# AN INTERVIEW WITH TONY F. SANCHEZ III

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White & Barbara Tabach

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Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada*.

Claytee D. White
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# PREFACE

Tony F. Sanchez III was born in the Las Vegas' Women's Hospital. It was 1966 and the plot of land the hospital sat on near Eastern and Sahara streets was considered rural. It was on the desert of the east Las Vegas that young Tony would grow up, graduate from Valley High School, and then graduate from University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

While doing his undergraduate studies, his mentors began to float the idea of him attending law school. Following their advice, Sanchez sought out internships and secured his first with Eva Garcia, who had begun her immigration law practice. Future internships became instrumental in shaping the trajectory his career would take. Opportunities included positions internships with the City of Las Vegas City Manager's office and the City of Las Vegas Attorney's office—all before he headed off to Arizona State's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law.

As a third-year law student and with help from Fernando Romero, Sanchez next went to work for Nevada Senator Richard Bryan in Washington D.C. It was a four month internship during which Sanchez attended Georgetown Law night classes. He returned to Tempe to finish law school and was chosen to clerk for Nevada Judge Joe Bonaventure. By 1990, Sanchez was back in D.C. working for Senator Richard Bryan as a full time staffer. During his second tenure with Senator Bryan, Sanchez focused on topical issues of mining and immigration; he also was in room for Senator Bryan's interview of Ruth Bader Ginsburg for her Supreme Court confirmation.

In 1995, Sanchez returned to Nevada for an offer with the Nevada Public Utility Commission. This was followed in 1997 with a position working with Gov. Bob Miller's Chief of Staff, Catherine Cortez Masto. When Miller's term ended, he invited Sanchez to follow him to form a government relations department within Jones Vargas' law firm.

His trajectory was far from over, when in 2000, Walt Higgins, then CEO of Nevada Power hired Sanchez as an outside counsel when the utility was facing a deregulation movement. Sanchez was actively fighting against deregulation during that time period. In 2006, Higgins tapped Sanchez to work in-house for Nevada Power, taking over for Pat Shalmy who was set to retire that year. Sanchez joined Nevada Power as Senior Vice President in 2007. Since then, Sanchez has overseen several departments within NV Energy and advocates for the best energy options available for Nevadans.

He remains active in many community organizations such as the Latin Chamber of Commerce, the UNLV Foundation. However, he points out that one of the fun parts of his NVE position is being active with the NV Energy's Foundation's philanthropic programs, such as UNLV's renewable energy program and the Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada oral history project for UNLV Libraries' Oral History Research Center.

Sanchez is married to Elaine Sanchez. They have four children: Antonio (IV), Tomas, Maya, and Elena.

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August 21, 2018
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Claytee D. White and Barbara Tabach

LATINX VOICES
OF SOUTHERN NEVADA
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**This is Claytee White and Barbara Tabach and three of our students with Tony Sanchez this morning here in the Oral History Research Center. It's August 21st, 2018.**

**Tony, could you please pronounce and spell your name, please?**

Sure. My name is Tony Sanchez, S-A-N-C-H-E-Z.

**Is Tony the full name, the correct name?**

My birth certificate: It's Anthony Francis Sanchez, the third.

**Tell us about that name, how it came about.**

I was born here in Las Vegas at the Women's Hospital, which was at Eastern and Sahara, right there by Valley High School. I've come a long way in my life. I went to Valley High School. I went to high school about four hundred yards from where I was born and I currently work on Sahara Avenue, so I've really come a long way. My birth certificate says I was born at the Women's Hospital in rural Las Vegas. Obviously, a lot of folks that have been here a lot longer, but I've always been fascinated that Sahara and Eastern was considered rural Las Vegas.

**Tell me what it was like to grow up here in Las Vegas in 1966. What was the area like around the school in those days?**

Around UNLV?

**What was it, Valley?**

Yes. I'm sorry. I was born there, grew up in East Las Vegas, kind of off Nellis Boulevard; that area. It was a lot of desert. It's still a very economically depressed area of East Las Vegas.

My parents divorced when I was seven. We lived in L.A. for about a year or two. They divorced when I was seven, so my mom and I my brother moved back here and moved in with my grandmother. I just remember it being very rural, Lake Mead and Nellis area of town, out by the Air Force base, very low income. I started out at Cyril Wengert Elementary School. I wasn't

there very long. I ended up at Mountain View Elementary School. I just moved around a lot.

**Did kids play in the streets at that time?**

Yes.

**What kind of games?**

I don't remember so much the games as just walking for miles through the desert and just all over East Las Vegas, which is kind of funny because I have four kids and I don't even let them play in the front yard, so a much different upbringing.

**Yes, times have changed. Start talking about your schooling for me. You told me about your first two schools. Where did you go to high school?**

Valley High School here in Las Vegas.

**And then to college? You had wanted to go back east for college.**

No. For me, graduating Valley, I had planned to take what people call today a gap year. I don't know what you call it back then. I was going to backpack through Europe. That didn't come through, but I didn't prepare to go to college. But I was a good runner at Valley, but I had never lived with my dad since I was a kid. I went to El Camino Junior College for a semester and ran on the cross country team, a lot of fun. But I moved back to Las Vegas after one semester and enrolled at UNLV in January of '85.

**What was your degree?**

Political science with a minor in Ethnic Studies.

**Who were some of your political science professors? Remember any of them?**

Oh, yes. I'm still in contact with all of them today. Jerry Simich, Dina Titus, Andy Tuttle who passed away last year—or was it earlier this year? Steve Jones. Tom Wright was a long-time history professor, the son, not the dean, the father who Wright Hall was named after. In Ethnic

Studies it was Tony Miranda and Roosevelt Fitzgerald when they were the whole department.

**That's right. Tell me a little bit about your mother's family migration to the United States.**

My mom is white, so that would have been from England, Scotch Irish.

**Okay, so that was not the one.**

Her family came from Tennessee to Oregon a hundred and something years ago. My mom's dad moved to Las Vegas in 1960. He was in the lumber business when Las Vegas was going through a building boom.

**Do you want to talk about your father later, your father's family and how they migrated?**

There's a book that tells the whole story that my cousin wrote called *Rain of Gold*, Victor Villaseñor. It was on the New York Times Best Sellers List and won a lot of awards. That tells the whole story of his mom, which would be my great-great-aunt, so his mom was my grandmother's sister, so maybe great-aunt, whatever that would come out to be, and how they came over from Mexico in probably 1910, maybe. That was on my grandmother's side of the family, so that's very extensive history there.

Then my grandfather came from Guanajuato in probably 1915, separately. My grandmother's family was from the Guanajuato area as well.

**Mexican Revolution?**

I'm trying to remember what the years would have been. That was never a part of the story that we heard.

**When they talked about that migration, what kind of things did they miss in Mexico? Festivals, celebrations, did they ever talk about that?**

I don't think they missed anything. My grandmother herself was born in Vista, in California. But my grandfather didn't miss anything.

**You don't fit any of our questions.**

**Tell me about your life here in Las Vegas. Tell me about that first job after UNLV.** During UNLV I started to get an inkling that I wanted to go to law school. Jerry Simich was the Phi Alpha Delta pre-law professor for the Honor Society. He was also my curriculum advisor. I told him, and he said, "Well, I advise you to send your resume out to twenty or thirty law firms in town and tell them you want to do an internship free. Spend the semester doing that and write me a paper and I'll give you three credits of independent study." This was probably 1986, '87 maybe, late '86.

I sent them all off and never got a phone call or a response except for one and that was Eva Garcia, a local practitioner that just started her practice a few years earlier and had an immigration business practice. She gave me the whole show; she would have me sit in on client interviews and just expose me to everything, took me to court. She was an early influence.

But in college I worked usually two or three jobs at the same time. I would work at UPS from two in the morning to seven. In the morning I'd go to school and spend the afternoon delivering appliances or other jobs that I would do. Then the internship, but that internship was very instrumental in meeting people.

From there, the following summer I interned at the City of Las Vegas City Manager's Office. That was facilitated by a woman named Diane Santiago, Puerto Rican transplant to Las Vegas. I'm not recalling exactly what department she ran at the City of Las Vegas, but she got me an interview. I ended up working for the city manager, Ashley Hall, and his chief of staff, Rose McKinney-James at that time. That was probably about 1987, maybe.

From there, once I graduated, even that summer before I left for law school, that internship at the City Manager's Office led to an internship in the City Attorney's Office working

for George Ogilvie. I went off to Arizona State my first year of law school. I came back that first summer and interned in the City Attorney's Office again.

Every internship or every opportunity I've ever had has always led to the next internship. As strange as it sounds, to this day I don't recall ever applying for a job. If you asked me how many jobs I've applied for, I couldn't tell you. I can't recall any jobs that I've applied for. It's always been opportunities that arose because of the work that I did and the people that I met and the jobs I was offered.

My third year of law school, I really had the political bug. Dan Hamilton won't tell you this over at the law school, but your third year of law school is a waste. They do it because every other lawyer had to do it, like a residency for doctors where you work twenty-four hours a day for a couple of years; it's a rite of passage. Anyway, my first semester of my third year, I applied for an internship with Senator Richard Bryan in Washington, D.C.

**Were any of these paid?**

No.

**What was it like working with Senator Bryan?**

When I applied, I was living in Tempe where Arizona State is. This was long before UNLV had a law school. But as an aside, ironically my dean was Dick Morgan and Chris Smith was the associate dean. Years later they both came over and were the founding faculty and deans for the UNLV Law School.

I applied to Dick Bryan's office and I got a thank-you letter a couple of weeks later that said, "These are very prestigious opportunities and Senator Bryan likes to save them for Nevadans."

**Where did he think you were from?**

Well, he never saw my resume probably. It was just probably some staffer. Again, because of the relationships I had met being involved in the Las Vegas community, I knew a gentleman that worked for Senator Bryan in Las Vegas, Fernando Romero, at the time. I called him and he immediately called back to the D.C. office and said, "This is an embarrassment. Look at his resume. It has nothing but Nevada." Lo and behold, a month later I had the internship in D.C., but I was thankful to Fernando. I think this year he is celebrating his thirty-eighth year of being the president of Hispanics in Politics, which is kind of funny.

I worked for Senator Bryan for four months in that fall of '90. I went to Georgetown Law School at night because I had to get the credits to be able to graduate. That was obviously the thing that really extended my passion for politics. I learned early on that as an elected politician—and Senator Bryan taught me this—as an elected official, you don't get to say what you want to say. There's strict norms that are considered whether it's political correctness or etiquette.

I learned early on that being a staffer to an elected official, you have a lot of influence. I really learned that the first time I was asked to write a floor speech for him on a very arcane issue here in Nevada. We didn't have the Internet back then; that didn't exist—it existed, but it certainly wasn't anything that we had access to. Any research I did, I had to go to the Library of Congress. I gave him the speech and I said, "What changes do you want?" And he said, "No, this is fine." I said, "No, you have to read it and tell me what changes you want." He said, "No, this is good." I think that scared the daylight out of me because, *oh my gosh, I need somebody to verify what I have written.* He gave the speech. It was at that time, being behind the shoulder of the person, I got to do whatever I wanted to do, which is a lot of influence and it's a lot of responsibility, though.

I finished that internship that December and went back to Arizona State for my final semester. I graduated in '88 and then came back to Las Vegas and got a clerkship for a district court judge here in Las Vegas, Joe Bonaventure.

**Tell me more about that semester at Georgetown and working at the same time. How did that work out?**

On Capitol Hill that's a common thing, to work for an elected official during the day and go at night to law school. A lot of people do it. Harry Reid did it. He went to GW there in D.C. He was actually a capital police officer when he did it. It's very, very common. Frankie Sue Del Papa...There's been a long history of Nevadans that go back and work for the member back in the days of whether it be Pat McCarran, Alan Bible, all those years. Many of today's lawyer/politicians did a stint in D.C. working for a member, Laxalt or Harry Reid.

Back to your story, what was it like going to Georgetown? Arizona State I had an entering class of a hundred and eighty-three. Georgetown at the time was the largest law school in the country. It probably still is. I think the entering class was probably close to seven hundred kids. It was a much different experience. It also cost ten times as much as I was paying at Arizona State, so I took it very serious obviously because I had to take out quite a bit of loans to be able to attend there. It was very eye opening. It was just very different then. There was discrimination that I encountered there that I had never encountered in Nevada.

**Tell me what the difference was.**

I don't know. I think it was probably just because there's kids from all over the country, all over the world there, which you would think would be more of a melting pot, a lot of diversity, but for some reason I didn't have that experience. At Arizona State it was all Mexican. Our organization was the Chicano Law Student Association, which I was the president, which was kind of funny

because of the thirty-five Mexican-American students there, my Spanish was the worst out of all thirty-five, and yet I was elected president. I just think they probably thought I was the dumbest one to take something like that on.

**Was the language that important for that group?**

No. But, like I said last week, I think we spent an entire year fighting each other, sometimes physically, not me. Although I had one law student, he would shadow me and told everybody that he was my bodyguard because he thought other people wanted—stupid stuff, but this is how passionate people get over what you call yourself, whether you're Hispanic, whether you're Latino, whether you're Chicano.

**BARBARA:** ***What do you call yourself?***

I'm Latino. I don't prefer the Hispanic term, but I don't get worked up about it either.

**Was the Chicano term at that time, though, one of activism?**

Yes. We marched with Cesar Chavez when he was picketing the Bruce Church, the lettuce farm, so it was very activists.

**I don't buy grapes today.**

I don't either.

**When you say that you became interested in politics, how does that play out in your life? Did you ever think about running for office—**

No, not really.

**—any of the things that we consider politics?**

Yes, I never considered running for office. That's a different personality it takes to want to do something like that and a sacrifice and a dedication. Even back then it was a lot easier to run for office than it is today. Today there's a reason most sane people don't run and if there's a reason

people do run, you need to probably do a psychological profile on them to understand why they didn't get the memo. But, no, I never had any desire. I've led a lot of organizations, but never had a desire to run for office.

**You went back to Tempe, finished school. And then did you think about anyplace else other than coming back to Las Vegas?**

I wanted to go back to D.C. I had Potomac fever at that point, certainly. I kept a journal when I was a senior in high school at Valley and got to go to D.C. for a week with the Close Up program. I don't even know if that program still exists today. It's a national organization. High schools around the country would participate. You would go usually as a senior and spend a weekend in D.C. and make the rounds of your delegation. You hit all the sights. I kept a journal on that trip and I still have it. In that I said, "I'm coming back here." That would have been '84. By '90 I was back there.

I clerked for the judge, one of the most colorful figures in Nevada legal history. He's still around. We had a lot of super high profile stuff, a lot of crazy—I could write a screenplay—working for him. But nine months in, Senator Bryan called me and said he had a full-time position on staff and if I was interested I would have to leave immediately. The judge was very nice and let me out of my year commitment to him early.

**Give me one of the colorful stories about the judge that you can talk about.**

We were in the middle of a death penalty trial. The defendant was a Hells Angel. The victim was African-American. It was very, very racially charged. The courthouse had a lot of security. Hells Angels were protesting out in front of the courthouse. We were pretty much on lockdown, at least through the front.

The way a typical court day would go is I'd brief the judge every morning, say at seven

thirty, on the day's cases. He would usually hear a civil calendar, do some sentencings, combination civil/criminal. Back then a judge would do everything. Today it's very specialized; you either do family, you do business, or you do criminal, but back then we did it all.

I'm in his office. Our bailiff is there. We're all tense. I hear a knock on his judicial door. At the same time I hear a pump shotgun. It goes *chick, chick*. I turn around and there is a TV reporter with a shotgun and right behind him a camera, a TV camera, and behind him is their lawyer. They had gotten somebody into the courthouse. It was an exposé on lacks security at the courthouse.

The bailiff is over here and the judge is here. The judge flies back in his chair, throws his hands up and yells. I turn. And I had eyes the size of silver dollars. I know because I was on TV for the next month. The camera in my face and the reporter shoving the microphone in the judge's face, saying, "Look what we just did. This courthouse is not safe."

What they had done is somebody had come in, got through security, and then went down one of the stairwells to an alley and opened up the stairwell. Then the gun and the camera, they all came up the stairwell and came right into the judge's chambers. It's kind of unnerving from the standpoint of I was in between the bailiff and the reporter with the shotgun. If our bailiff had probably been more awake, I could have been shot because you just don't know what's happening in that stunning instance. I'm yelling at the judge to hold them into contempt and the lawyer is screaming at me that this is freedom of the press. There was something like that every week.

**Wow.**

***What was the verdict in the case?***

Guilty, definitely guilty.

**Tell me what it was like to go back and work for Senator Bryan.**

I left and went back to D.C. at the very tail end of the Bush one administration, the one term, so this would have been in the spring of '92. Bush was in office. Just fascinating. I was one of the youngest ones to graduate in my class at law school because I didn't love school, I just wanted to get it done at the time. I've always thought later in life I would go back to school for fun, for the actual learning component of it where I want to do it as opposed to just punching my ticket. I was twenty-four, twenty-five on Capitol Hill.

It was a very historic time. The campaign was in full swing. Bill Clinton was running at the time, so that was a very charged atmosphere and very fascinating. Clinton got elected. I went to the inauguration, just historic stuff that you don't forget. From a memory that I'll never forget, soon after Clinton got into office, he got his first Supreme Court nomination and he nominated Ruth Bader Ginsburg. As a lawyer on the staff, I got to sit with the senator while he interviewed her because they always make the rounds with the senators. They have to make sure they've got the votes. It's just amazing that today she's at the end of her career, probably hoping she can put up with it for another two or three years and maybe we have a change in the administration in 2020. But she's being lionized right now. CNN has a big special on her next Tuesday, I think, RBG. Really funny, they're kind of "millennializing" her image, which is just unbelievably neat.

**Any special issues that you worked on under the senator?**

Unfortunately, I was one of the only Nevadans on the staff back there. If you're a senator from New York or Massachusetts or something, it's a lot easier to get kids, young folks, professionals to want to work back there. It's difficult to get folks to go back all the way from western states to go back there and live because those aren't high paying jobs. Even as a lawyer back there, I never made more than thirty thousand dollars. The jobs were so hard to get that if you were a lawyer

and you got an opportunity to be a front office receptionist in a senator's office, you would do it to try to get your foot in the door.

Because I was from Nevada, I had all the Nevada issues. I had mining, public lands. Because I was the only Hispanic on the staff, I had immigration. I had the typical things that they give you that they think you'll have some affinity for. That first speech I wrote for the senator was on why we needed to protect wool and mohair subsidies. Do you know what mohair is, because I didn't?

**I know what a mohair sweater looks like.**

Yes, that's right. But I never knew until then that we had very large cattle ranches. They produced all the army uniforms in the United States from the wool and mohair that they got from whatever mohair comes from, whatever animal. The senator was there protecting the subsidy because it was jobs in Nevada. Up until the point when I left the senator's staff in '95, the environmentalists under the Clinton administration were trying to revise the mining laws of the country, which had been written in 1872, to favor the mining industry, just like the mining industry today in Nevada was responsible for the drafting of much of Nevada's Constitution at the time and that's why they as an industry enjoy such strong constitutional protections is because mining was all there was in Nevada in 1864.

I'll never forget my environmental law professor at Arizona State, John Leshy. He was very well known in his field and politically. When Clinton got in, Leshy became the solicitor general for the Department of Interior. I went to a reception welcoming him in February of '93 held by the Sierra Club. I was so excited to go up and see my old professor. He said, "Well, what are you doing here?" I said, "I'm working for Senator Bryan." He says, "Well, what issues are you working on?" I said, "Mining." And he said, "I've never been more disappointed in a student

in my career." Because we were the bad guys in Nevada, mining. Professor Leshy was as green as they come in terms of environmentalists and it was his job to shut the mining industry down.

I think when you've been in a politics a long time, as a professional staffer you don't always take a position that's passionate. That's not your job. If you're passionate for a particular issue, volunteer your time, go off and do your own thing, create a nonprofit. But if you're a professional staffer for a politician, you have to do your job. Whether I necessarily agreed with protecting the way mining extracts gold, which is that they take these big Dumpsters, they pile up a mountain, literally, and then they put these big hoses on top, they emit cyanide through the mountain, and then on the bottom of the pile the gold comes out in a trough. You can imagine what that does to the environment and why the environmentalists wanted to go after that. But that's the industry and that's how it's done today.

**That had already started as early as the early 1990s?**

What's that? To go after the mining industry?

**No, doing that type of mining in Nevada.**

That type of mining as already been around since Nevada was created. That's how you extract gold.

**But earlier, though, like Virginia City, when we became a state, it was completely different?**

Yes. There's a combination, but that was pickaxes. You don't have the pickaxes anymore. You have dynamite and you have these trucks with tires that are taller than your house, so that it's volume mining. Heat bleach cyanide mining is what they do. For example, what they call tailings is the remnant rocks. If you're a miner in 1872 or 1864 when it became a state and you've gone through your pile of rocks, you put it off in a dump. You just get it away from you and you get it

away from the mine and it's called a tailing. Mining companies for the last fifty years have been going into those old mines and re-shoveling out those tailings and dumping cyanide on top of them because it's all microscopic. They're getting everything that you couldn't see with the eye. It's an advancement. The mining industry is a big client of our power company, and so I am on the Nevada Mining Association Board of Directors and I have been for the last decade. In fact, I'm going up for their convention in Lake Tahoe next week for several days. It's a very important part of Nevada's legacy and history, but if you're in Las Vegas, you don't know anything about mining, and I didn't either.

**Are we still doing that kind of mining?**

Yes. But there's obviously a lot of safeguards. What do you do with the cyanide after it comes out? It goes into ponds. What happens when you're a rural state and you have migratory birds flying over? They see water and they need the land. They want to be in water and they land and they land in cyanide. Through reforms over the years, now they have nets over the ponds; those types of things. It's not necessarily as bad as I am making it sound. There are a lot of environmental safeguards. Today's modern mining is drastically different than it was forty years ago. The whole process of reclamation and reclaiming mine sites, it is a science and it is a big business and it's a big business in Nevada. Nevada, if it was a country, it would be the second largest gold-producing country in the world only behind Russia. It's that big of an industry worldwide for Nevada. That said, it doesn't rank in the top fifteen of employers in Nevada; it used to, but it doesn't today, but it is for Elko and rural parts of the state, certainly.

**Tell me about the immigration issues at that time.**

That's a really good question. Dick Bryan was up for re-election in '94 and immigration was the hottest issue. You think immigration is a hot issue today, and it has been for several years, it was

really a hot issue in 1992, '93, '94. With the senator running for re-election in '94, I was instructed by the chief of staff, because there was going to be a crime bill passed in late '93, early '94, and I was told that I would pass something in that bill, get some amendment attached to that bill that the senator could campaign on in terms of being tough on immigration, and that was very difficult. I had to meet with a particular group, the Federation of American Immigration Reform, FAIR, which the Southern Poverty Law Center lists as one of the great hate groups in America. These folks would come in very, very arrogantly. They were very uncomfortable meetings to take.

**What did FAIR want?**

Everything that Trump says today: If a child is born to an undocumented mother, it's not a citizen; curtail legal immigration; crack down on the borders; arrests, which was always kind of be wildering because the last time we had comprehensive immigration reform was 1986 under President Reagan and he knew—I don't want to say he's a visionary; most people would say that—but he knew that all the corporations in America are the ones that hired the undocumented workers and it was a jobs issue.

**He was from California.**

And so all Republicans wanted the employment. And he was from California. But because he passed that bill, my grandparents in San Diego had two pictures in their house, one was of the Pope and the other one was Reagan, because of that immigration reform. He was so revered. I would not debate my grandparents on why I thought Reagan was doing that. I don't know if I knew then. I certainly came to know and develop a cynicism that is very healthy in me today.

You're the only minority on a senate staff. You're expected to do something for your senator, who is a center-right Democrat in the Senate. Dick Bryan was always considered more

of a conservative Democrat on a lot of issues. I struggled with it for a long time. I finally came up with an idea that I viewed at the time that allowed me to sleep at night. It was a crime bill and I wrote a provision that enhanced penalties for felonies committed by undocumenteds here. They were enhanced penalties for violent felonies. I worked the system and it passed.

**Bryan didn't get re-elected, did he?**

He did.

**He served two terms?**

Yes.

**I was thinking one.**

No. He got elected in '88 and left in 2000.

**How long did you continue to work for him?**

He got re-elected in November of '94 and by January my law school loans were starting to...I was starting to get letters in the mail. I could not really handle those types of debt obligations making thirty thousand dollars, so I knew I had to go back to Nevada, and so it was a good time. My boss in the office at that time—I was assistant counsel; he was the general counsel—he had taken a job back in Nevada as counsel to the Nevada Public Utility Commission, and so he offered me a job that included a hundred and fifty percent pay increase.

**So it was difficult to say no.**

Yes. It was fun and that was a good time to go. A lot of my friends say I left in '95 because they passed a comprehensive lobbying reform and lobbies could no longer buy staffers fancy dinners at all the restaurants in D.C.

**You didn't get to go to all those wonderful places.**

I did, but the month I left it stopped, so my friends think that's why I left.

**Coming back to Nevada, how was that for you. The utilities commission, what was the work like?**

That was exciting. It was a state job. I had an office in Carson City and I had an office at the Grant Sawyer Building over on Las Vegas Boulevard and Washington. I always thought it was funny that my office at the utility at Grant Sawyer overlooked the city cemetery and then particularly the pauper cemetery, so I would watch funerals a lot, which was great for my personal ambition. That's a joke.

**I figured that but I couldn't put it together.**

I would know who was popular by the amount of folks who would show up and I would know who didn't have anybody because it would just be the two grave diggers and that was always fascinating.

**That was Woodlawn?**

Yes, the one literally in the shadow of the Grant Sawyer Building there, yes, on Las Vegas Boulevard. Those were exciting times, a lot of politics. Everything is politics.

**Tell me what the PUC does.**

The Public Utility Commission regulates all public utilities whether it be electric, gas, telephone, actually even railroads, water companies. But to once again tie in how small Las Vegas is, which has really been the story of my career just how small of a town it is—it is fascinating—the then chairman of the PUC was John Mendoza. He had lost his judicial re-election a couple of years earlier. Bob Miller, as is oftentimes done in politics, you find your supporters jobs, and he [Mendoza] became the chairman of the Public Utility Commission. In his much, much younger life was a lady named Eva Garcia, who then became Eva Garcia-Mendoza. It's kind of funny how it comes full circle.

But because I got that job, everybody thought that I was John Mendoza's spy because it was a very nasty political environment there. I didn't really know John. I obviously knew his wife very well. She's the one that had given me that chance years earlier doing my internship at UNLV. Eva was very prominent, served as president of the Latin Chamber multiple times, was in the newspaper, back then was a very prominent civil rights and immigration activists. She was a great role model.

John Mendoza was the chairman. Obviously, I grew close with him in the couple of years that he was the chair. But a lot of politics involved in all that.

I ended up leaving there in '97 to actually work for Catherine Cortez Masto. She had just been made chief of staff to Bob Miller. She offered me a job as counsel and to work with the governor and her.

**Before you start talking about her, we have a bill on this election for deregulation of utilities. How should we vote?**

I know the guy that's running that campaign, the No on 3 campaign. There is a Yes on 3 campaign. They are the ones that funded it. I'll just give you the story. Sheldon Adelson and a DA company here, Switch Communications, are the ones that are funding it. They've probably put thirty or forty million dollars into this right now. This is going to be the most expensive campaign in Nevada history.

**That side is yes, Switch and Adelson?**

Yes. About $40 million that they've put in to do that. The idea is break up—everybody calls NV Energy a monopoly. What that means is we serve I'd say 85 percent of the customers in Nevada. We don't do much of the rural areas; those are provided by cooperative associations. But in exchange that we get to serve those people, we have to agree to two things. One is we have to

serve anybody that asks. If you're on a ranch forty miles outside of town here and there's no electric lines between you and that house, we have to serve you. We have an obligation to serve every customer no matter what. We have a legal obligation to serve you. Now, the second one is we agree to be regulated in terms of what we can charge in our price; that is set by the Public Utility Commission; that's how they regulate.

Under question three, the idea is—and this was big back in 1997, '98, '99. California did it. Twenty-four states implemented some form of the concept of deregulation, so no longer do you have a utility. They sell off all their power plants and you get to buy your electricity much like you do your cell phone carrier, so T-Mobile, Verizon, AT&T, Sprint. You get to pick a plan; you get to do that kind of stuff. Twenty years ago, like I said, twenty-four states started it. Today only fourteen are doing it. Nobody's done it in the last twenty years. California tried it. Nevada passed it in '99. Then we had a company called Enron figure out how to gain the system. Because they're selling on the open market, they figured out how they could shut off certain plants or claim that certain plants were broken. When you have a plant that's broken, you have less capacity, less volume to sell. And so what happens to the price? It goes up. They were manipulating the market and charging literally 2,000 percent higher prices. That's what ultimately cost Gray Davis his job as California governor, because it imploded in California. Ray Peers ended up paying 40 billion dollars because of that manipulation. Because we are so closely tied to California, it imploded here, and by 2001, literally two years after it passed, after then Nevada Power was ordered to sell off all its plants and sign the contracts, had accepted the money to sell the plants, the legislature came back in 2001 and stopped it and said, "No, we can't have this." They voided all the contracts and Nevada Power continued to serve as that monopoly.

Fourteen states today have some form of deregulation—Texas, Massachusetts, New

York. The study out of Texas has shown that since 2002 to 2016, residential rate payers have paid 28 billion dollars more in power prices than they would have had they not deregulated. It is similar in Massachusetts. The attorneys general in Illinois and Massachusetts are calling for an end of deregulation because deregulation does benefit large companies that use a lot of energy that can afford to have energy staff on site.

**Like the Sands?**

Yes, the Sands, MGM.

**Switch.**

Switch. But in 2001 when they reversed deregulation, they put a provision in the law that allows a large customer to leave our system if they're over a megawatt as long as they pay an exit fee. The exit fee goes to compensate you as the remaining rate payers for the money you have fronted, which is through your monthly payments, to pay for the infrastructure to serve MGM, for example. We had 75 million dollars' worth of bills related to the infrastructure that we put in for MGM. They wanted to leave because the open market was cheap. It is cheap today because natural gas prices are at a historic low and have been and will be for probably the next decade. They left and they were told by the utility commission to pay 75 million dollars and they paid it. That's the system. You've been able to do that since 2001. The Wynn did that. Caesars Palace did that. Switch and Sands applied. The Sands was told to pay 25 million, and they said, "No, we're going to write a ballot initiative so it deregulates and we get to leave for free." Or so they think. They're probably reassessing the decision they made there because now they're going to easily exceed paying that just to try to get this passed.

Now, on the other side, on the NV Energy side—this doesn't just impact NV Energy. It impacts all the rural cooperatives. It impacts all the municipal utilities, like Boulder City. It

impacts everybody because for the first time it's going to say in the Nevada Constitution that every person in Nevada has the right to buy and sell electricity of their choosing. The No on 3 campaign is premised around, you're going to put something like this in the constitution? The constitution is where you put freedom of speech; you put civil rights; you put voter protections; you put the Second Amendment. Attempts have been made eleven thousand times in the history of our country to amend the U.S. Constitution and how many times have they done it? Twenty-nine, thirty? I should know; I was a lawyer.

**Yes, I think it's thirty something.**

Out of eleven thousand attempts. There's some things you don't mess with. You don't put political policy positions into the constitution. That basically sums up the No on 3 campaign. The campaign manager is brilliant who is running the No on 3 campaign. It passed in 2016, because it has to pass twice.

**Oh, it did pass.**

Because the company was neutral; NV Energy was neutral at that time. It has to pass again this November. It passed 72 to 28 in '16.

**So this is critical.**

Right now the polling is showing, because this campaign manager is so brilliant, the numbers have flipped the other way, so No on 3 is leading in every poll, some polls up to 20 percent lead and other polls 10 percent, 8 percent. If you haven't figured it out, I am the campaign manager for No on 3.

**I kind of figured that but I wasn't positive.**

Everything I said about the brilliant—it's on tape—the brilliant campaign manager, I was joking. I was joking, but it is true. But we are going to win this campaign.

**Good. You take a job with Catherine Cortez Masto and you become her best employee, I believe, ever.**

Self-proclaimed title.

**Tell me about that work.**

Bob Miller to this day is the longest serving governor in Nevada history, very popular, very tough on crime. He was a sheriff's deputy in Los Angeles and was in the hotel the night the RFK was assassinated. Born in Chicago, but raised here. His dad was president of the Riviera. If you read his book, *Son of a Gambling Man*, you can see what the governor went through. His dad was purported to be a front man for the Chicago mob and that kind of stuff. As a result, Bob was very, very tough on crime. He was district attorney. He then became lieutenant governor and then governor when Dick Bryan got elected in 1988. Bob served from '88 until the end of '98 or early '99.

Going to work for him, I was working for him at the tail end of his career, legacy time. But it was very exciting, a lot of fun. Clinton was president still. Bob Miller and Bill Clinton were very, very close because Bob was the first governor in America to endorse Bill when he was running for president in '92, and Bob endorsed Clinton at the height of the Gennifer Flowers scandal when nobody thought Bill was going to survive that scandal. As a result, he and Bob were very close, so much so that Clinton nominated Bob to be ambassador to Mexico, which ended up getting torpedoed by Jesse Helms of North Carolina for unfortunate political reasons.

Working for Bob was real exciting. You had a lot of politics. Obviously, we had the '98 campaign; Kenny Guinn was running to replace him against Jan Jones, which left a little bit of mixed feelings with people because Jan had run against Bob four years earlier in the primary. Politics are always strange bed fellows. That was an exciting time. But the governor at the time,

about six months before his term was up, he asked me what my plans were after his term was up. I said that I had been offered at a job at a big law firm in Las Vegas. He said, "Well, I'm interviewing with all of them, too. Keep your powder dry if you can and let's maybe start a government relations law practice together within a big firm when I leave." I said, "I won't sign anything. I'll keep my powder dry."

He interviewed. He got offers from all the big firms. He came in one day and said, "I want to go and I want you to come with me. We're going to go to Jones Vargas." Which really pissed me off because Jones Vargas was the Republican firm in the state. The senior partner was Bill Raggio. The president of the firm was Joe Brown, who ran against Bob in 1986 for lieutenant governor. As I told the governor, I said, "You accomplished a lot in your ten years as governor, and the things that you didn't accomplish that you wanted to was because Bill Raggio stopped it." So I'm like, "Why in the world are you doing this?"

To show you how myopic and immature my thinking was, he says, "Well, we can go to another big firm. All the other big firms are big Democratic firms. We can go to Grant Sawyer's firm, Lionel Sawyer and Collins. We could go to Frank Schreck. All big Democrats. Do we really want to be two Democrats in a firm full of Democrats, or do we want to be two Democrats in a firm full of Republicans who need us?"

I still didn't get it, but I took the leap. Within two years I was a partner because it was the key to success. This Republican firm had nothing but Republican clients and they couldn't get anything done at the legislature or local government because they were Republican. I and the governor, we were the Democrats. To get anything done in Nevada, you have to work both sides. That was brilliant on the part of the governor.

But working for Catherine prior to that, she was a very, very good supportive boss. It was

at that time that Catherine started to get an inkling of some kind of future career in public service. When the governor left, when we closed the office, she by then had gotten married to Paul Masto, who was the number-two Secret Service agent in Nevada. She had met him—every time Clinton would come to town, he was the president's protective on Secret Service detail—as chief of staff to the governor. At that time Bob was also in '97 the national chairman of the National Governors Association, which is a really big deal because Nevada is so small politically and population-wise to have Bob be the president of the National Governors Association. They had the big convention at Caesars and that's where she met Paul. They got married and moved back to D.C. She became a U.S. Attorney and worked as a federal prosecutor. The rest is up to today and there's a lot of history yet to be created.

A funny story working for her and knowing Paul very well. Clinton was coming to town. The president was coming to town. What happens when the president comes? You have to have a delegation of the top state officials greet him or her when they get off Air Force One. They go down the steps and at the bottom of the steps are always the governor, senators, congressmen, local officials, so we had to do that. This would have been early '98. I followed the governor in his car. I was driving my car. We got to drive right onto the tarmac and park about a hundred yards from Air Force One. It had landed. They were wheeling out the stairs. I got a call on my flip phone. These were the early cell phones. This was twenty years ago. I'm like, "Oh, I've got to take this call." Meanwhile, the governor and Yvonne Atkinson Gates, who is on the Clark County Commission, and Shelley Berkley are the delegation, and they walked over and planted themselves at the foot of the stairs.

I finished up my call and I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I can't miss this." So I start trotting across the tarmac. I look down and there's all these little red lights bouncing off my chest. I don't

know what's going on. All of a sudden, out of nowhere—I don't know if they're embedded in the pavement—but all these Secret Service agents surround me with guns, saying, "Hands down." Or, "Hands up." I don't know what they were saying. I had all these laser pointers...to take me out because to them here is a guy running towards Air Force One. I wasn't running, but I was walking very fast. This all happened probably in a span of five, ten seconds.

All I could hear was, "Guns down. Guns down. He's with me. Guns down. Guns down. He's with me." Paul Masto comes running up, grabs me by the shoulders, walks me over to the corner and proceeds to cuss me out, saying, "Do you realize how stupid you are and what you just did?" I'm like, "Yes, you might have just saved my life." Unfortunately, he has not let me forget that.

**Of course.**

I didn't even remember the president coming down the steps after that it was so traumatic. That's how dumb. I mean, I've had some doozies in my life and that was one of them. Every time I see Paul, he tells everybody how he saved my life. I can't disagree with him.

**I think that's great.**

***That's a good story.***

But Catherine went on from there to run for attorney general and then the first Latina United States Senator, so that's really neat.

**That's great. Tell me about NV Energy and becoming a part of that company.**

Going back to '99, 2000, when I was at the law firm now, that was the first time they were going through this deregulation movement. The CEO, Walt Higgins, was facing the threat just like we are today. It was the exact same thing. He hired me to work on the political side to fight that effort, which is obviously why I'm doing it again twenty years later. I was a private attorney, but

I was his outside counsel, so I did a lot of work for Nevada Power. Interestingly enough, I had always had a lot of respect for Walt because I had met him for the first time in '92 or '93 when he came to introduce himself to Dick Bryan as the newly hired president of then Sierra Pacific Resources, which was the Reno version. Sierra Pacific and Nevada Power merged by about '98. Walt was now the president of both going forward. He hired me in '98-99. I had a good law practice and some of it was energy and other was just administrative law practice, but I represented Nevada Power a lot.

Then in 2006 he came to me and said he would be retiring the following year and his number-two Pat Shalmy, a very well-known leader here, was the Clark County Manager and was the president of the [Greater Las Vegas] Chamber of Commerce—very terrific guy. He was the senior vice president of Nevada Power and he was going to retire, and so he asked me if I would join the company in-house and take over for Pat. That was in '06. Because of obligations I had with clients in the impeding 2007 legislative session coming up, I asked him if it was urgent that it happen then and explained to him that my clients have been paying me. In my type of practice I get paid monthly the same amount regardless of the amount of work I do.

**They're all on retainer.**

Yes. He understood and said, "Yes, I'll call you the day after the legislature is over." That would have been July actually of '07 he called me and said, "Okay, now is the time." I told my law partners and joined the company as the senior VP, which was interesting because I was only about forty then and I was twenty years younger than anybody else on the senior management team. I don't say that because I'm so impressive or anything. It was just because of my specialty.

**How did you feel, though?**

Oh, it was an incredible opportunity, even more so because six months after I left my law

practice, the entire Las Vegas economy cratered and half the law firms in town closed and laid off their attorneys. We went into more than a recession. A lot of my old law partners would call me and say, "How did you know to get out when you did?" And I said, "Much like the rest of my life, it was dumb luck." That was pretty fortunate. I've always been grateful to have had that timing.

**What was that work like?**

At the power company?

**Yes.**

If you work in politics, it's always controversial. There's always stuff going on. The first thing we had was the CEO announced that we were going to build the largest coal plant in America in Ely, Nevada, which is about a hundred and eighty miles from here on the Utah-Nevada border. The day I was leaving my law firm, I was packing up my files and I get a call from one of Senator Reid's assistants saying, "The senator would like to talk to you." I was like, *this is really neat. He's just saying, hey, good luck, thank you for everything.* Which is what he did when I left Dick Bryan's office in '95. I'm thinking, *oh, he's calling to congratulate me and looks forward to working with me*. It didn't turn out that way. He said, "I hear you're going to the power company. That's why I'm calling you. I am doing a press conference this afternoon and I am going to fight you with everything I have to stop that coal plant in Ely." I was blindsided. I had no idea. I said, "But, Senator, this is going to be the cleanest coal plant in America." Once again, one of my top ten most naive statements I've ever made. He said, "Well, I just thought I owed you the heads up."

I hung up the phone. I didn't know what to do. I called Pat Shalmy. I called Walt Higgins. I spent the next three years getting shellacked by the most powerful United States Senator in

Nevada history, and we ultimately did announce that we were not going to build the coal plant, but not for the reasons that Senator Harry Reid opposed it or the environmental community opposed it. By the time you got to about 2010, every economic study we had used to justify the need for twelve hundred megawatts of coal had disappeared. Our population base had decreased. Our economy had decreased. I've told Senator Reid this and he says that I owe him for this. If he had not put up every roadblock he could, which you can as a majority leader in the United States Senate; you can tell the BLM to stop cooperating with us on federal permitting issues with Nevada being 87 percent federal land—we needed federal government cooperation and he did put up every roadblock and we did get sued under the sun from the Sierra Club to the Moapa Paiute Tribe, all the things that he did. But if he hadn't done that and we had just had a green light to build that plant, we would have probably been seven, eight hundred million dollars underway and would have been building that plant at the time that we would have had to stop because we couldn't have justified the need anymore and we would have potentially lost a billion dollars. He thinks we owe him for that.

**What is the conversation like today when you see Senator Reid?**

He was diagnosed six months ago with pancreatic cancer and it was early. He had his surgery at Johns Hopkins and he's undergoing chemo today, so he's focused on that. He's very focused on his health, which he should be being close to eighty. He's as tough as anybody's ever been in Nevada, especially with his upbringing in Searchlight, Nevada.

I just hit my eleventh year with the company at the beginning of this month, in August. We are now number five in the country for solar energy production and number two in the country for geothermal production. We've closed all but one remaining coal plant through some legislation that I lobbied for in 2013 to close our remaining coal plants, which has been a good

financial decision for Nevada rate payers because coal is extremely expensive with all the regulations associated with it. Despite President Trump's attempts to bring back coal, he's not going to because natural gas is just so much cheaper. Even five years ago when natural gas was the cheapest form of energy, as a utility we have an obligation to build and sell to our clients the cheapest energy no matter what. It's all about price. From a public policy perspective that is the most important—well, the Sierra Club thinks it should be the cleanest form of energy, and I don't make a value judgment on it. But the bottom line is we have to provide the cheapest. It always was coal. Then it became natural gas. Well, as of this year, in the last six months, the cheapest form of energy in the country today now is large scale solar. It's cheaper than natural gas. The price has come down literally 75 percent in the last decade.

Senator Reid says, "Look, I turned you into a solar utility." Okay, if that's what he wants to think. But we have an obligation to do so because it is the cheapest form of energy today. Utilities are not coal mongers. Utilities are not destroyers of the environment. Utilities supply a product and by law have to supply it in the cheapest form possible. It's a fungible item. It's not a philosophy.

That sums up the last eleven years with me. Now the greatest challenge we've ever had. Combined, more than a hundred million dollars will be spent on this campaign.

**That's a lot of money.**

It would build a really nice library, a nice library here for a lot less than that, right?

**Yes. Tell me about your connection with UNLV over the years. How did that start?**

I served on the Alumni Association for years. The only fun part of my job at NV Energy is I oversee our foundation and all our community giving, which is contrary. People say I'm very popular in town. Yes, I'm popular in town because I hand out five million dollars a year.

Wouldn't you be popular if you handed out that much money? I'm really popular.

About seven years ago, our then CEO Michael Yackira said, "Hey, we've long supported the geothermal studies program at UNR. That's where all the geothermal is outside of Reno. He says, "Do you think we could approach UNLV and start a renewable energy program?" And I said, "This is great." Smatresk was president. He had just become acting president then, so whenever that might have been. David Ashley had just left. I called the good friend of mine Luis Valera, who is the VP of Government Affairs here still. I said, "Where do I go?" At that point I was serving on the foundation. But to create an academic program I had no clue. So I worked with Luis. He said, "I've got your back. I'm going to show you how you're going to donate millions of dollars to UNLV."

**I like Luis.**

He's very smooth. He set up the meetings and, lo and behold, we created the renewable energy minor program. At that time, we started it in the College of Engineering. It migrated into Urban Affairs, kind of the Environmental Department over at Greenspun. I think now it's kind of back in engineering. It kind of goes back. It's a product of, what's the hot thing today? Solar jobs are not the hot thing anymore; it was two years ago. Today it's Tesla. Today it's data centers. Today it's cryptocurrency and Ethereum and data mining. Those are all the hot stuff. So it's not solar anymore. But we still fund the program.

NV Energy has close to twenty-five hundred employees. Half of them are union represented linemen, call center personnel, folks that work at our power plants. The other half are all professionals that have a college degree. UNLV is our most represented university within our employee base. As a result, we have an obligation, because we give our money where our employees want us to give money, and UNLV has a warm place with our employees, and me

obviously.

People say to me, "Wow, you were the Alumnus of the Year in 2012-2013." Well, you would be too if you were donating millions of dollars to UNLV.

**Just keep it up.**

***Barbara: I have more of a reflective question. I really appreciated hearing all your anecdotes and your trajectory through our history and all of that. Here we are today. We are starting this Latinx Voices project, and you're a member of our advisory board, which we are appreciative of. You identify yourself as a Latino and you were raised by a white mother. Talk about how you are in that identity today.***

My dad's family is a very, very Mexican family. My story is one of assimilation because when I was born I was technically the sixth Tony Sanchez. I was the sixth. For whatever reason, they went by who was living at the time, so that's why I'm the third. My dad obviously grew up speaking Spanish in the household and his dad was a very conservative Mexican, but by the time I was born my dad said that only English would be spoken, which is very common especially back in the sixties. I would have been the sixth Antonio Francisco Sanchez, but because what was drilled into my dad's head, I became the first Anthony Francis Sanchez.

Why does that make me so emotional? That's interesting. What's the first thing I did when I had my first son? He became Antonio Francisco Sanchez.

***What year was your son born?***

Two thousand, so he's seventeen. I don't blame my dad for that. I blame him for not speaking Spanish fluently, but not in a mean way. That's just what he did. My mom speaks fluent Spanish.

***Did she always?***

Self-taught early on. Everything I've done—not everything I've done, but everything I've wanted to was reverse that assimilation.

***Is that what attracted you to this project and our initiative here?***

Yes. Well, that and because I've been president of every Latino organization in town here over the last twenty-five years at one point except HIP. I was Fernando's vice president, but he told me early on he was going to treat HIP like a Central American company and he was going to be president for life.

**Tell us what HIP is.**

Hispanics in Politics. I was very involved in that. That's actually how I met my wife. She was a student here and I had just come back from D.C. In the Latino community I was the guy. Tom Rodriguez was writing a weekly column for one of the local Spanish language newspapers and he used to write about me—I don't know why—but as the person that was going to come back and do great things. I've spent the last twentysomething years disappointing him.

***I don't think so.***

**No, it is the opposite.**

Anyway, both my wife and I are the only ones in both extended sides of our family—my wife, both her parents are Mexican—we're the only ones that ever went to college. I'm not proud, but it's why we raised our kids the way we did. My dad is seventy-four now and lives in L.A. As a parent you always want your kids to do better than you do, and our kids are well on their way to doing that.

**Do they speak Spanish?**

Our two boys are seventeen and sixteen. They're getting there. We probably need to focus more on that with our girls. My wife grew up with her dad in the Navy and he became a federal prison

warden for thirty-three years and retired in 2000 when we started having kids. They retired here and they're still here. He with his wife, my mother-in-law, has a typical East L.A. upbringing. My wife's grandma is a hundred and still lives in the same house in East L.A. that she's lived in since 1940. She's a hundred years old and has been recognized by MALDEF and every Mexican-American civic organization in L.A., really neat. So good role models.

**Tell me about Nevada Partners, how you got involved.**

One of the themes in my life, again, is the folks I met early in my life. Rose McKinney-James gave me that opportunity to work for her as she was chief of staff. Actually, she was young, in her early twenties, African-American lawyer from Washington, D.C. She had worked for a very famous African-American congresswoman in D.C., Barbara...I'm embarrassed that I'm forgetting right now.

**Barbara Jordan?**

It might have been….Obviously, there weren't that many. Rose has been part of my life since 1986. Half that time we've been fierce adversaries because she's the godmother of solar for Nevada; that's been her career. But she's one of my earliest mentors. I have had many, many horrible political fights with her. But, at the same time, on Nevada Partners she was chair for ten years and I was the vice chair for ten years. Nevada Partners started in the wake of the Rodney King riots in West Las Vegas. Governor Miller was governor then. It was horrible. It was a recreation of what had happened in the Watts Riots: Lack of economic development, lack of jobs, frustration. In large parts of West Las Vegas, there was severe riots and killing and burning. Governor Miller with Kirk Kerkorian and Mujahid Ramadan, one of the long-time Muslim leaders here in Las Vegas, started Nevada Partners to create job opportunities in the Westside. That's why NV Energy gives so much money to UNLV, UNR, to the schools K through twelve,

to Nevada Partners, because we're training our future workers. We have an obligation and we need them. We can't hire enough engineers. We can't hire enough accountants. We can't hire enough lawyers. That's our philosophy and we'll always do that.

We've done some really, really incredible things at Nevada Partners. Most of it was under the leadership of Steven Horsford, who is, if not my best friend, one of my closest friends. Our kids grew up together. We'd have a kid, and he and Sonya would have a kid. We'd have another kid and him and Sonya would have a kid. We had our third and he had a third. Then we had a fourth and he just got really mad at me one day and he said, "You need to stop."

**That's great.**

His kids were running track. This was ten years ago when they were eight or nine. They're boys. I said, "Hey, I want my kids to get into track." I ran track and my wife ran track. He says, "Well, my kids are a part of this youth track league." Which I didn't even know existed. I said, "You guys want to run?" My boys were like, "We're the fastest kids in our school, Dad." They went to Challenger Academy, a very, very regimented curriculum, usually teaching two grades ahead of where you're at. It's very international, but it's kids of Asian doctors, Middle Eastern, very, very, very few African-American kids or even Hispanic kids.

I said, "Oh, you're the fastest ones in your school?" So we went out to Steven's track team. My two kids were the only non-African Americans. They proceeded the entire season to come in last place in every single race. Sometimes they wouldn't come in last and we'd have a big celebration because they didn't come in last.

But they stuck with it. Both my sons are varsity cross country in track. They go to Gorman, which is probably another hour story I could tell. We don't have time for that today. Gorman won the state track championship for the first time in Gorman history in sixty-five years,

so my kids are part of that, which is really neat. As a result, my kids are really good.

My seventeen-year-old is trying to decide if he wants to pursue running in college. He took after his mom and he got in the top one percent in both his SAT and ACT, so he's touring all the Ivy League colleges right now. But he wants to go in the Naval Academy of all things now, which is fascinating.

I was a public school kid my whole life. My wife was private school. I lost that debate early on. Whenever I lose something and I try to reverse it, like with my name or my dad's desire to assimilate, that's one of the ways I make up for having put all four of my kids through private school their whole lives and that's why I'm on the executive board of the Public Education Foundation and that's why we give so much money to public schools. It's a coping mechanism.

**MARCELA:** You've talked a lot about mentors, people that have come into your life. I was kind of curious if you could tell us about some of the role models that you've had that helped shape you?

That's why I mentioned Eva Garcia-Mendoza. To this day she was one of the first and best. Previous to that it was Roosevelt Fitzgerald.

***Barbara: I'm guessing they probably don't know who Roosevelt is. Could you maybe describe him?***

He and Tony Miranda were anthropology professors in the School of Anthropology here and they created the Ethnic Studies program. Roosevelt was an African-American scholar from Natchez, Mississippi, and very well published. He had a profound impact on my academic life, as did Tony Miranda. But I used to resent Tony Miranda because he was Mexican and he drove a convertible BMW and that used to piss me off.

**Claytee: What did you want him to drive?**

To a kid like me then, it was like you were a sellout, which is funny.

**What do you drive now?**

A seventy-five-thousand-dollar Audi.

***[All laughing] I'm glad you asked that, Claytee. That's great.***

Academically also, the two professors, Dina Titus, now Congresswoman Titus, and Jerry Simich. He retired a few years ago. Dina and Jerry wrote my law school recommendation letters back in 1988, successfully because I got in. Dina went on to a long career as a state senator. In 2006 she was running for governor, and I was not supporting her. She let me know of her unhappiness with me when she said, "As a professor at UNLV I can still go in and change your grades that you got two decades earlier." But I'm very close with Dina today, and Jerry Simich too.

Eva Garcia-Mendoza was very instrumental. Now she's pretty semi-retired. She became a great trial lawyer here, president of the immigration bar. She founded the then version of the Latino Bar Association.

Obviously her husband, John Mendoza, who has his oral histories on file here, is one of the foremost, if not most, accomplished Mexican Americans in Nevada post-1900 Nevada history. He went to Las Vegas High School. Everybody talks about Gorman's football program these days; they've won ten state championships in a row and they were ranked number one in the country for the last three years. But John Mendoza in 1947 played with a group of rag tag kids that went to Las Vegas High School and he was the only Mexican and they won the state championship that year. No team that they played in California, Arizona or Nevada even scored a point or got a first down against him, so it's legendary stuff. John went on to Notre Dame and came back.

They should make a movie out of him because in 1960 as a Mexican—and looked very,

very Mexican—got elected district attorney of Clark County. We haven't had a person of color elected to that position since. We hadn't to that point and haven't since. He was that much of a leader. He became a district court judge for about thirty years after that.

I got to know him more, later in his life. He used to take me to the country club to try to teach me to golf. This was in the nineties. I had a chip on my shoulder and I would tell him the same thing, "No self-respecting Mexican American can belong to a country club and golf." I have been a member of the TPC Country Club for ten years now. I'm a walking—what do you call that?—a walking anachronism or something?

***What's your handicap?***

My golf game is my handicap.

John, certainly. Fernando Romero, who I fight half the time, I have a lot of respect for him. He's obviously on your list to talk to. He is a very polarizing person, but he has done unbelievable things as a leader since the 1970s. Now he's attaining elder statesman.

Something that you're all going to discover as you meet all these people is in the Latino community, it is very, very fractured. If you're Cuban, the Mexicans don't like you. If you're Cuban, you don't like the Puerto Ricans. You guys know all this. This is very common, not just Las Vegas. You're going to have Tom Rodriguez. You're going to have Larry Mason. They half the time won't sit in the same room as Fernando Romero. There was a lot of friction. I am the guy that everybody says gets along with all of them, and I like all of them. It's just my personality. But I also don't need turf. I don't need my thing. I don't need to control anything. It's not like they're going to badmouth each other or anything like that. Now they're all old. Now they're all hitting seventy, all these guys.

Larry, the tallest Mexican I've ever met in my life. Larry is on your list. To this day he's

the only Latino school board president we've ever had. Larry was the admissions director here at UNLV for many years. People don't know that.

Tom Rodriguez was the affirmative action officer at the school district for thirty years, and he got that job because, as a real militant activist, he sued the school district and got MALDEF to front the bill and beat them and created the diversity program for the school district and got resources for Sunrise Elementary School on Eastern and parts of East Las Vegas. So to answer your question, those are the guys that really did something.

***That's great.***

**LAURENTS: You mentioned early childhood, your family grew up East Las Vegas. I've personally never met anyone from my same neighborhood as successful and accomplished as you are. My question is, how has the East Las Vegas neighborhood changed?**

It hasn't. Unfortunately, it hasn't. You know what has changed? I went to Mountain View Elementary School. When I was there it was maybe five percent Latino and now it's a hundred percent. It's absolutely fascinating demographically how it's changed. My mom still lives over there. But it's still hands down the poorest area of our city and it doesn't have the resources. I think the only way we're going to get that is by electing more Latinos to office to focus on that.

One thing I am very envious of is the cohesiveness of the African-American community and especially the elected African-American community. That is how you get community centers built in West Las Vegas. That's how you get community centers built in East Las Vegas; you have to do it through politics because people won't do it because it's the right thing to do. If you leave it up to the typical elected officials...We've seen in Nevada in the last seventy-five years that's why Green Valley wants to have its own school district, which would be the most horrific thing ever for West Las Vegas or East Las Vegas because those are funded by property taxes.

What kind of property taxes do you pay in East Las Vegas versus Green Valley or Summerlin? Do we need a Summerlin school district? Do we need an East Las Vegas? It would be horrific. I always fight deregulating the Clark County School District. That's why I'm very hopeful with the new superintendent that we have. I think he's going to be terrific. We've been fortunate with the superintendents we've had at the school district for I would say the last twenty-five years.

Most of my mentors, it's all been politics. I have a simplistic view that that's the only way to effectuate change is through that power. We've had some terrific leaders in this community and we've had some epic failures in our Latino community in elected officials, just like everybody has, but we have to keep encouraging people to run for office. My job is to help people get elected to office as opposed to running myself and that's what I've been doing.

**MARCELA: You mentioned that in order to create change we need to elect more Latinos and Latinas into office. What advice do you have for younger Latinos and Latinas who want to pursue a career in politics?**

There are two types of people that run for office. There are those that before they've ever had a full-time job, they run for office. You can get elected without ever having had a job. But they want to run for office because they want to be somebody. When you get elected to office, you do become somebody. That's just the way we treat our politicians. We hold them on a different pedestal. When they fail, we beat them down so bad and so quickly. But there are others that might have a base and might do something and then they want to give back.

My advice is to get your foundation. Don't go the elected route because you think it's going to lead to a greater job in the future making money, which unfortunately too many politicians do. Get your education. Do your thing. Bring your experience to office. You can't bring anything to office if you're twenty-two years old and you get elected to office. What are

you bringing? The youth perspective? Maybe. But other than that, get very involved, work on a campaign, but just get involved in the community, and people will come to you and want you to run.

A lot of people don't want to run for office today because even if you have the cleanest background and you don't have any scandals in your background, depending on what office you run for, they will make them up. In my job, I worked in I believe the nastiest job in the world. It's very cutthroat. I'm dealing with millions of dollars. I'm dealing with major corporations. I'm dealing with really, really serious people. They hire private investigators to follow me in my job. They create websites and say nasty things. I don't mean it at a federal level or anything, but it's just a very nasty process.

Build your internal fortitude, develop a thick skin, and never stop believing in yourself. You can get elected if that's what you want to do, but pick the right thing. When you run and where you run are the two most important factors in your successes as an elected running for office. I have so many friends and so many kids come to me and they tell me they want to run, and I know immediately if they're going to win or not. It's not because I'm smart. It's demographics. It's voter registration. There are very few surprises in elected office at the lower levels, very, very few surprises. I tell my CEO, "I have a 98 percent win record in terms of predicting who is going to get elected because I give out all the checks." Not only do I do the foundation and the charitable, I hand out the political checks. So why do you think politicians like me? Because I hand out big checks from the power company. But I don't give checks to people that I think are going to lose. I tell my boss, "Well, I got ninety-eight out of a hundred again." He's like, "Wow, what's really amazing." I'm like, "No, it's not that hard to know." If you're involved you're going to know.

**Did we talk about the Latin Chamber at all?**

No.

**Can we end by talking about the Latin Chamber of Commerce and your involvement over the years and even today?**

The earliest I can remember getting involved—I hope Gus Ramos' name is on your list, Gustavo Ramos. Gus worked for the Housing Authority; that was his career. He started the LULAC chapter [League of United Latin American] here back in the eighties. I'll never forget, in 1988 he took me to a political conference at Claremont McKenna. If the West Coast had an Ivy League, Claremont would be in the West Coast Ivy League with Stanford and Berkeley and Cal Poly probably. But Claremont is an incredible series of colleges, Harvey Mudd, really, really top stuff. They had this conference there in 1988 right before I graduated called Impacto 88. The Latino community, they had such advancements in politics in the seventies in the civil rights movement. Then you had the eighties and things kind of fell by the wayside and you had lost that activist focus. This was going to be the big meeting of the national Latinos to start to get some of that back. I met some of the folks that were involved at the Latin Chamber. But Gus took me to that. In fact, I got a scholarship from LULAC to go to law school, which was really neat.

When I got out of law school and when I came back from D.C., I immersed myself in HIP from the political standpoint. I learned a lot. It was a lot of fun. But at a certain point, I was building my law practice in about '99, 2000, 2001. The Latin Chamber was the Latin Chamber, but it was always the business organization, it wasn't political. I ran for the board and got elected to the board and served on there for two or three years. I didn't like the guy that was running for president at the time. I just didn't think he was a good representation of the community. Eddie Escobedo, who founded the El Mundo newspaper, really liked me and put me and my wife and

my kids on the front page of his newspaper like six weeks in a row. It was the most embarrassing thing. Communities of color are always looking for the next leader. So I won that election, and because of my philosophy I took the chamber in a very political direction, and it's been that way ever since.

I've been off the board now for ten years, but I am the largest funder of the Latin Chamber of Commerce; my company is. I haven't been on the board for ten years. One of my employees is on the board. They came out with their endorsement list yesterday. I looked at it and I shook my head. I just haven't had time to focus on it because of the No on 3 campaign I'm running. I said, "Boy, some of these are going to be controversial." I didn't understand why they were doing it, but I don't meddle. They're going to have to learn. From the press I read this morning, they're getting the living you know what kicked out of them for some of the decisions they made yesterday. I'm probably getting blamed for taking the chamber in that political direction, but it's the reason the Latin Chamber is where it is today and why cabinet secretaries and national political figures go to the lunches; that's why celebrities go there; it's why the people go there, because politics is where it's at. They are the center of the political universe. Sometimes too conservative for my taste, but that's Cubans. I only know two Cuban Democrats, Mo Denis and Dario Herrera, who is a UNLV grad.

**Aren't both of them...**

Dario got a little ahead of himself and had to do some federal prison time. He was the one I was talking about; some of our greatest hopes turned out to be our most epic failures. But Mo Denis, on the other hand, he's a Mormon bishop, so he went the other way.

**Do you still consider the Latin Chamber mostly Cuban today?**

No.

**But we know it started that way.**

Absolutely, it started as the Cuban American Chamber. Mike O'Callaghan and Dick Bryan, in 1976, told them they needed to be a little less identifiable with just one population, and that's how they came up with the Latin Chamber name, which is kind of an odd one. Most of them around the country are Hispanic Chamber of Commerce or something like that. But it stuck. Otto founded it in '76 and up until four years ago ran it, and so it always had his imprint and his identity. But Otto is one of the greatest leaders we've ever had certainly in the business but also the civil rights community. I don't agree with him one thing on politics, but I'll be the first one there to get a school named after him for all the lives and all the kids and all the scholarships he's given out and the people he's impacted his whole career. I'm glad you've interviewed him. His health isn't the best these days.

The Latin Chamber today is a reflection of the demographics of the valley. We have a disproportionately large Central American community here, too. Tom Wright and Jerry Simich wrote a book.

**Exactly. *The Peoples of Las Vegas.***

Yes. It does a good job of explaining the different communities here.

***It's part of their required reading. They just haven't been given it yet.***

Oh, I'd love to introduce you to both of them. They're still very dear friends of mine.

**Tom Wright is on the board, as you know, of the project.**

***I'd like to make sure that particularly these students can tap into you for context and follow-up as they work on these interviews.***

Absolutely. That's my obligation to what Eva, and all them, did for me.

***We really appreciate your time. This was great. You were our Guinea pig, our first official***

***interview for the student workers.***

**This was amazing.**

Don't let your future interviewees meander like I did.

**Oh, no, we want you to meander. We want you to tell stories.**

Is that right?

**Yes, we do, definitely.**

As my wife says, I tell some of the greatest stories of all time and they get better every year.

**That's okay. That's what we want.**

***What does she do?***

My wife has a criminal justice and poli sci degree from here. She graduated here at UNLV when she was eighteen, I think, eighteen or nineteen, when I started. I'm about nine years older than her. She just always wanted to go fast and fast and fast and finish early. I don't know why. She, from there, went to work in politics and worked for Sig Rogich for a time. She worked for Senator Bryan years after I had left. But she was always involved in politics because her grandmother was very active in East Los Angeles for fifty years in politics. Then she really got involved in politics when she was the press secretary for Oscar Goodman, so she was involved in a lot of politics. Then she ran all press and media and marketing operations for McCarran Airport for many years. We had our two boys, and by the time we had our two girls, we had a six-year gap when we had our two girls. I wanted two boys first and then I decided I wanted to have two girls after that. I tell that to some people and they're like, "Wow, that's really neat."

***You're amazing.***

I'm a great storyteller. By the time the girls were born, it became overwhelming. About five years she has been working with the kids full-time.

***That's a big job.***

It is. Like I said, our kids have greatly exceeded both of us academically, so it's been neat.

***That's great.***

**We just thank you so much.**

No, thank you. Whatever resources I can help with...I haven't even started scratching the surface...just in terms of connections to the right folks. We've just got to really strategize financially what we can do. You're documenting history. Because you're going to interview somebody's grandmother, that grandmother's grandson might be the president of a bank and they're going to be very honored that you're doing that for their grandma. We have to really branch that out.

We have internships at our company, and so we always get these bright and eager students. The first question I get is they always want to know how I got to where I got. I could do a matrix on that white board and do a six degrees of Kevin Bacon. But because I met that person, I met that person, and because I met that person, I got this job, and because I got this job and met this person, I got that job. I could do that. I imagine everybody could, right?

**A lot of us can.**

But it means a lot to me and I know how important that is. I've known too many people. The people I don't like are the people that will say, "I got here because I was the smartest and the hardest worker." I scrapped and I did it. I just don't have time for folks like that and I don't have time for people that try to pull up the ladder behind them especially when somebody handed them the ladder. Thank you for your time. I appreciate it.

**Thank you.**

**[End of recorded interview]**