



**A Conversation With The Governor  
Latino Leaders Luncheon Series  
Eagle Leadership Award**

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**Mickey Ibarra:** You're the son of Ron Sandoval, an FAA maintenance supervisor. Boy, we've heard a lot about the FAA recently. And Gloria Gallegos, a legal secretary born in Redding, California on August 5th, 1963.

As a longtime resident of Reno, you graduated from Bishop Manogue High School and from the University of Nevada. You served on the staff of U.S. Senator Paul Laxalt and served as an extern to the Ohio Supreme Court, later earning your law degree from the Ohio State University and passing the bar exam in Nevada, in California, and in the District of Columbia.

You served as an Assembly member, attorney general, federal judge, and governor of Nevada. So a few questions. What was your life like in the early years growing up? Tell us about

your parents, siblings, role models. Tell us about your early life.

**Brian Sandoval:** Of course. First and foremost, thank you for the opportunity and honor to be here, Mickey. I'm really overwhelmed. Senator, thank you for the kind introduction. I have such a profound respect for your father. He welcomed me into his office when I was a candidate and gave me advice and was supportive of me, and I never forgot that. People don't know we've been friends since my days -- our days at the university. So I have profound appreciation, respect for the Senator and what she has done for our great state. Thank you.

Before I respond, and I'm not filibustering here, I also wanted to acknowledge my wonderful wife, the former NFL Nevada first lady, Lauralyn Sandoval. And thank you all for being here. There are a lot of friends and familiar faces here, and I truly want to give you my thanks for the support through the years. We all love this great state of Nevada.

To get to my parents -- and I'm proud to talk about my parents, Ron and Gloria Sandoval. They're both native New Mexicans. My mom was the daughter of my grandfather Eddie Gallegos who is a proud World War II veteran and his wife, my grandma, Mary Ann Gallegos who's a housewife. My dad was one of ten, one of ten children. Had he not been one of those ten, one of the only ten to move out of state, I would be a multi-

generational New Mexican. But he made that decision. But we moved around a lot when I was young kid. We had moved for -- I was born in Redding. From there we went to South Lake, and from there we went to Los Angeles. From Los Angeles we went to Fallon, Nevada.

My mom still tells that story because she went to Fallon, sight unseen from Los Angeles. Quite a difference between Los Angeles, California and Fallon, Nevada. But two of the most amazing people that you would ever meet. I mean, they really thought me the value of hard work, of respect, respecting everybody. And if you have the opportunity to help others, you do it. They both taught me a work ethic unlike any other. A lot of people don't know this about me, but when I was kid we raised sheep out in Sparks, Nevada, which was great -- I guess at the time I didn't think it was great way to grow up. My first job, I've told this joke and I've apologized but it's kind of true, my first job was cleaning sheep pens. I had said it was good practice for what I did in politics, you know.

But in any event, you know, we had to get up, my brother and I. That was our job and that was how I put myself through college. It's how I bought my first car. It's how I learned about the value of a business because we kept our sheep, we sheared them ourselves, we sold the wool, we sold the lambs. And with that money, we got to keep it. We bought our grain and

we bought our hay. But we had to be up really early in the morning to get all that done, my brother and I.

My brother is now a veterinarian in Sparks, Nevada and does an incredible job. I also have an older sister, Lauri, who works for a nonprofit in Reno, Nevada. My parents are still with us. I'm very blessed to have them. But without them and without teaching me that work ethic, and my wife says this all the time, anything is possible. Everything is possible. And that was part of the lesson that my parents taught me as well, that you have to put a little hard work behind it.

**Mickey Ibarra:** Governor, your interest in government and the law, what sparked that interest? How did that come about?

**Brian Sandoval:** Well, you had mentioned that or was mentioned during the introduction that my mom was a legal secretary. And my first W2 job was when I was 14 years old and I was a bus boy at the federal courthouse in the cafeteria. So I'd obviously have to arrive at work before. When I would take my breaks, I would sit in the courtrooms. I would see and interact with the attorneys and all the people at the federal courthouse. My mom, as a legal secretary, had worked for the U.S. Attorney and she had worked for the U.S. public defender. I really saw some lessons there and really had an opportunity to make a difference in people's lives.

There were no professionals in our family. No one had graduated from college. And that was another thing, that there was really a big push from my parents is that you are going to go to college and you're going to finish college and go on from there. But it was a big inspiration for me at that federal courthouse to be able to observe the lawyers, the staff, the judges, to watch people that needed representation and who otherwise wouldn't have it, to find a profound respect for our Constitution and the laws of the United States of America and the Rule of Law and that it protects everybody. It really made a big impression on a young man at the time.

**Mickey Ibarra:** Yeah. Thinking about the American dream, what was your dream?

**Brian Sandoval:** I wanted to make a difference in people's lives. I assure you in all the schools that I visited, I tell those kids it never occurred to me that I would have the privilege of serving as governor of the great state of Nevada. I felt that was so beyond anything that I would have a chance to do. But I did know that I wanted to make a difference, that I wanted to be in a position. When I was a kid I loved doing reports on presidents. I loved American history and history from all over the country. And it really inspired me to do that.

My first trip to Washington, D.C. was in 7th grade. I had saved my lamb money to buy a plane ticket because my mom had a conference there. That inspired me as well to go there. So I had hoped that someday that I would be able to make a position or make a difference and be in a position to make a positive change in people's lives.

**Mickey Ibarra:** Crossroads. I think all of us could point to a crossroad or two in our lives, the decisions that made all the difference in where we are today or where we're headed. I'm wondering if there's a crossroad or two that stand out in your life.

**Brian Sandoval:** There are many. I think all of us know that life is never in a straight line. It's never in a straight line. We have plans and life happens.

One of the crossroads for me is I think about the response to this question. You talked about inspiration. But when I was in college at the University of Nevada, I became aware somebody I knew had done an internship in Washington, D.C. And I thought, wow, to be able to go to Washington, D.C. and work there, just think what you would learn. And I never thought I would get elected, but I thought what do you have to lose. The worst they could do is say no. And that might be one of the lessons today - is that you have to take risks, you have to be willing to take disappointment.

But I applied to be an intern for Senator Paul Laxalt, which you had mentioned. He was a very revered former governor of the great state of Nevada, a U.S. senator, best friend of President Ronald Reagan. He was called the First Friend. They had been governors at the same time. He was very well respected in the United States Senate. So I decided to apply to be an intern for him. I was selected. The only reason I was selected - and I was actually telling my kids this the other day, and I probably shouldn't say this in the audience - it wasn't because of my grades but it was because his father was a sheep herder and he had read my personal statement. I had put in there that I had raised sheep and he said we got to have this guy. An absolute true story.

It changed my life. It changed my life. A kid from Sparks, without any connections or anything like that, suddenly was thrust in 1984 in the re-election of Ronald Reagan to be on Capitol Hill in the United States Senate. I assure you, I was making copies, and bringing coffee, and doing whatever they asked me to do. But I got to observe and I got to watch Senator Laxalt on how he conducted himself. I got to watch some of the other U.S. senators and what they got to do on a day-to-day basis. That was a crossroads for me, to be selected for that.

So I was telling somebody who was doing an application the other day you just never know what it's going to be on your CV

that somebody is going to notice no matter how small that you think it is. But that really inspired me to get into public service, and Senator Paul Laxalt is somebody or was somebody that I've tried to emulate my entire life.

**Mickey Ibarra:** Thank you. You were recently quoted as saying there is a difference between wanting to do something and wanting to be something. What is the difference? Help us understand.

**Brian Sandoval:** Well, that's something -- I have the privilege of almost every year speaking at Nevada Boys State and Nevada Girls State. For those of you who don't know what that is, there are young men and women who come to Carson City. They come together and they learn about government. I've watched this and observed this throughout my entire public career because there is a really big difference between somebody who wants to be something.

I want to be a governor. I want to be in an elected office versus -- the question is why. The question is what are you going to do, not what are going to be. So that's something that -- you know, another thing I'm going to do is teaching at the law school in the fall. The program's going to be called Law and Leadership. Part of that is what I call servant leadership, and there is literature on that. But there really is a very big difference. You talked about it being campaign season. It's



seeing the candidates who really want to do something and make a difference in people's lives regardless of whether it's going to risk their office and their position.

And so these young men and women will probably get into some of the things. It happened in my elected career, in my public service career, but it's going to come to an end. You know it was a privilege to be in public service. What I tell these young men and women who are coming up is it will not last forever, but what you will cherish and what you will value most is what you did. Not who you were.

**Mickey Ibarra:** I love that. I love that. As governor, you were willing to change your mind on public policy and important issues. Be they be driver authorization cards, better known as driver's licenses, taxes, gay marriage. Is there a leadership lesson there to be learned?

**Brian Sandoval:** Well, there is. I mean, the first leadership lesson is to have an open mind. And that's something I learned as a federal judge. I wasn't the most partisan guy to begin with. And when you go on the federal bench, all of that is out the door obviously. When you sit as a federal judge, everybody who comes through those doors has to understand, has to know that this is going to be a place where they're going to be treated fairly and the law is going to be applied fairly

regardless of who you are. That was very instructive to me as governor to take all the facts in and look at everything.

Now, drivers' privilege card, drivers' authorization cards, I was with, for those from day one. But there was a lot of resistance to that in the state. And Mo Denis' name was mentioned a little bit earlier. He was somebody who came to me and sat down and said this is something [audio glitch]. It was his bill. It was his bill. There was a lot I would say Republican opposition to those drivers' authorization cards. But doing the due diligence, like I said, once you look at all the facts, it became a no-brainer. I mean, it really was a no brainer and it has allowed for thousands of individuals to be able to drive legally and safely, and ensure that they take the driver test, that their vehicles are insured. So that was a bill that I think had made a tremendous difference in our state.

But you said what's the lesson in the leadership is, there's a lot of places that I know and we could talk about that, again, you have to have an open mind. And that's one of the things that I'm sure the Senator gets frustrated sometimes because you have to be able to work across the aisle. You have to be able to have a conversation with people to understand where they're coming from and why. And also not have the ego to admit that you might have been wrong. That you might have been wrong, and that maybe that individual did have a good point and

that whatever policy that they were promoting would make a big difference.

So for me, I've always had an open mind be it in the legislature, be it as attorney general and as governor. Obviously, there are some places where you don't agree and you have to have the courage of your conviction, but you also have to have the courage to say that you were wrong or that you're willing to compromise because it is in the best interest of your constituency.

**Mickey Ibarra:** Thank you, Governor. Final question. Somewhat related. You have a reputation for being an extraordinarily good listener. Has that always been the case?

**Brian Sandoval:** That's the first time I've ever been asked that question so I got to think back. I think so.

**Mickey Ibarra:** How did you learn that?

**Brian Sandoval:** Well, I think for me being a good listener again is respect. You have to respect and look in the eye whoever you're talking to whether you agree with them or not, whether you like them or not. I think this is something that was instilled from my parents. It's like think through, you know, the different things that I've done. I can't think of a time when I wasn't willing to listen to somebody. You mentioned about the door always being open and having somebody come in.

Even when they're angry at you, we can go in and we could take some audience questions as well.

I still recall eight years ago, in this state, we had over 14 percent unemployment. We led the country in bankruptcies. We led the country in foreclosures. We had the highest rate of uninsured in the country. We had the worst high school graduation rate in the country. I came in and there were \$8 billion of budget requests and we had \$6 billion of money. So guess who had to be the guy who had to make the cuts. Part of the response was we'll just raise taxes. But how do you raise taxes where the business community is on its knees?

And as I said, you had 175,000 people who lost their jobs. So I had to make some really difficult decisions in terms of higher education, K through 12, health and human services, all the basic services. It broke my heart. It absolutely broke my heart. But at the same time we talked about economic development. The Senator talked about that. We really we did have a plan, we did have a strategy to bring the state back, but in the meantime difficult decisions.

I still recall looking out from my office on the Capitol Mall. There was a tent city on the Capitol and they called it Sandoville. But I went out there and there were a lot of angry students at me saying: Governor, you're cutting higher

education. How could you do that? It's going to hurt us. It's going to cut programming.

But I've always said when you have somebody, you've got to sit down with them and explain where you're coming from. And part of the explanation is what I've just told you. But I told them the state is going to come back. And when the state is in a position, we're going to restore all of these. Not only are going to restore, we're going to take it to the next level - which is again something you mentioned. So our economy did start to rebound, and we're in a position where I felt that we needed to make a generational investment in K through 12 education. But the only way to do that was to raise taxes. And for a Republican governor with Republican majorities in the state Senate and the Nevada Assembly, how do you think that went in the beginning? And in Nevada, for those of you aren't from here - but most of these are - you need two-thirds super majority vote, which meant you have to get Republican votes in order to pass that tax.

As governor, I visited over 300 schools. Schools here in Clark County all the way to a little town called the Austin, Nevada that had 13 kids in their K through 8. Thirteen. A town with a population of 200 and we've got to take care of everybody. So I just took it upon myself and, believe me, we had a board with a tally to get those commitments for those

votes. At the end of the day, we were able to get those votes to frankly the single largest tax increase in the history of the state to go directly invested into the children of Nevada.

**Mickey Ibarra:** Governor, I'm thinking in a word, that's what I would call leadership. Please join me in thanking Governor Sandoval and congratulating him on the Eagle Leadership Award.

**Brian Sandoval:** Thank you.