Transportation to a five-member airport authority.

"Honolulu International Airport has exceeded its capacity," said Kahele, noting that it's not uncommon for flights to wait long periods on the tarmac because gates are simply not available. Likewise, passengers are often required to remain seated in parked airplanes until the

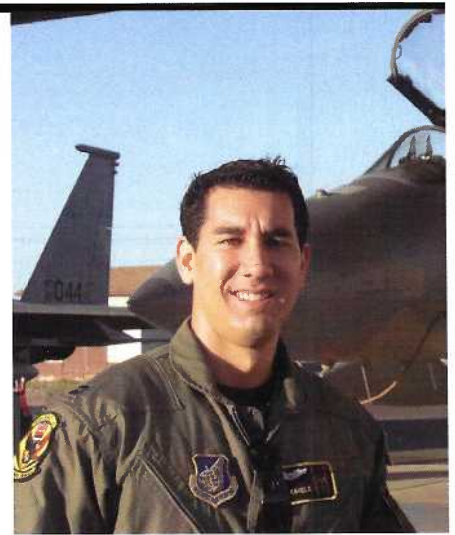
crowds at the airport's customs/immigration facilities dissipate.

"Most other U.S. city airports are governed by bodies made up of civic and business leaders. Transitioning to this kind of organization would help us streamline processes and modernize decades-old airports," he noted.

Other legislation on the elder Kahele's radar included Senate Bill 3073, which would appropriate funding to establish an aviation college at the University of Hawaii at Hilo. "My dad always dreamed of having a world-class collegiate aviation program here in Hawaii."

Success on these bills will require hard work, determination, and most of all time—something Kahele doesn't have...yet. The governor appointed the Hawaiian first officer to fulfill the second year of his father's four-year term. However, as an appointed Hawaii state senator, he must run for the post and get elected this coming fall if he's to hold the position for the full term.

Several of Kahele's family members were pilots, and his mother served as a United Airlines flight attendant. Consequently, he had the opportunity to travel



Public Defender

F/O Kaiali'i Kahele (Hawaiian) prepares for flight as a member of the Hawaii Air National Guard's 154th wing.



"I don't think being a state senator will be the last public office I'll pursue."

F/O KAIALI'I KAHELE
(HAWAIIAN)

frequently as a child, an experience that broadened his horizons. As a high school graduation gift, Kahele's parents gave him six weeks of classes at a nearby flight school and, in time, he earned his pilot's license.

While attending the University of Hawaii at Hilo, he began operating commercial tours, flying tourists up and down the coastline to see the island's volcanoes and waterfalls. Soon after his college graduation, he enlisted in the Hawaii Air National Guard, flying combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, where he earned a USAF Air Medal and a National Defense Service Medal. Kahele currently serves as a major in the unit and as an instructor pilot on the C-17 Globemaster. He's also an adjunct member of the faculty at his alma mater.

Kahele has been with Hawaiian Airlines for seven years and currently flies the A330. As a widebody pilot, he's able to bid several long international trips, giving him time to take care of other responsibilities, including those of being a husband and father of three.

"My dad and I were always really close," said Kahele. Recalling his childhood, he remembers going door-to-door with his father to campaign or canvass the local community. For many years, Kahele toyed with the idea of seeking public office but didn't take the matter seriously until this past winter. Always looking forward with a desire to try something new, he added, "I don't think being a state senator will be the last public office I'll pursue." ✉