



Pete Ricketts
Governor

STATE OF NEBRASKA

Latino American Commission
Jasel Cantu
Public Information Officer
State Capitol Building
P.O. Box 94965
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-4965
Phone: (402) 471-2791
Fax: (402) 471-4381

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Media Contact: Jasel Cantu
Phone: (402) 471-2791

TWO LATINAS AMONG 2016 LEGISLATIVE PAGES

LINCOLN – Antoinette “Toni” Caudillo and Brenda Gallardo are two of 27 Legislative Pages working with the 2016 Legislative Session, and the only Latinas to serve as Pages this year.

Legislative Pages fall under the Clerk of the Legislature’s office, which describes them as local college students employed by the legislature to respond to senators' requests for assistance on the legislative floor, answer incoming calls to the chamber and prepare for and assist with committee hearings.

There are 27 Pages this year, but the number varies every year according to Kitty Kearns, who oversees the Pages.

“(Caudillo and Gallardo) are very enthusiastic about their jobs and a joy to work with,” said Kearns. “I really like working with these two young women and I hope they leave here with a sense of pride after being chosen to work for the Nebraska Legislature.”

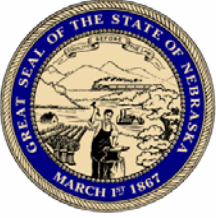
Their work began when the Session began in January, and will end on the last day of the Session on April 20, 2016.

Both Caudillo and Gallardo are currently attending the University of Nebraska – Lincoln (UNL) as full-time students. They each coordinated their college courses to work around their weekly 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. schedule at the Capitol Building, taking classes in the mornings and evenings.

Their duties include making copies for the senators and assisting them, delivering coffee or water, set-up, retrieving documents from the senators’ offices, collecting handouts and testimony at the hearings and attending to the senators when their light comes on.

Originally from North Platte, Caudillo, 19, is majoring in public relations with plans to graduate in 2019. She is a member of the Mexican American Student Association at UNL.

Caudillo submitted an application after her aunt, Lori Laurelage, who is part of the legal counsel team at the Nebraska Department of National Resources, recommended the Page position to her.



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She then received a letter of recommendation from her senator, Senator Mike Groene (District 42 – North Platte), and did a final interview at the Capitol Building.

“They want someone who is responsible and interested in politics,” said Caudillo. “Someone who can balance school and work. I was pretty busy in high school with after-school activities and sports so it wasn’t something I wasn’t used to. I like coming to work, it keeps my mind off the stress of school.”

In high school, she was involved in sports with basketball, cross country, and the dance team. She was also a member of the school choir and One-Act Play. Outside of school, she participated in service trips to Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and Winnebago Reservation for two summers.

Caudillo is assigned to the Transportation and Telecommunications committee and the Government, Military and Veterans committee.

Gallardo, 20, is an economics major who expects to graduate in 2018. Originally from Wakefield, this is her second year as a Page after becoming interested three years ago from her friends’ work as Pages. For the past two years, she received her letter of recommendation from Senator Tyson Larson (District 40 – O’Neill).

Since it’s her second year of being a Page, Gallardo knew how to balance school and work. She even schedules study times on her calendar to ensure proper time management.

In high school, she was a member of the National Honor Society, the Future Business Leaders of America, Speech, One Act Play and Student Council. At UNL, she is a member of the new Define American student organization, the Sigma Alpha Lambda honor society and is on the Diversity & Inclusion Committee of UNL’s ASUN Student Government, the UNL Student Conduct Board and the Student Advisory Board for the UNL College of Business.

Gallardo likes to read the fiscal notes for bills, which allows her to see the influence of economics in the state and government, “which is what we do in economics, and it’s cool to be able to link what I’m taught at school to what I do with work.”

She described her most rewarding experience as a Page had occurred last year when she was at the hearing for LB 623 since she was assigned to the Transportation and Telecommunications committee. She said she was able to stand on the sidelines and watch the entire process as testifiers spoke in favor of allowing Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival recipients to have driver’s licenses. The bill became law last year.



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This year, she is assigned to the Revenue committee and Business & Labor committee.

Both students express that they have been treated respectfully and kindly by all of the senators and staff at the Capitol Building. Yet, there is one senator who stands out: Senator Ernie Chambers (District 11 – Omaha).

“Listening to Ernie Chambers’ talk is interesting,” said Caudillo. “He’s very passionate.”

Gallardo echoed Caudillo’s statement, “Ernie Chambers is very interesting to listen to; he’s a voice that needs to be heard. It is important to have someone like Senator Chambers in the legislature.”

Applying to become a Page was a decision both students do not regret.

“It’s very interesting, you get to see and hear everything. There’s a lot of behind-the-scenes work you don’t know about, and we get to see it, which is really cool. I’ve learned more about the (Capitol) building. I like working here, the (Capitol Building’s) pretty big; it’s fun at work,” said Caudillo.

“I get a first-hand look at the legislative process,” said Gallardo. “A lot of times we see one side, so it’s interesting to see the senators come together to negotiate for what’s in the best interest of the state. A lot of policy is made that impacts all Nebraskans, and I get to play a small part of that legislative process.”

Gallardo wants to return as a Legislative Page next year. She is interested in attending law school and would like to become a policy advisor or teach economics at a university. Caudillo is unsure of her future career plans but will use her Page experience to help make future decisions.

Current Congressman Adrian Smith (District 3) and current state Senators Heath Mello (District 5 – Omaha) and Adam Morfeld (District 46 – Lincoln) were all former Legislative Pages.

Contact the Clerk's Office at (402) 471-2271 to inquire about the program or request an application.

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Note: Photos available.