

BY / BECCA BROADDUS

D.C. attorney **shapes lives** through legislation, mentorship

RUSS SULLIVAN LOVES WHAT HE DOES.

From Capitol Hill to the courtroom to the chaos of his home, Sullivan has made an effort to live out his passions.

“Unless you really strike it rich, you’re going to work for a significant portion of your life,” Sullivan said. “It might as well be something that when you wake up in the morning, you look forward to doing. And so, that’s what I’ve done my entire life.”

Before working on Capitol Hill, Sullivan, a Baylor Accounting graduate and University of Texas Law School graduate, worked at an accounting firm and a law firm for about a decade, respectively, before pursuing his goal of “bring[ing] a business perspective to government and public policy.”

He started working on Capitol Hill during President Clinton’s first term, and he left during President Obama’s second term. In the 18 years between, Sullivan worked on tax, trade, healthcare, social security, banking, budget and most of the domestic economic portfolio.

“I got the opportunity to craft and draft the Bush tax cuts of 2001, the expansion of Medicare and prescription drugs in 2004, the agreement to add China to the World Trade Organization, various trade bills, and then ultimately, the Affordable Care Act,” Sullivan said.

Sullivan’s face brightens as he rattles off the list of his proudest achievements at the U.S. Senate. He includes the passage of the 2001

tax cuts, a bipartisan agreement led by his boss at the time, Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT). As a result, Sullivan found himself at the helm of an impromptu press conference. Additionally, he considers his role as a chief architect of the Affordable Care Act among his proudest achievements.

“It was thrilling to help guide a very significant change in the way a portion of our economy works, and then to see that process implemented, challenged in court, and ultimately, have those issues resolved,” Sullivan said. “I never envisioned I would be where I am now. I intended to only stay on Capitol Hill for a couple of years. I was just having such a great time. I didn’t want to leave, so I stayed for 18 years.”

In 2013, he retired from his position as staff director of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee and joined Washington, D.C.-based law firm McGuireWoods as partner, building a tax law and tax policy practice. At the time, he had nine kids in college, and Sullivan joked, he “had to earn some money!”

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BBA '83

In fact, he has been legal or designated guardian of 22 kids, and all but three are in college or beyond.

“My passion is changing the lives of young people who face extraordinary challenges due to the death, incarceration, illness or other problems with their parents,” he said. “That’s my calling, and that’s my purpose in life. Ultimately I realized, like the Rick Warren book says, you need to find your purpose in life, and once you do, life gets a lot easier because it’s easier to make choices.”

Although he’s no longer working in Congress, Sullivan continues to serve and impact the lives of others. His priority for the next few years is to build the practice, “pour [his] life” into his middle school-aged children and serve on the boards of nonprofits focusing on children.

“For the last 20 years, I have invested a good part of my waking hours... as a mentor [at work] and then as a guardian for all these kids,” he said. “That has brought me joy, and I feel like I have made a difference.”

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