

AN INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIA DÍAZ

An Oral History Conducted by Nathalie Martinez

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



For Olivia Diaz, the East Side of Las Vegas is a place that is more than the reports of violence and crime that have tainted its history—it is a home that fosters community and unity. As a Las Vegas native, Olivia Diaz has dedicated her career to serving and meeting the needs of the Latinx community in Las Vegas. Inspired by folks like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who “would just take injustice” and “wanted to try to educate and create awareness,” Olivia seeks to transform educational policy and strengthen the community she grew up with.

Looking back on the life of her family in Mexico she talks about the lessons learned from her paternal grandfather who served in the Bracero program and her maternal grandmother who was a midwife in Mexico. Growing up between the East Side of Las Vegas and Durango, Mexico, Olivia became deeply connected to her Mexican roots and experienced the inequities that immigrant children face in both regions. In her oral history, she talks about how the Spanish language was a part of the “essence” of who she and her family were and impacted her own identity formation. Her faith also transcended borders in Mexico and in the United States throughout her upbringing.

Olivia discusses the changes she witnessed on the Las Vegas strip as her father worked at the Caesars Palace from its opening until his retirement in the early 2000s. She also delves into the evolving demographics of the East Side and how it became a foothold for the Latinx community. Her background living in Durango and in a Mexican household ultimately motivated her to pursue the Alternative Route to Licensure in the early 90s upon graduating as a first-generation student from UNLV. Her graduation collided with the call for bilingual educators in the Clark County School District to serve the growing Latinx migrant population.

She describes the challenges she faced as a bilingual instructor, teacher, and English Language Facilitator for CCSD, from the gap in foundational language training of students who were coming from war-ridden regions in Central America, to policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act that shrunk the number of resources available for bilingual instruction.

Her dedication to Latinx and English Language Learners encouraged her to take her experiences from the classroom and become a political change agent as the first Latina woman to serve on the Nevada Legislative body. “Pushing and pursuing” as she did studying at Rancho High School, she talks about running campaigns between grading papers as a teacher and being a mother. She became one of the eight Latinx women elected into office in 2010. She looks back on her term as Assemblywoman for District 11, including implementing Zoom Schools in CCSD, and discusses the goals she has for her term as Councilwoman for Ward 3.

Olivia’s oral history also provides a moment of reflection on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on her personal and professional life. She discusses the unique challenges she has faced from being an at-home educator for her children and those of the community she serves in Ward 3 which is over 60% Latinx. Looking to the future, she hopes to leave Las Vegas a better place than she found it and create an environment for future generations “where we honor each other, where we respect each other, and where we are trying to lift one another for the greater good of everyone.”

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in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Nathalie Martinez

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Olivia Díaz 8-31-2020
Signature of Narrator Date

Nathalie S. Martínez 31/8/2020
Signature of Interviewer Date

Session 1

Good afternoon. Today is the 31st of August 2020. We are in the Lied Library in the Reading Room. My name is Nathalie Martinez, and today we are here with...

Barbara Tabach.

And...

Olivia Diaz.

Will you please spell your name?

O-L-I, V as in Victor, I-A, D-I-A-Z.

Where were you born here in Las Vegas?

Back in 1978 when my mother was expecting me, we lived in some apartments that set across the old Sunrise Acres Elementary School on Eastern and Sunrise; that's basically where I was born. I was born in, then, Women's Hospital that existed. Currently it's a car lot. That hospital used to solely emphasize in deliveries of babies and nothing else; it was just a maternity ward. That's why it was called Women's Hospital. That's where I arrived, I think it was in the morning of September 17th, 1978.

Tell me about your parents. Where are they from?

My father immigrated to the United States in his teens. I think he was about sixteen or seventeen. My grandfather participated in the Bracero program coming from Durango, Mexico. His roots are Presidios, Durango, Mexico, and it's a very small, small town that's part of a bigger municipality called Tepehuanes. Because my grandfather had been coming to the States for work and leaving the family behind—my dad is the second oldest of eight siblings—(my father) was basically at a very young age the man of the household. My grandfather would come for periods of time to the States, and then he would leave the children and the wife behind. Sometimes they

would get resources; sometimes they wouldn't get resources, and so he had to help from a very, very young age.

The opportunity presented itself where my grandfather gained residency here and he was able to bring the entire family from Durango to Lincoln, California; that's where my grandfather worked at that point when they immigrated here. Then my father, because he had grown up from birth to about sixteen or seventeen years of age in Presidios, Durango, he had this nostalgia and this connection to his motherland, and he would make yearly treks back to visit grandparents and relatives.

On one of those trips he met my mom. My mom is from an adjacent town. There is Presidios de Arriba, Presidios de Abajo, but people got them too confused because both of them sound Presidios-like, so they decided for the train station that passed through just to identify my mom's hometown as la Candela. My mom is from la Candela. My dad is from Presidios. They are two kilometers apart, but they're different towns. People feel that they're of a different identity or they're from different people although they're very similar.

They met at a dance and then they maybe saw each other once or twice that visit and then they wrote letters to each other. Then a year or so later, my father went and asked for her hand and they got married. They got married December 16th of 1973. Then my father wanted to make sure my mother came in a way that didn't put her at jeopardy. He petitioned her. My mother stayed back in her town with her parents waiting for the immigration process to happen.

By that time, though, my dad would go and visit. My sister was born nine months after they got married, to the date. My sister was born September 16th of 1974. Then my mother had another baby. Unfortunately that brother didn't make it past a few months; he came down with pneumonia and passed. Then it was right about that time that then the process happened and my

mom made it to Vegas, and then that's kind of where my story begins where they're here together as a family and we're looking forward to this life of living together here—the Diazes start here—and I'm the very first Diaz to be born—Diaz Ortega, because that's my mom's maiden name—to be born here in Vegas.

What brought them to Vegas specifically?

For my father, since he was living out in California, it was a very agricultural line of work, and he always had an issue with an eye from a very young age that almost didn't allow him to continue in school at a young age. My dad pretty much stopped going to school when he was in second grade because of the eye issue and the inability to secure glasses. They came from very humble beginnings. Again, those resources that were supposed to come from the north sometimes didn't make it. My dad had these eye issues. He was out in California working in a nursery, very agricultural in nature, a lot of wind, a lot of dust, and it aggravated his eye condition.

He had an uncle that had made Vegas his home. This uncle was my paternal grandfather's brother. He said, "Hey, why don't you come out to Vegas? It's growing. More jobs are going to offered here." The casinos were starting to get off.

My dad decided at that point, do I stay in California in a very agricultural line of work that really is not comfortable for me, or do I venture away from my home, away from my family and try this new career or try to secure another job that's different? He decided to make the leap. He was the only one of his eight siblings to leave California and defect California. He took my uncle on his word and stayed with my uncle.

He started working at some laundromats when he first arrived; doing that kind of work, a lot of washing, a lot of folding linens and stuff. But eventually Caesars Palace came on the map

and he applied for a position there. My dad started working, I think, when the casino opened and retired thirty-five-plus years after.

He stayed at the same place the whole time?

He stayed at the same casino, yes.

Wow that whole time. That's great.

As a casino porter. He saw the good times of Vegas, and then as he was leaving he was seeing the turnover of one owner owning the casino versus then corporations owning the casino and how things started to change.

I remember a lot of things growing up, even the appearance of the casino, how things like the OmniMax changed. You would go and see this big brown ball sitting outside of Caesars Palace. We went in. When you were a kid, you almost felt like you were flying in the movies on that big screen. Then that became where Celine Dion performed later on and they did away with the OmniMax. But I remember as a kid walking through and seeing the huge reels that the movies would feed, and I was just mesmerized by the size of the apparatus and how that got displayed and how it made you feel like you were a part of the movie. It was very different. Cutting edge technology for what today's kids with virtual reality; that's kind of what it was for us back then. I also remember through the years how the Forum Shops got added.

When we were younger we went more to the Christmas holiday parties that they would offer for the employees, but then as I grew up those parties started to disappear and go away. You have good and bad memories of things. But I do remember Dad would bring home a turkey from work; they would give every employee a turkey. Then my mom would make the Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings. It was part of learning the tradition that you were taught here.

Talk more about that. For Thanksgiving, for example, did you keep it to the U.S. traditions?

My mom, I give her credit for having lived a very sheltered life, because my mom came from a very small town in Durango, Mexico, and then she comes here to Vegas with no family. She had no aunts. She had no immediate family of her own to visit, to talk to, to open up to. It was basically her and her kids. She had friends that she made along the way, my dad's side of the family that she then embraced as her most immediate family, but it's still not the same. Your in-laws are still not the same as your own. But she did as best as she could with what she had. She made the best of everything, I think.

She did—not assimilate, but she learned to honor and value the traditions of this country, especially as we went through school. We always made the crafts and you always made either the pilgrims or the Indian. Every Valentine's Day you'd come home with hearts. Every St. Patrick's you would come home with shamrocks. There were more that I think resonated with her and Thanksgiving was one. It was a time to give thanks for everything we had.

We come from a very religious family, very Catholic. Both grandmas, on my mom's and my dad's side, very, very—and I think my dad's mom more so—very, very entrenched in Catholicism, pray rosaries, go very religiously every Sunday for communion every Sunday, lived by the book. I feel my mom—Thanksgiving kind of resonated also religiously, spiritually. She would make this huge meal. She would invite different friends for every Thanksgiving to come and feast with us whether it be a friend that she knew was going to be tired from work and probably didn't have the time to fix the meal, rotate to cousins that would come over. It was a time to be thankful for everything we had.

If you think about my mom growing up and my dad growing up in these very rural times at the time where barely the electricity was making it in, indoor plumbing was barely making it in, they lived in a very different reality than what you came to find here in an urban setting. But Vegas at that time, as small as it was back in the '70s, it was still highly urban compared to where they came from. My mom learned how to make the turkey. She would ask around, "How do you make this?" She would try different things. She would just ask, ask my grandmother who had been here more years than her. My grandmother became her guide and I think her second mom in letting her know.

Did your grandparents move here as well?

On my father's side, yes, because that's who brought my dad here. My grandmother came with all of her children to the States when my grandfather immigrated the family, when they were able to get their residency. Then my dad was able to bring my mom.

But my mom's side, never. I take that back. On my mom's side, what I came to find out when I was older, probably in my college years, is that my maternal grandfather Ortega had come to the States, but he worked his stint, I think, up north in Nevada—actually, laying railroad tracks and doing stuff of that nature. He stayed here and saved money, and then he decided he would leave the United States and form a family over there. That's when he met my maternal grandmother and stayed put. I understand he got married late for that time because usually people were together at eighteen, seventeen, twenty (years of age); that was even old at twenty. But I think this grandfather ended up settling way later in his life. Because he came and he worked in the States, he was able to then go and purchase land. Then he built his home. Then he could have his cattle or grow his own food, and that became important to him for sustainability down the road for his family.

My mom and my dad often talked about how my dad went without and how my mother had everything, to a point my mom always had both her parents by her side even though they were ten children. She was number seven, I want to say, of the ten, and my dad was the second of eight. I remember growing up and their conversations that they would always compare. My dad was like, "There were nights that I went to bed hungry because we didn't have anything to eat. The money didn't make it." My grandmother was struggling financially. She was just basically trying to make ends meet on her own sometimes because the monies were not making it. Then on my mom's side, it was like, you never knew what it was to go with your belly empty and with having to struggle. My mom's like, "That's true." My grandparents had orchards and they had fruit trees and they would have different things, corn, beans. They would have their own plots of land that they could then reap what they sowed, so my mom said that.

My grandmother on my mom's side was the midwife of the town. She became almost like the medicine woman of the town informally because she was expecting one of my uncles; she thought she was pregnant with twins and that would be very hard for a woman to deliver in a town, two babies, and so she went to a town where a doctor was there permanently and at seven months' pregnancy she started walking around with the doctor. The doctor was like, "Let's go see what we have to do today," and she would see how this doctor tended to the patients for different things and different reasons, fighting infection, putting things where they needed to be. She picked up a lot of what the doctor would do for certain situations, and everybody would come to my grandmother after that point. She didn't have twins, though. She was just very big and very pregnant with that uncle.

But she came away with a skillset of shadowing the doctor that then came into play, and she delivered many, many babies afterwards, including my older sister. My older sister was

delivered by my own grandmother. She came breach. Very skilled, very tough, very courageous woman. I remember my mom saying that my grandfather didn't always agree with my grandmother at one in the morning, because babies don't tell you when they're going to come. They're not on our schedule, right. They're like, "Toña." Antonia was my mom's mom. They would come, "*Ya va dar a luz.*" "So-and-so is going to give birth. Can you please come and help her?" My grandmother would get up and take her things, and my grandfather would say, "Why do you have to go help them?" My grandmother was like, "Well, I can. I know how to and I'm going to go." She would go out there and deliver these babies. They said that a lot of times there was no payment. People, again, lived very, very precarious lives and didn't have a lot of luxury. But when they had something they would try to share. If in their field they were growing alfalfa, later they would turn up and give her some alfalfa. Or if they had a pecan tree and they had harvested pecans, they would give her some pecans. In a way she didn't receive payment, but then later there was some kind of gifts and that gratitude that people would then bring things to that grandmother in exchange for having helped them in their hour of need.

When you're going through labor, as women we know that's a very difficult time. To have someone that's gifted and talented in helping you through it, wow, my hats off to her. I think she delivered thirtysomething babies, maybe forty in her lifetime. She even delivered two cousins of mine that were twins. There came a point when she got older that she didn't feel as competent and she would say, "I can't do it anymore," and she ended up moving to another town with an aunt of mine. That's kind of the hardworking, courageous grandparents that I come from.

Those are your roots.

Those are my very strong roots, yes.

That's great.

You said they were on both sides of your family very devout Catholics. What was that life like here in Las Vegas growing up?

We went to church every Sunday.

Which one?

St. Christopher was the one that my parents mostly took us to. I was baptized at Holy Family. I don't know why. I think at that point maybe because there was a cousin who lived near that church and that's where they decided to baptize me. Then we baptized some of my siblings at St. Anne's. The older ones, then, got baptized at St. Christopher's. I remember Sunday was a day that we devoted to going to church, dressing nice. God forbid we didn't go in a dress in our Sunday's best especially during those important occasions like Christmas and Easter. You never missed church. It was always church before any of the other partying or gatherings that we did.

I remember being a young child, mass seems like it goes on forever, and we always went to Spanish masses, so the masses were always with Spanish-speaking priests. You get impatient as a young kid and it just seems like you're there for three hours even though mass is only an hour. We would ask my mom, "When is it over, Mom?" She's like, "In a little bit." "When is it over, Mom?" "In a little bit." By the time we got to the third time, "When is it over?" She would give us a nice little pinch on our arm and then we knew we couldn't ask anymore.

I appreciate that religious spirituality that my parents continued to instill in us because it does help you get through some very hard knocks in life and very tough times, when you question your existence, when you question why am I here, why is this happening to me? But your faith helps you hang on and really face adversity. When you're younger you don't really think... Then it also was a very good moral compass. I think through the sermons you're taught right versus wrong, do what's best for your brothers and sisters, be very pious; all these other

elements of growing in a very small town also come through fruition and grounding in this kind of religious upbringing. We did all of our sacraments, so baptism.

First communion and confirmation were done back in Durango, Mexico, just because it was easier for my parents. We would go almost on a yearly trip. My dad didn't give that up. Even though he started to have us, we would then be packed up and we would head over to his town every year, one, because he wanted to build a home over there and have a vacation home or a second home just in case if we ever needed it we would have it, and, two, I think for my dad it was very important that we not lose the essence of who we were.

Growing up, my mom was very, very strict about, when you go to school, you speak in English, but when you come home you're going to speak Spanish and you're going to practice your Spanish here because I don't know English and I need to know what you're conversing about, what conversations we were having as brothers and sisters.

I'm the second of six siblings, and so we were five girls and then my brother was the youngest. Kept trying for the boy, and then five times after they kept trying, I guess it's not in the stars for us to have a boy. Then the boy came on his own; they weren't even looking and then the boy came. I remember that people would see a little stepladder. I think my oldest sister is four years apart from me, but then from there we're only two to three years apart from each other. We would always show up in a stepladder and they would ask my parents, "Are all of these yours?" And my dad would say, "Yes, they're all mine." Some folks would be like, wow that's a handful, but others would say, oh, I love big families; they're cool. It depended on who you crossed paths with. Why was I going here? What were we talking about before?

Church.

Yes. I feel like having that religious compass; that religious upbringing—also, when I would go back to the hometown on the yearly vacations out there, it's very interconnected to daily life in the small hometown, and I saw you do the rosary for the patron saint, which in my parents' hometown one is on September tenth for Saint Nicholas of Tolentino, the other one is August 12th for Santa Clara, and there's always these big gatherings of all the townspeople, and a lot of people would make the trek from the States back to the hometowns to venerate those patron saints. There's fireworks and there's big feasts and there's a big party all around the patron saints. I feel like I would be incomplete or I would not have a better understanding of where I come from and who I am had I not had that upbringing in the Catholic Church.

Do you still go back?

To my parents' hometown? The last time I visited was when my son Xavier was two. He's currently nine, so it's been seven years. The capital of Durango was celebrating its 450th anniversary of being founded as a city. Actually, I think it was probably the first capital of Mexico before Mexico City because of the Spaniards arriving and everything, so it has its history there, too, in the origins of the country. That was the last time we went. We were so lucky to witness that celebration of 450 years of a city being. Here we are in Vegas and we're very young in terms of how long we've been established. My son has only been there once.

As we go through these COVID-19 times, I've been kind of—I don't know why—missing not being there because it's a completely different rural environment where you feel like you're on your own pace and on your own time there. It's not like when you're here and you're saying, oh, I've got to go to my next appointment, or I've got to go to my next thing. It's like you wake up with the sunrise and you're on your own, and you enjoy the communal living with everybody. You get to enjoy breakfast. You talk to each other. You get to know people on a

more personal, I feel, level and you just have more of this awareness of who everybody is, what they bring, what their strengths are, and that you're there for each other through thick and thin because family is family. I do miss going to that respite because I feel like—you come from that fabric and in a way when you're here in an urban setting, it's a different rhythm and sometimes it's harder for some of us to keep up. Then when you know where your origins are from and how come sometimes you might feel at a loss in a bigger scheme, you're like, oh, I get it. My parents didn't grow up in the hustle and bustle of New York City where there's a metro system and people are going and used to going really fast all the time. Over there you're going at your pace and you've got the length of the day to get certain things done and you went at that pace.

I want to definitely make an effort now that hopefully I can control my schedule more. I think I lost sight of going when I threw my hat in the ring and started politics. Then you start losing... That's important, too; that part of going back to visit your extended family and kind of unplugging and decompressing. I hope that I can get back.

Growing up here on—that's essentially the east side of Las Vegas, right?

Yes.

What was the demographic like growing up?

It was very diverse back when I grew up in the east side of town. From that apartment on Sunrise and 28th to then we moved to—sorry. It was Sunrise and Eastern; that apartment was. Then we moved to some apartments that were more on 28th and Cedar; those were government housing projects back in the day that existed. It was just more diverse. I remember I had a little bit, a sprinkling of everything around me, and so there were African-American folks, there were Latinos, less of us back then, and then there were Caucasian folks. I remember going to Sunrise Acres and my class being very diverse. It wasn't just faces like mine. They were very, very

different. But as I grew up, we're talking about early '80s to now nearing early '90s, the demographics started to shift quite a bit. By the early '90s you saw way more Latino presence especially on the east side, and so much so that when my parents bought their first home in 1990, we still had very many Caucasian neighbors. We had Ray, who worked for the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, and next door to Ray was, I think, his daughter and son-in-law. Then across the street from us was Lalony. Mostly it was a Caucasian street when we moved in and my dad purchased the house, but then when we moved in the houses started to go for sale and more and more of the house owners looked like my family. From the '90s to 2000, the shift just happened tremendously from being very diverse to now just basically being more Latino centric.

Do you still live in that area?

I still live in that area. I only live a few blocks away from my parents' home where they bought. Somehow destiny doesn't want me to leave the east side of Vegas. I guess I could say I grew up there, went to Rancho High School, ended up graduating. I remember the commute, too. I used to walk from that house—because my dad had a swing shift, my dad would basically sleep during the day and he would work during the night and early into the morning. My dad's shift was six p.m. to two a.m. He would come home, decompress, probably went to sleep about four in the morning, so then very few hours after that we were getting ready to go to school. Only on his days off would he drop us off at school. Every other day that Dad worked, then we walked ourselves to school. I remember those long treks from basically Washington and Eastern all the way to Roy Martin Middle School off of 28th and Stewart. It was a long ways. I think about it now and I'm like, would I even let my son walk that distance? But my mom would always admonish us: Don't go through parks; don't go through alleys; stay where you're visible; stay

where the cars are; I don't want you cutting any corners; please stay on the main arterial roads. We were very compliant in that sense because we knew it was stranger danger and we didn't want to put ourselves in harm's way. If anything, I don't remember having even a close encounter of someone that was asking me things. I just went straight to, straight from. Then Rancho was a lot shorter, thankfully, my walks. Then I ended up graduating from Rancho High School in 1996 as salutatorian of my class.

What was that achievement like?

I was upset that I couldn't come number one. I felt like I fell short, and I think it came down to a driver's ed course. You're like, really? It's not even intellectual. It just came down to a skill that maybe I didn't have the ability. My dad didn't really have the ability at that time to teach me; one car for the entire family, and I had to wait my turn. My sister was older; she had to be taught before I did. My dad didn't teach any of us to drive until it was absolutely necessary, either, to go to work or to go to school, so my sister ended up learning at eighteen; and, therefore, I learned at eighteen as well. I think for him it was more about us having a sense of responsibility and not doing foolish things or rash things because he knew that one accident could mean somebody's life or whatever. He was very apprehensive, I think, about us behind the wheel as well.

Then I got over it. I'm like, okay, two is okay out of a really large class. I don't remember how many students we were in '96, but it was significant. I was like, hmm, two out of the whole class is pretty darn good. I remember giving my speech at the Thomas and Mack because that was where our graduation ceremony was held. I made sure that a couple of teachers read and proofed my speech before I gave it just to make sure that it wasn't going to be offensive; it was going to be good, solid. Mr. Cannous, I remember was one of my math teachers. He was like, "Wow. You wrote this?" And I said, "Yes." He was like, "This is pretty

mature for your age.” The essence at the end was: Life is going to throw curveballs at us, but as long as we stay the course and we’re resilient and we persevere, just like the starfish story, it’s going to make a difference to that one.

The starfish story?

Yes, I brought it in, yes, about the boy on the—obviously if you think about the demographics of Rancho High School, the kids...The valedictorian, his parents were from Laos. My parents had emigrated here from Durango, Mexico. It was about survival, resiliency, and how things don’t necessarily go easy for us. I equated it to the waves and you’re taken back and forth different directions; you don’t have someone guiding you by the hand, taking you down the easy road. And so I just felt like I needed to instill hope in my graduating class and that maybe things weren’t going to be easy for us, but if we were up for the challenge and we fought hard and we stayed the course that we were going to get there.

What was going on at that time that you were pessimistic, but you were hopeful and needed that message to be told?

I can’t pinpoint something in particular. I don’t know.

That’s interesting.

I would have to go back to ’96. I know that Bill Clinton got reelected, so our economy was pretty strong at that point. But I think maybe it came down to being a female, a Latina. In Latina circles sometimes we’re supposed to be seen, but not heard. We’re supposed to be quiet. We’re supposed to be the traditional...Had I followed the traditional...I don’t know. What would you say? Model of a Latina woman was supposed to be.

Stereotype.

The stereotype. I think maybe part of my young rebellious self was saying, I don't want to just get married and have a family. I want to go to college and do things that my parents don't know how to do or how to navigate and don't have a clue about, but I'm going to make sure that I give myself that opportunity and that pathway. I remember a lot of my teachers were instrumental in making sure that they knew that I knew; they were instrumental in making sure that I knew that I had what it took to survive college, to continue my studies, and to basically do what I wanted to do. But that's very easy to say that in a young person: Do what you want.

Another reality is, what will society require of me? And what jobs and skillsets do I need to be a productive member of society. I remember that many of us got a little lost in the "do whatever you want," and I think they kind of directed us a little bit more, like society needs more engineers, society needs more doctors and lawyers especially of diverse ethnic backgrounds, because you speak different languages, because you understand the cultural piece of different part of the community. We received more guidance.

But I'll still take what I got, which was a lot of support in saying that Olivia, you have a lot of potential; make sure you use it and make sure you don't lose it. I think that's what pushed me to continuously—I don't know. I think I was kind of out of bounds and out of the norms compared to a lot of cousins that still lived in the small hometown where my parents came or even some folks that had graduated but didn't really take it to the next level, which was college.

Where do you think that spirit or drive came from?

It came from the late '80s. I was actually my son's age; I was going into fourth grade. My parents had finished the construction of their home in Durango and Presidios. A lot of talk started to happen around, we're going to go to Mexico and we're going to live there. We are like, huh? You're young and you're kind of half listening, but kind of half not. Then eventually it

became real; we started packing. We started selling things. We started just keeping what we were going to take. I remember starting fourth grade here, but by October we left to my dad's hometown where he had built his house.

I think a lot of it at that time, if I really think about it, 28th and Cedar, notorious for the 28th Street gang activity that was happening, and I think my dad was just trying to keep us safe and put us in an environment where hopefully we wouldn't fall prey to gang initiations and that crowd. I think my dad might have said, I think I need to do this move to make sure my kids don't go on a path they shouldn't.

October of 1987 we left to Presidios. I started to live the very rural life. My house where I got to live that my dad built with a lot of sacrifice had a bathroom, had a shower, so it was not missing a beat from here. But then I would go to other people's homes and they had outhouses, or you would have to go out in the corral, and at night. There were very stark differences. There were times when the town would lose electricity and you would go without power for two weeks. It would take two (weeks), sometimes even up to a month. You would have to use petroleum-filled lamps and candles to light your environment at night. You would have to forego using your frig and you could only bring in what you could keep. There was a butcher in town, so then we would just go buy the meat for the day. Every day was going to buy your stuff because you didn't have a way to keep it.

We lived in this part of town called La Loma. La Loma is supposed to be one of the highest parts; it's equivalent to a little mountaintop, and so we lived on one of the highest points of the town. But as a result, the water pressure, by the time it got to our house, we got drops during the summer months, if we were lucky. Even though we had a restroom, even though we had a shower, sometimes during the summer months, because all the water was being kept in the

more, let's say, centric parts of the town that weren't on a hill, we didn't get that water and we'd have to go fetch our water whether it was to wash dishes, for cooking, for drinking. Then we would go to my mom's hometown to bathe during those times because there were thermal hot springs in her hometown, and that's how we would then take baths. And if we couldn't make the two-kilometer trek to take the bath in the hot springs, then we'd just go get our pails of water and we'd just have to do it really quick in our tub, but with water we would boil, and we only had a very finite amount to use.

Then, to put all of that into perspective, I go into the school system over there. There's no ESL. As you know is much of the converse of here, there is no program to help a child learn Spanish; you're just thrown in. While I spoke it and I understood my mother, very different from knowing where your accents go and how to write it correctly. Thankfully I had already mastered reading and English, and so the transition to Spanish, which is a highly phonetic language, wasn't that labor intensive to make the switch for me. But my sister, who was younger than I, going into first grade, she was barely learning ABC's here, then she got derailed into a different phonetic system over there, and it was a struggle for her because she didn't have a solid foundation in a language.

The principal over there said, "Well, if your daughters don't get up to speed..." We got there in October and he wanted us up to speed by December or January of that year. He said, "If your daughters don't make it up to speed, if they can't keep up with the pace of their classrooms, then they're going to have to be put behind a year."

So that incentivized me. We had to basically get tutored in math; reading not so much because I think we picked it up pretty quickly, and the writing part, too. I feel like I was already strong in them here, so that skillset was good to transfer over there. But it was just basically

pushing yourself every day to make sure because I did not want to go back to third grade. I'm like, I do not want to go to third. And my sister would be put in kinder. But somehow, some way, through the tutoring we got there. Then I ended up excelling, even to where I was competing for first place academically with folks who had been there since day one.

I think that experience and knowing what it was to have very limited resources in a place—chalkboards still, very old wooden desks where it was two students per desk. Each one had their space in front. Very, very different teaching styles from there; over there way more disciplinary heavy. If you miss something you could get physically punished for not complying or not doing something. Obviously I was never in that box, but I saw cousins who had to pay a hefty price for not having done their homework assignments correctly.

And so it was just different, but I got to learn a lot over there. For example, you did a lot of folklore dancing for different things, for example, revolutions. The Mexican Revolution is celebrated on November 20th, so we always had some patriotic days that we would put whether it was skits or dances or poetry readings; experiences that I didn't have culturally here growing up. We had the assemblies, but I just feel like over there all eyes were on you. You were center of stage when you were performing because everybody else was sitting, parents and other classrooms were all around the main stage. Here, yes, we performed for grade levels, but rarely was it the whole school, eyes on you kind of environment. I learned a lot about the Mexican history and that part of my heritage that I hadn't really had the opportunity to be exposed to.

Fast forward. When I'm going to enter seventh grade, my oldest sister had finished the equivalent of what would be ninth grade here. But for her to go to the next level, she would have to go further out, to the town. For my oldest sister from day one when we got there, she had to go to middle school, *la secundaria*, but it was a forty- to forty-five-minute bus ride she had to take

every morning. She would have to get up about 5:30 in the morning and catch the bus about 6:30. And then the same thing; she would arrive and have her uniform. All of that obviously costs, right? There's nothing free; you have to pay for your uniforms; you have to pay for your school supplies; you have to pay for your bus ride; you have to pay for your lunches if you don't take them already prepaid. My dad started putting two and two together after three years, so I was there fourth grade, fifth grade, sixth grade, and when my sister was about to go to the next level of her educational career, she was going to have to go further out. It was going to take closer to an hour to get to school.

My dad started thinking about the dynamics. He would live with us about six months and then he would come back to keep his job. He was able to go on leaves at that time.

He would come back to Vegas.

He would come back to Vegas. Basically we were in a matriarch-led household where my mom would be like, okay, I need you to do this and I need you to do this. I was like the runner and I would go tell people things for my mom, or I would go buy the things at the store. I became the errand runner. My oldest sister would maybe be left behind with the younger children because she already in her fourteenth, fifteenth year. We were all delegated different responsibilities.

It came to a point where my dad was like, this isn't family living, being separated. Like many families that don't have a choice to be together, it just doesn't make any sense anymore. He decided that for my sister to transition to her high school years that we would come back to Vegas. July of 1990 we came back.

All of my English had been stored away in my brain. I had completely gone into Spanish mode. Then I came back and I remember when my dad had to get us enrolled in school, he took us to the ESL department. I think it was called ESL still, back then. Now it's English Language

Learners. But they were able to test me. I read things; I answered them in English with what I had learned up to third grade. They're like, "You're not ELL." I was like, "What do you mean? I can't even speak it." And they're like, "Sorry, but you don't qualify for ELL. You know enough to be in mainstream." I was like, okay.

I could understand everything people were verbally telling me, but I couldn't articulate anything back to the person. It would come out all out of place and jumbled, and it would take me a minute. I was still doing the code switching. But then once I started seventh grade, just after a couple of months, it's almost like the file opened again in my brain, and it just came and it flowed. It was a very interesting experience to be in both places, like not knowing the Spanish like I needed to when I got there, then being strictly Spanish speaking, and then coming back to an environment that you needed to go back to the other language, and then you're brain having to go through it, but I got there. It just gave me more empathy for folks that were starting their very first educational day in English when their language was another. Just me having gone through that I think I...

I remember my first day in seventh grade I met a good friend that we still keep in contact to today, Alma. She was a deer in headlights. The campuses are huge here compared to the tiny, little town schools that we have where the school that I went to in Presidios, there is only one teacher per grade level, so you're talking about one kinder through sixth grade, and that's it. There's just one classroom per grade. Here, once you get to middle school, it's like crazy town because you have different teachers and different classes. You have English and you have math and you have science and you have computers. You have to learn how to navigate a schedule and you have to learn about lockers. There is a cafeteria, elements that don't exist in some towns that are very rural.

I remember seeing her and she looked like she didn't know what to do, where to go. I started speaking to her in Spanish. She's like, "Oh." I'm like, "I can help you out." I remembered that I tried to help facilitate her navigation of that day, or the first few weeks. Then she ended up moving schools because she wasn't zoned for that one, but I felt like at least I had helped her out at navigating because I knew how it was to be new in a completely different environment that you're not even aware of or know. That was very interesting.

Then to your question, when I was in my parents' hometown, I saw that most of the women were getting married very young. They were seventeen, eighteen, nineteen. Then right away they started families. Also, back in those late '80s in that very rural town, you didn't see women playing a huge leadership role or being incentivized to be first in different areas or do more. I had maybe one female teacher my whole time there; most of them were male. I just feel like having that experience and when I came back, I was like, I can't miss the beat or I can't miss this opportunity this country gives us. Free public education. Look at just the way the schools are, the size, the quality of classes you get. I don't know. I just felt like I had access to such much more here and that the future was whatever I wanted to make of it and I didn't have to be constrained to this very narrow stereotype that I had seen play out for me in my short, little two and a half years in Presidios. I think that made the difference. I said, I have it and I'm going to make the most of this and I'm going to see where we go. I just never let go of this newfound opportunity.

What was your engagement like in high school, then?

I was a nerd. I was totally a nerd just because I think my mind functions at that level. I mean, if you really think about it, I just had honors and AP classes in high school. I was just very dedicated and driven. One thing that I did do in high school that I didn't have the opportunity

growing up, was I experimented with sports. I think a lot of our at-risk youth don't have that opportunity that sometimes we think, oh, all kids play something when they're young, or, all kids are exposed to these extracurricular activities. But sometimes when you're growing up in a big family household that's barely getting by with what one income makes, you're not privileged to these extra activities because they cost money and money means I either give it to you and then I don't give it to the other one, but then the other one is going to need shoes and the other one is going to need this. You have to make do with what you have.

I know that in high school when I came back and middle school when I came back in seventh, there really weren't opportunities to engage in sports. But I know that once I hit ninth grade and they said, we offer track; we offer volleyball; we offer soccer; you can do basketball, I was like, whoa, I can play sports? And I was really bad at it, obviously, because I had never really trained from a young age. I still put myself on there because I wanted to say I tried it; I did it.

My dad would say, "But you can break a leg or this could happen." He would always tell me all the bad things that could happen to me by playing and training. I was like, "Dad, just sign, just sign off that I did the physical and that I can play. And if I break the leg; that's on me. You don't need to worry about it. I'm not going to blame you. I really want to do this." I think in my family I always was the one that pushed the envelope. My sister, if my dad said no, she would just kind of be like, okay. But I never took no as an answer from my dad. I'm like, I want to do Honors Society; I want to do this club; I want to do this sport. I would just push and pursue. I'm like, "This is good for my resume, Dad. I'm trying to build this information so that when I go to college, people are like, oh, okay, she tried different things. I had to educate my own parents on how I needed to break through.

But they were encouraging you to go to college? You didn't have to convince them that that was a good path?

In a way. My dad sometimes would say, "Well, why do you want to go to college? With your high school diploma, you have access to way better career choices than I. You can be someone's assistant, someone's secretary; you'll have a desk job."

For me it wasn't about just getting a desk job. For me it was about, what can I do that I will, one, help the greater good out there, but, two, feel like I'm better or I've contributed? I don't know. I think I was always very motivated by people whose stories were very motivational, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. even though his life was cut short, how he used his talent to lead a movement of people. He wouldn't just take the injustice. He just wanted to try to educate and create awareness. I just knew that whether it be science related or something else that somehow, some way I could help with breaking through or starting a movement or, I don't know, getting the Nobel Prize for something. I don't know. I just knew that I just didn't want to be status quo. I just didn't want to graduate from high school and work in a casino; that was just not something that was going to satisfy me.

I just think that's why I just kept swimming, upstream, having to convince people, even myself. I think a lot of times it's making sure that you reaffirm that you have it and you can do it. Do I know how to get there? Do I know the Holy Grail? I don't always have the roadmap. But as long as I know that I want to, that's all you need is the will of wanting to do it. Everything else, you'll figure it out.

I remember graduating from high school. My friend Alma and I graduated from the same high school, so we were reunited back in high school. We started to then help each other out with this transition to college, like, what do you mean? She had more mentors from the SOL, the

Student Organization of Latinos, she had some connections to them here at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas level. Then I kind of would lean in on her. Oh okay, I have to go see my counselor and then they have to tell me, what do you mean declare a major? What do you mean course catalog? What do you mean classes I have to take? All of this is new. No one in my circles had been through it. We had to rely on seconds and thirds to give us this information. We came to the freshman orientation, which helped, but it's still a lot to be internalizing and understanding.

I remember we used to do it by phone; we had to punch in a code on a phone here at the TAM Center you would have to—

So you enrolled here.

I enrolled at UNLV. I did have some summer learning experiences. I remember that they would say, “The sky’s the limit. Apply everywhere.” But the reality is each application costs money if you didn’t know how to pursue money for those college applications or you didn’t know that system. There were just a lot of things that if I knew what I knew now, when I was sixteen or seventeen, then I would have better prepared, but things kind of came upon me and I lost track of time. Before I knew it I was already a senior on my way out from high school even though I went to Upward Bound, I went one summer to UCLA, another summer to UCSD, but I think they really helped in sealing that I’m going to college; there’s no way that I’m not going to college. I was able to intern in different places and just kind of get a feel for dorm life.

I would have personally liked to have that independent experience of, okay, I’m out from high school, now I want to go live on my own, but, in a way, my parents made me feel guilty about leaving. They’re like, “What do you mean you’re going to leave us?” I did, I guess; I compromised and I just really wanted to go to UNR, and they felt like it was eons away; it was

too far. What was I going to do by myself in snow? And so I was just like, okay, I'll start at UNLV. Teachers would say, "Well, you can always start in one place and transfer." But then sometimes life has other plans for you. You think you're going to transfer, and then other things happen, which have been really awesome and cool, so I can't complain about what has transpired.

But I do remember being a freshman here and then very—was that my first year? I think I was in my first year of college, and this friend Alma, she's like, "You should try to go for this pageant." And I'm like, "What do you mean?" She's like, "Yes. There's this Miss Hispanic of Las Vegas, and I just think you should be part of it." I was like, "Well, why?" It just didn't stand, the values of a pageant, with my values. Here I am talking about being a strong woman; why go into a pageant? She's like, "You got the brains, you got the beauty, you've got everything; you've got the whole package. You should do it. There's scholarship money." She still didn't convince me. I was like, I just don't see myself doing a pageant.

She called in as me and said, "Hi, I'm Olivia. I'm interested in participating in your pageant. Here's my phone number. Give me a call back." She left a message. Then the next thing I get is a call at my house phone, because back then we didn't have mobile devices like they're so widely used today and they called my parents' house line. They're like, "It's for you." Then I get on the phone. They're like, "Oh, so you're interested in the pageant, so you just need to fill out..." At that point I'm just like, I guess I'm not going to fight it. Like everything, let me just see what this is all about; let see what the experience is like. I just threw myself into it.

I ended up participating in the '96 Miss Hispanic Las Vegas Pageant, and I ended up winning the pageant. That was like, whoa, this is interesting, okay.

What did you have to do? What were the parts of that pageant?

They did some little choreography numbers to Ricky Martin. I remember Ricky being really big back then. “Ole Ole Ole; Maria.” We did a lot of little numbers. We did swimsuit. We did evening gown. We did question, impromptu question.

It was a beauty pageant in the true sense.

Yes. We had an interview with the judges.

Where was it held?

It was at Nicholas Horn Theatre, so CSN campus in North Las Vegas. Anyway, that was very, very different, but I was like, okay, let me just try this. I ended up squeaking out first place, which I thought I wasn’t going to get because I just felt like I never mastered the walk, the beauty queen walk. I don’t know. Maybe my brains gave me a little edge there and I think my interactions with the judges, with the question on the stage, I think the question on the stage, really. I didn’t rush into my answer. “Can you repeat the question one more time?” I was gathering my thoughts. You had to answer it in Spanish. I was able to speak my Spanish eloquently enough. I think at the end my brains gave me that edge over the beauty part. That opened another chapter in my life.

Before you go to that chapter, what was the scholarship money, do you remember?

It was five hundred dollars and it was to apply to whatever institution of higher learning I was going to. They also offered me a trip .Initially they said Cancun, but it ended up getting morphed into a trip to Mexico City, which I ended up loving that trip because Mexico City is amazing, amazing, the museums and the history and so much that you can take in. You can’t go enough times to really know the essence of indigenous roots, the *machicas*, and everything, the Aztecs, the cathedrals being on top of the ancient civilizations. It was very, very cool, but, at the same time, then I knew what a big city was like and how you had to really be aware of your

surroundings and everybody around you. Here I am from a very small town, and then a very small town in Vegas because we weren't really that big back then, and here I am going to this huge city that you could be eaten alive in. Everybody's like, "Put that camera away. They were looking at you. You better check." There's this whole other etiquette you have to learn. It's basically survival of the fittest. When you're not used to it, it's very hard to watch your back when you're not used to watching your back.

Your next chapter, do you have time to start that?

I don't know. Like, ten minutes. I don't know if you have a question.

What was the pageant through? Was that through an organization?

Miss Hispanic de Las Vegas was one of the very first beauty pageants that focused on Latinas. I remember that it was through Sola Escobedo who did it, and Sola was the daughter-in-law of Eddie Escobedo, Sr. Eddie Escobedo had the newspaper that was founded here in 1980. Through the backing of his newspaper was the call out to create this pageant. I think the pageant started in '92. It was (Adriana Morella), the first queen. She used to be on the news, Univision News. She used to be the anchor for the news. The second winner of that pageant was Veronica Perez, who is now a very prominent attorney who has her own lobbying firm in California. She went to Columbia Law School. Then the next beauty winner of that pageant was Juanita Campos, and I know that she ended up being a paralegal or working somewhere in a law firm. Then it was me; I was the fourth queen. Yes, '92 I think was the very first pageant they had. After me they still had several iterations of it. I think even Mariana Kihuen was a Miss Hispanic. I can't remember what year. A lot of trailblazing women who did their own in their different spaces, and I think we all did it with the motivation of, hey, if it gives us scholarship money.

I think that one big take away from that experience is that it helped me just get better with my public speaking and public engagement skills. I remember while I was queen I would be asked, oh, go help and give the soccer team's trophies. Okay, here we were. "Here, congratulations, here's your trophy."

My dad was very jealous through this whole thing because he knew; you're young and you're around all these men. *It's not cool with me.* But, at the same time, I would Dad, "It's fine." I usually went with someone from the pageant whether it was Sola or her husband or someone from the newspaper. I kind of had a chaperone, or even one of my sisters would come with me. It's not like I would just go by myself. I feel like I wasn't really putting myself in a vulnerable position. But I will say that men do see an eighteen-, nineteen-year-old as a very gullible, very easy target. I remember some people intervened and stopped some people and said, "No, you're not talking to her anymore; she's gone." I was like, okay. I understood, then, my dad's protectiveness and my mom's protectiveness. They're like, "We don't know who's out there and what they want to do." I always reassured them, "I am going to participate in this for a good reason, not for something you wouldn't be proud of me."

It would be more presenting. Then I got into emceeing. People would ask me, can you emcee our event? Can you come and contribute this? I really enjoyed that part of my life because I got into some really cool events. I remember listening to Bill Clinton at one event that I wouldn't have had access to had I just been Olivia Diaz, but I was this pageant queen. I was joining the media and I was able to get into these places. You saw different personalities or Spanish celebrities. I remember a few of them: *Los Temerarios*, *Laura León "La Tesorito"*. There were these Spanish stars or figures. But I was never star struck. I was just like, oh, nice to meet you, and move on. It was kind of cool to know you're just another person. You have a

talent and you make a lot of money, but you're just another person. I remember I never got so enamored with the celeb status.

I remember I was more about the cause and being there. I remember during my term as a queen, I remember there was either tsunami or earthquake, something—a hurricane in Acapulco, and it was just very devastating to the *guerrerenenses* and then people started to get things donated to then take down there to the families that were going to go without. I remember I was sorting through the clothes and making sure things were fine because we didn't want to take just blah, we wanted to take something that was going to be helpful to the people. There were many times when there were those kinds of projects and calls to action.

Another one was emphasizing why people should vote, and I remember in those times in '97, '96, Latinos were still saying, we need to be engaged; we need to make our voices heard; we need to make sure we cast our ballots and we vote; we're not part of the process if we're not helping pick our leaders. But a lot of people get disenfranchised from Latino communities because we come from countries where there's high corruption and we're like, eh, it doesn't matter; they're going to elect the person; right, like my vote really matters? It was also getting into that space. I remember meeting Oscar de la Hoya, and he was part of that voter education campaign. Hey, Latinos, we've got to be champs and let's step up and vote. Julio Cesar Chavez was another huge boxing celeb at the time. We would try to get all these folks out there stomping and saying, as Latinos we need to vote. I remember that was one of the things that I also got to enjoy and say, yes, we need to do our part to make a change, and if we want to make a positive one, it's got to start there.

We'll talk about this more later as well, but I want to make sure we touch on it now. Now as a councilwoman, how do you continue to push the vote now that you're in this position?

It's harder. It's harder as an elected because I feel that people feel I'm no longer Olivia Diaz that was an activist as a young woman; that somehow it's about me and it's about how it's going to benefit me, and it really isn't. It's like, you know what? If you don't want me in office, I don't have to stay in office. That's why elections have consequences. That's why if people aren't happy with the job I do, we choose another person to succeed me and that's fine by me, really it is. But people feel sometimes when you're an elected that you always have an agenda and it's always about you. Now it's harder to get that message to resonate I think in a more genuine way. I really want people to know that whether I have a position or I don't have a position, I truly do want them to do their part and to speak their minds and to go to the ballot box regardless of who they like, who resonates with them that they do turn out.

We're seeing, especially in the immigrant communities, a lot of harmful policies that have been adopted, things that are impacting our migrant communities in such a negative way, and the only way to rectify it is if we do our part and we correct the course and we choose leaders that are not going to put our communities in jeopardy; that are not going to give our communities these inhumane treatments. I feel that this country has been settled by waves of immigrants. Yes, initially it wasn't folks who looked Latino or Latina, but there has been various iterations of waves of immigrants. We had waves of Irish immigrants and Italian immigrants and Polish immigrants. Even Danish immigrants, English immigrants.

There's been a point in time where everyone has had a struggling economy in their country and that struggling economy and overpopulation has put people on a voyage and a trajectory to seek a better life for themselves and their families, and who wants to leave their home and make these treks when they don't know what's lying ahead? It's only out of desperation, out of necessity that you really do make that jump and you say, you know what? It

doesn't matter if I die on my way, but I'm going to die trying because right here in this spot...Look at what's happening to Syria right now. Look at what's happening to the Lebanese. There are so many people who are hurting, so many kids who don't have a quality life ahead of them. For us to kind of be unrealistic and say, well, you were born there, so now you've got to stay there, that's not what humankind has been all about even from our basic humble beginnings. It's always been about how do we adapt, how do we survive, and what's the best conditions where we can be?

I just hope that folks can really know that there are leaders who step up and run for office because they want to see good change, they want to see good policy, but sometimes there's not enough idealistic folks, because not everybody is that kind of elected, too. I understand there's many different elect-eds. There's elect-eds who get into it because it is about them, because they are ambitious, because they do want that position. Kudos to them because you do have to have the wherewithal and you've got to stick to it and you've got to have the ability to navigate so many things. I would say don't judge everybody; don't paint everybody with the same stroke because everybody is different depending on where you come from and who you eventually become.

[End of session one]

Session 2

Good afternoon. Today is September 14th, 2020. My name is Nathalie Martinez. We are here at the Lied Library in the Reading Room. Today with me are...

Barbara Tabach.

And...

Olivia Diaz.

Picking up where we left off last time, you were nineteen, here in college. What were your first impressions of your first semester here at UNLV?

I think it was the first time I really felt a sense of independence in having to take ownership of figuring out what I wanted to study. I started here at UNLV majoring in biology because I thought I wanted to be premed. But that changed really fast after my first year because my first year I took chemistry and I took bio, and I was like, I don't know if premed is in the stars for me. After that first year I decided to go undeclared. The independence came in being able to select what you wanted to potentially study, and then also being able to make your own schedule; that was completely foreign to me. I had never had that level of independence. Obviously living with my parents, it was very much living under their set of rules. Then going to high school, everything is pretty much preselected or they put you on a path. But aside from electives that you got to have somewhat of a say, I really felt like college was the first time I was really feeling more of an independent thinker and I got to make a little bit more of the decisions for myself.

It was kind of cool to be the first one in my family, first-generation college student, to make it to a university. There was a lot of just things I didn't know and that I had to find folks to mentor me to facilitate information and hold me by the hand to get up to speed with some

processes that maybe for other family's members that had been through the college system knew exactly what to expect. For me everything was learn as you go.

What did you decide to take after biology?

After I didn't feel like biology and chemistry were going to be a forte—now being on this side and being much wiser and older, I just really think that had I had someone to just tell me to persevere and give myself another opportunity, it might have been for me. I think it's mind over matter and your mindset has all to do with you mastering the course. Initially I took that chem course, didn't do very well in it, but then we had to take it my second go I even aced it. I was like, oh okay. Anyway, I think maybe I was overwhelmed with the transition from high school to college and making taking too many sciences with labs and math all at once was pretty difficult in learning, also working part-time. But I like the life I've gotten to enjoy up to this point.

After I took that bow out of biology, I went to undeclared. I wanted to get a feel for what would kind of match my strengths as a student. I ended up declaring English liberal arts major with a minor in philosophy and I think communications. Although I might have not completed the philosophy part, I think I did get the minor in communications. As I was going through the halls here at UNLV or walking, they would say, "So what are you majoring in?" I would say, "English." And they're like, "You're going to be a teacher." I was like, "Maybe. I don't know. But why? Why a teacher?" Liberal arts, I don't have to just focus on that. But maybe they knew what was in my stars later.

Also, when I was at college here, I got to participate in the AmeriCorps program that's still going strong. I was placed in at-risk inner city schools. I did some of my service at Will Beckley Elementary. The teachers there were just like, "Olivia, you just are gifted. You have the knack for communicating with the students. We see that you would be a great teacher." All of a

sudden, everybody that would talk to me once they knew my major was English or when I was in the volunteer space, they would say teaching was good. Anybody knew more than me at that point, but at that point I thought, no, I don't think I'm going to teach. But that changed.

I ended up graduating from here in 2000. That was the same year I also got married; that same summer. I got my degree during the summer and I got married during the summer. Then I ended up starting my very first job. Obviously everybody who told me I was going to teach knew that the job market didn't have positions spelled out with people who majored with English degrees. I went to work at Bank of America at a call center out in Summerlin, and that was my first job right out of college. Obviously being married, having two step-kids that I was sharing responsibility for, I just needed to get into the workforce to help support the household, get us health insurance; that basic survival stuff that you learn once you embark on your own. I did the call center for about a year and a half.

At that point the Clark County School District put out a massive call to seek bilingual teachers because we had received an influx of immigration especially from Mexico and Central America in the '90s, and we're talking about 2000. They're like, oh, we need bilingual teachers. At that point the school district did have a bilingual education model and I think they wanted to make sure that they had the teaching staff to make that happen. A friend, Alma, the one that put me in the pageant, actually said, "Olivia, did you hear about this call that they're putting out? They'll take anybody who has any kind of a degree. I think it would be awesome for you to pursue this." I thought about it and I was like, it would be a very awesome opportunity to be a bridge between the community and the students. Having grown up in a Mexico household, I could relate to my students from that and then I could relate to the parents and their expectations,

too, and use the language to make sure that the youth that was coming behind us didn't give up on their educational opportunity that I know had been super positive in my life.

I decided to pursue this alternative route to licensure program. I applied for it. I got into it. It was over a 120 hours that we had to put in volunteer. They put us through a rigorous course to see if we would like this. They just didn't take you and put you in a classroom. You had to survive all these different phases. A lot of it was, 120 hours of coursework, what is lesson planning? Just the basics. What is classroom management? What do you need to do to be successful in a teaching field? We did that. We were still working. Nothing was guaranteed.

I went through all the phases of the program. One of the last ones, after getting all the coursework under your belt and actually being offered the opportunity to teach, was to pass basically an interview with principals from different schools. They would ask you—mine was seven principals strong, because they were all vying for these candidates because they all want bilingual teachers at their schools, and so you have seven principals asking you questions, vetting you, scoring you, and seeing what you could potentially bring to their schools.

I remember that I got to selected to teach by the principal then Maria Chavez, who was the principal at Ward Elementary School, and at that point Ward Elementary, which sits right here on Tropicana and Hacienda, was only a primary school. They only saw students K through two. I was hired as a second-grade teacher my very first year to offer bilingual instruction. My kids that I got were going to get, let's say, 40 percent of their day in English, 60 percent of their day in Spanish, or vice versa; 60 percent in English, 40 percent Spanish. We were trying to wean them off and get them to greater proficiency in language. A few years after I started teaching that program kind of went away because No Child Left Behind was passed. With the urgency of testing and measuring proficiency in English, mastering that other language or teaching that

other language kind of went out of the window, and so that program was unfortunately discontinued in terms of offering bilingual.

I was fortunate enough to teach at Gene Ward E.S. under Principal Chavez's amazing leadership, but then I was the lowest woman on that totem pole at that school because I had been the very last hire, first one to probably have to go if projections weren't met. Every year, just like right now, three weeks into the school year, if you don't meet your projections, then they have to see how many positions have to be eliminated from the school. She was very honest with me. After my first school year, she was like, "We're excited. We love you. But I want to be honest. If our projections don't come through, you're going to have to be on the chopping block."

I decided, I don't want to get all my classroom done and put everything into it and then have to know at the very beginning of school year, one month in that I have to move schools, because then you don't even get to select your schools. It's involuntary surplus and you land where they need to place you. I decided I didn't want to be put in that predicament. I decided I was going to go out there and figure out if there was another job where I had other friends who went through the program with me that I could go that they could recommend a principal.

It ended up where I did follow some colleagues from that same program that we got into teaching. I ended up at C.C. Ronnow Elementary off of Washington and Pecos under the leadership of then Dr. Kaplan. I put a good, geez, many years in there. We're speaking of 2002-2003 was my first year teaching. Then that means 2003-2004 was my first year at C.C. Ronnow. Then I was able to serve as a second-grade teacher there as well.

Then a couple of years into my teaching there, I had the opportunity to become the English Language Learner facilitator, which was really cool. I was responsible for all of the testing of all the kids that came into the school whose parents marked on their home language

survey that they spoke another language in the home. I had to see how proficient they were in English and if they qualified for the English Language Learner status. With that came services to support the student in acquiring their second language, which was English. That was a whole other experience in just having to test, having to be responsible for the annual assessment of their language growth. There were over five hundred students at that school that fell under the English Language Learner category. Every year was a monumental task for me to figure out how we're going to test them and to get it completed in the time frame and not lose any of the test materials. It became a significant investment of my time.

Another thing that I really loved was that I got to also continue to offer more services to the parents, if they wanted English classes whether it be when the kids went into school at the top of the morning or after school. I found a way to work with my administrators to help support me in offering some adult English language classes. I really loved that experience. I really felt like I was giving back at that point and giving some much needed skills for parents. Some of those parents I still keep in contact through Facebook. They're like, oh, Mrs. Diaz. They never stop calling you Mrs. Diaz. It's really amazing to see my then kindergarten and first graders now all grown up in their twenties and thirties. You're like, whoa, time has really flown by.

Are we all better off if you can start that kind of education younger, so that they can keep both languages and not lose it? What's that fine line?

I would say that is probably accurate because studies will tell you that by the time you're twelve there are certain sounds that if you didn't develop the ear for them when you're younger, then it becomes increasingly harder for you to hear the difference in the pronunciation. For example, a lot of people that didn't hear English until they were in their late teens, early twenties, it's really hard to do the *W*, *wha*. They hear it like *ga*. Then you go *wood* and they go *good*. Then you go

wood and they go *good*. I think in terms of developing an ear, it's always better to hit it before that eleven or twelve years of age so that you can develop that ear. They say that first you've got to hear the sound so then you can replicate the sounds. I think also the younger you are, you're not thinking about stigma or I'm butchering it or I'm mispronouncing. You throw yourself into the fray without the fear of they're going to laugh at my accent or of the way I say it. I think when you have a mix of kids, kids are very resilient. Especially the models say that when you have a 50-50 composition, if you have 50 of your class really strong in Spanish and 50 percent really strong in English that's the best because then you have peer models. You're hearing it from kid to kid versus the adult. I would definitely advocate for younger, better, and that there is a missed opportunity when we don't have programming. For example, I think it would have been awesome had I gone into the school system and had the ability to study a bilingual model. Then I wouldn't have had that abrupt, oh my gosh, got to switch, got to go, got to learn. But in a way it helped me, but I know not everybody has necessarily that ability to do it that quickly and under that amount of pressure. Kids coming from home hearing Spanish, speaking Spanish, what a great way to build a student up, saying, wow, you know so much in Spanish and by the time you're done this first year, you're going to know two languages, not just one. Seeing it as a value added versus the attitude that sometimes can come off as, you don't know English yet. Research after research shows that the brain's connections are stronger when you know more than one language because your brain has to connect the vocabulary words somewhere, some place, and so your brain connections are stronger, too, when you know more than one. We know so many other countries study multilingual, and they're saying because their geography and because they're so much closer to other countries. But we have countries that are north and south of us that speak different languages, so we can push our kids. I think if we set the bar higher, we can

try to reach it that much faster. It was a little sad to see bilingual education go by the wayside. I think I was at C.C. Ronnow when that happened, at that point.

Staying with the language conversation a little bit, your own children, how do you approach language?

Easier said than done.

It's like the plumber who has a drippy faucet.

Yes. My mom and my dad, I give them all the credit in the world. They were very on us in terms of speaking Spanish in the home and when you go to school, it's English learning time. I tried with my own child. My stepsons were lucky in that they had their mom's grandparents who provided a lot of care for them, and so they only knew Spanish. They had to really stay on top of their Spanish skills in that sense with the daily interactions with their grandparents. By the time I was in the picture, I was bilingual, and so I would communicate in either language they wanted with me, so that was really good. But the oldest one is stronger in his Spanish language skills than our middle child.

Then my child came and I did Spanish from the time he was born up until he hit pre-K. What happens is when you put the child in the environment of pre-K and all they speak in the environment is English, all of a sudden they don't see the use or the value of their first language. That's what happened in my situation with my nine-year-old. I still talk to him in Spanish. A lot of our home interactions are in Spanish. He chooses to answer me in English. I always try to get thank-yous and this and that, at least basics, in Spanish, and he'll understand. He understands what we're trying to tell him, but he can't articulate it because his vocabulary hasn't kept up in terms of what he's learned in English versus what he knows in Spanish. That's what kind of happens is when they start to receive a formal education in one over another, it's kind of like

you're not training the muscles with the same challenge. I'm working out my right arm more than I am my left, so I'm really buff on my right hand, but this is really floundering and weak on my left. That's with my son.

I've been going back and forth. I wish there could be a way that we could continue to immerse and show our kids that there is value in knowing your native language; that you can speak to your *abuelitos* and your *abuelitas*; that you can honor that part of your culture because it's part of who you are, it's part of your heritage, it's part of even understanding. The essence of certain things in your culture is tied to language and what we call things. I'm not giving up. My son's nine.

I wouldn't give up on a nine-year-old. We hear that though in our interviews that sometimes people come back to mastering of Spanish at an older age.

Yes, yes. One night I was here at UNLV, I took a couple of classes, not that I needed to, but I just wanted to keep up that level of Spanish. I took a few with Professor Galindo, literature and I can't remember what the other ones were. I just wanted to try to keep my language ability up to speed and up to snuff. I'm lucky enough that my husband is very well educated in Spanish, and so anytime that I'm not sure if I'm using something correctly, I can use him as my grammar checker. Hey, can you vet this? Does this make sense? Then he'll use my English strength. We kind of balance each other in that sense. It's helpful for my son to hear us also still conversing a lot in Spanish even though he is choosing right now—because right now it's a choice. I think it's unfortunately validated by pop culture. It's not embraced; it's not valued. Sometimes they make you feel like knowing another language is a hindrance or something that's not accepted. You're like, well, why? It's anybody's education and it only makes us better citizens when we can communicate with others in other languages.

When we start talking about your political career, let's come back to language and the role that that plays, too.

When you were in charge of the program, you constructed the exams that they had to take as well?

Those were provided. Those come from McGraw Hill or all these companies. LAS Links was the company that provided not just for our state, but for others, so it's standardized tests. It's a kind of standardized test that kids were given to measure where they're coming in as a baseline, and then the different grades at kinder, at first, at second, they establish minimums of proficiency.

If you had identified different themes or benchmarks that you were looking for, was it pronunciation in regard to English and Spanish?

What was required for us to test was, were they able to speak it? Were they able to listen and follow directions? Then to what degree they could do both of those. Also, could they write it and could they read it? Those were the four areas that most of the assessments vetted to establish the baseline.

When I took over that role, another thing that I started doing especially with my newcomer kids that had just crossed the border from Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico, I started to really gage their proficiency level in their first language because it could tell me if they had received a formal education wherever they came from, and that was going to be very telling with what speed they could accelerate their acquisition of English. If you have a pretty good educational base from your first language, it's going to go that much quicker. But when maybe you were limited because where your family lived was war-ridden and they kept you home because they didn't want to expose you to any unnecessary dangers, there's going to be a lot of gaps. We first had to fill in even in your first language. You didn't even maybe learn how to read

with fluency; you didn't get exposed to many vocabulary words; you don't even have the math skills to connect it from one language to another. That's at a greater disadvantage to the child. But I could see that the more they were right there in their primary language, those kids took off with it. It was just a matter of connecting the dots for them and saying, oh, this is what it is, *boom, boom, boom*, although English is a little bit more complicated. My gosh, you have to teach them *ea* says this, but then here it says this, but then here you pronounce it this way, and these two sound the same, but they mean completely different words or different things, homophones. But kids are resilient and they pick it up at sometimes mind-blowing speed when they really are motivated.

There's children that aren't really happy that they're here. Maybe their environment isn't optimal. They miss their home. Maybe they don't feel as connected to this community, and so that also plays a factor into their wanting to learn English, too. I received many SOSs from the parents, like, oh, my child is doing this at home. A lot of parents would come to me and complain. "He doesn't want to speak Spanish anymore in the home." When I had parent-teacher conferences, I would speak to the parents in Spanish and I would say, "You want to keep your Spanish. This is an amazing skillset for you when you grow up. Look, I'm here talking to your parents in Spanish and I can explain them everything. You don't want to give up that skill. You're going to be worth so much more money. They're going to pay you so much more if you know Spanish. Two languages are better than one." I try to at least take advantage, when the parents brought it up, to validate the parents' point of view, and being the teacher I hopefully gave them that okay. But they were second-graders, third-graders. Who knows if they carried that with them? I tried to make a difference where I could when my opinion was asked.

I had been teaching about five years and then we had the recession. The first thing that obviously gets impacted when we go into a recession are budgets, and at the state the first thing to have to adjust is the education budget because it's the biggest part of the budget in the state and our resources are finite. You only collect so much sales tax and so much property tax and so much gaming revenue. We started to feel the cuts come home pretty hard. By 2009 I was asking the then two Latino elected representatives what are they doing to help us because we were kind of dying on the vine in the trenches teaching.

Who would that have been?

That was Senator Moe Denis, who was the very first Latino elected in Clark County in terms of the legislature, and then it was Ruben Kihuen who was the second one. I remember running into them at Hispanics In Politics events or whatever the community event at that time. I would ask them, what are you doing for education? What are you doing for education?

Then it came back full circle. "They came and said this assembly seat is going to open and we think you'd be an amazing representative. Do you want to do it?" I talked to my husband. I talked to my step-kids. I didn't have my son at that point. I talked to my family. Getting involved in politics is affecting everybody who is close to you because you're the candidate and things are going to be said good or bad about you, and so your family needs to be prepared for this shift and to know that we're trying to make a positive difference. Will everything be positive on the campaign trail? Not necessarily. But everybody was onboard. Everybody was excited. A lot of people were like, "You really want to get into politics?" I'm like, "I think we can make a difference here."

I went into it really wanting to focus on education because for me education is the greatest equalizer of all times, and the more you afford people a stellar, awesome opportunity at

a great education, the more you're going to help them help themselves and their families.

They're just going to be amazing citizens. I took a dive into my very first run for a political seat in 2009.

That seat was what?

Or 2010. At the end of 2009 I decided to run for Assembly District 11. At that point then Assemblyman Ruben Kihuen was moving to run for a state senate seat that Bob Coffin was leaving vacant due to term limits. Term limits have come to play a role, for good or bad. A lot of people hate term limits. They say term limits hamper the ability for a solid individual to stay in a position as many times as they need to to represent their community. But in the case of all of us who came to the political scene, I think it has done its part in helping diversify the representation. If people hadn't termed, they still might be seating in those seats, and younger folks, more diverse folks might have never had an opportunity to represent the community. It's a mixed bag, but I think at the end of the day when I ran in 2010 for that assembly seat, we had yet to see a Latina make it to the Nevada State Legislature.

So you were the first?

I was one of four. That 2010 cycle Irene Bustamante Adams ran, Lucy Flores ran, I ran and so did Teresa Benitez-Thompson up north, so all four of us were in the mix of candidates trying to secure their first seat there. The Hispanic caucus that year grew from two representatives to eight. In 2010 it was a very significant electoral cycle; for Latino representation in the state, we grew four times.

Being aware of that what did that feel like?

It was amazing. We're like, wow, we're on top of the world. It's your first time getting elected, so you really come with a lot of—you're optimistic and you're saying, wow, we can bring a

different perspective, a different view to the table, and a level of advocacy that hadn't been there. What I learned really quickly after being elected is state law making is sometimes done in the hub of a silo called the legislature. I had never really had a close experience with the state legislature until I became elected. At that point I was already thirty and I really hadn't been part of making a law, advocating for a law, bringing up, hey, we need a change because of this, at any level, not locally, not even at state, not even at federal. Just kind of seeing how the sausage got made was, I think, a very, very important lesson.

Not to mention that through the campaign trail in 2010 I ended up becoming pregnant with my son, who is nine. On top of being one of the first four Latinas elected, I also became one of the first legislators to give birth during session, live birth during session. There had been other representatives that brought their babies with them that were only months old. That was a whole other thing that I had to be flexible and plan around is delivering my son in Carson City. I headed up in January and I was about eight months. Then he came in February, three months into my very first legislative session.

Did you get any backlash on that or any sexist comments?

Actually people were like, okay, so...I did get a few comments from some male legislative colleagues, like, you couldn't have planned this better? For me, I was like, it's not like I'm eighteen getting pregnant. I had already been married a good solid ten years with my husband. It was at a point where my stepsons were becoming independent. They were going to college all on their own. It happened. I think sometimes life happens and you just run with it and you go with it. I was not going to feel like it was awful that I was pregnant. I think it's part of embracing that you're a woman and we have very many hats that we have to wear and one of them is motherhood eventually. If you are happily married and you want to form a family, but you also

want the career, why do we have to pick one over the other? We should be able to be moms just like politicians have been able to be dads forever. The difference is they don't give birth. They're the ones having to be in the room, maybe, when it's happening, but they don't carry the baby, so gender roles are different. I remember some male colleagues were like, "Couldn't you have planned it better?"

But I remember women being very supportive, saying, "Other women have gone up there with their babies, too. You'll be fine. We have technology now. You can stream. You're not going to miss a beat." I was like, okay. I felt very supported by a lot of women, including the ones that when I got my first rounds of training up in Carson City, they're like, "Do you have an OBG up here already?" I had to start thinking about who's going to catch my baby when my baby was going to come because my doctor was down here and I obviously wasn't going to fly down to deliver. They even were instrumental in helping me line up, because a lot of doctors are like, if I didn't see you your whole pregnancy, I don't want to deliver. But everything was super falling in line. I had amazing women who just said, "You can do this," and I did it.

Being a freshman legislator, you don't have as many roles or responsibilities as a more senior one just because you haven't been there; you don't know the process. Maybe term limits will change that eventually if the door is revolving so quickly that you don't have established leadership that then the freshman is going to have to take a leadership role. But usually those who have been around a few cycles are the ones that are helping the newer ones come.

My son's middle name is Carson, Xavier Carson Alejandre. We wanted to just memorialize in his name that he was part of that effort of campaigning and getting there and advocating for the people here in our assembly district.

What was that like campaigning? What was your platform, or how did you build that whole campaign?

I know that I had the support of the Assembly Democratic Caucus, so it was helpful that I had that nod coming in because a lot of times they don't give you the backing and that makes it a little bit more complicated. It makes it harder to raise the money. It makes it harder to pay for the mail that you're sending. But I think one thing that I did try to be very thoughtful and intentional about was capturing that I was a teacher, that I was almost a lifelong resident of the assembly district that I wanted to represent, and also reaching out to them in the language of their preference.

When I went canvassing, a lot of it is making that one-to-one contact, going to knock the doors, introducing yourself to the voters, saying, hi, I'm Olivia, I'm running for assembly, and I really want to hear what you think is lacking in our community, or how we could be doing better. I really went more to listen than to sell myself. I think that's just been part of me that I try to listen more than talk myself. It wasn't about selling me. It was about more knowing what I needed to represent if I got elected to the job.

I really did try to communicate in the language if I was able to. Obviously, if the spoke Farsi or they spoke Tagalog or another language, but if it was Spanish, I would try to talk to people and I'd try to make a note that that person preferred to speak in Spanish versus English so they could be put on the right mailing list. All of my lit pieces that I mailed would go to a Spanish universe or an English universe because a lot of people have mixed feelings about receiving things translated, and it kind of gets lost, too. You have to distinguish what language you're focusing on. I just really tried to target the audiences and give them the information in a way that was easy for them to follow. Just telling them that I would work hard; that I was a

teacher; and that I really wanted to help with the economy, help with education, and help with healthcare, which I don't think has changed too much. I think those would be strong selling points right now as any candidate for any role.

You won your first election.

I did.

Were you prepared to lose?

I don't think so. I don't like to. It was a three-way female primary. Doug Bouchet represented that assembly district before Ruben Kihuen did. No, I take that back. I think it was a gentleman by the last name of McCleary, but maybe Bouchet represented it before him. His wife, she filed and thought the Bouchet name might have some...people might remember it or vote for her. Then there was another lady who also ran, so it was three women running for this assembly primary. I remember that I just kept knocking myself, just kept knocking on the doors. I circled the houses I don't know how many times. It got to a point where my husband is like, "We've been to this house three times, Olivia." I said, "I know, but they haven't voted. They told me yes, they'd support me, but until they vote it doesn't materialize." He's like, "Okay." We overworked and I think that hard work...I've always been about putting in the work, and if I don't get it then I can't be disappointed because I did step up. You just have to sometimes accept the greater will of people. But, thankfully, we outworked the other two candidates.

It was easier in the general because that assembly district was highly Democratic in registration numbers. Once I secured that primary win, it was easier on me and I didn't have to be going to the door every day after three. Mind you, you're putting in that campaign time after your clock hours. I was still teaching, putting in my day teaching in the classroom, and then it was 3:30 and I had my campaign manager already waiting for me at the door. He just expected

me to dress down or get into something like khakis and a comfortable shirt. And off we went for another two to three, sometimes four hours. It depended on the sun setting and not getting to doors when it was dark and people felt unsafe. But it was that level of intensity; you're still working.

A primary goes through June, so if anything I may have had a couple of weeks where I didn't work, but most of the time I was working, finishing my shift, and then going to the doors. You put in a lot of blood, sweat and tears, and you don't have any weekends. I remember that first time we would canvass double shifts on Saturdays and sometimes half a shift on a Sunday, so it was all in. I'm like, I'm putting all my tips in; I'm making sure I cross all my I's and all my T's. But it's part of the formula for success. You have to be the one. You can send a team; you can send people to knock for you, but they don't really come off knowing who you are, what you represent. One thing is to get mail; one thing is to get another person. But when they actually see the candidate, it just adds that much more meaning to, oh, she came; she stopped by. Every time after I talked to somebody I'd try to send a nice note back hitting on things we had talked about. Those personal touches, those deposits so that they knew I would be accessible and I would be there.

You said you went in hoping to make change in education, in economy and healthcare.

What were you able to accomplish?

First two sessions were really hard because we were cutting. Being a freshman legislator I was in the midst of a new governor, Governor Sandoval. I got elected in 2010. He had made a pledge: No new taxes. Obviously, when you don't generate revenue, it's very hard for you to allocate more resources especially in the education arena. I went into cutting and cutting and cutting the first session for sure. The hemorrhaging stopped by '13. I think we were able to start adding a

little bit more. Our economy started to bounce back, but it still didn't have the amount of resources. We took the wins we could. Thirteen, I believe was the first year, when we were able to start Zoom schools, so we got some funding to target schools that were underperforming with high English Language Learner kids, high number, to get them the resources behind those schools so the kids could catch up because in my experience I knew that having limited amount of exposure to a language because in your house they only speak the other language was... When I grew up most of the TV channels and the radio channels and everything was mostly English. There was not this robust amount of media content in Spanish. Now you have radio stations, Spanish language. You have television stations, Spanish language. And so I knew that if the parents weren't mostly tuning into the Spanish, then where are the kids picking up the language? Mostly only in school.

We were trying to figure out more creative ways to give the kids a decent boost, and so we thought pre-K was of utmost importance here, as the state compulsory attendance isn't until first grade? In my latter years I tried to make kinder compulsory, like you must go to kindergarten; didn't achieve that, fell short. It was on my bucket list. I carried it and I tried. But we knew pre-K was a really, really important for English, like language acquisition and development. We made sure part of the funding went to Zoom schools, allowed kids to get access to pre-K.

We extended the school year because we said that if they go to school a little bit longer, they're going to have that exposure to language; it's going to help fill the gaps. We also put some money in for family engagement; engaging the families, making sure they understand the educational process, making sure that they know they're valued as a partner, making sure that we're talking to them and saying, what do you need from us to help your child at home? It's

super important when we're teaching the parents how to help provide that sight word practice, that reading practice. Even if you don't know the language, you can be reading to them in L-1. Read to them in their first language. It's just about the good school habits that kids need to know. The first set of expectations come from the home, and then the second ones are from the school, and then the kid knows that they don't have much room to run. Like, no, expectations are squared away; mom, teacher on lock load.

Is that where FACES came out from?

FACES came later, I think. But what we were trying to do with Zoom is making sure that schools knew that it was important to the legislature that families get engaged and that we provide as much to them in terms of information and trainings and engagement as possible. Am I missing another pillar of Zoom?

And I know that the school district took our overarching policy guidelines, and then they've started to create their programming and I know that they embedded software programs, like i-Ready and other learning tools. Waterford, I think, was another one where kids can hear the language via computer. That was the first big W for us, is making sure that kids where we saw their academic achievement, just the gap widening for them, to reach proficiency and saying, the red lights are on the dashboard and we need to make sure that we're doing our best to reach every kid, and the sooner the better, because we know from educational research that the stronger the foundation and the stronger the child from the very beginning, the more likely they're able to stay with us. But if those deficits keep growing, if they come in and don't master everything at kinder, first and second, then it becomes harder for them to catch up by the time they're in fourth, fifth and sixth. Everybody is like, read by three. A lot of people predict the

outcome of a child if they're reading on third-grade level; and if they're not, they're usually saying they're not going to make it. We wanted all of our kids to be college bound.

We were able to get a little bit of funding, at least towards that program. Then the following legislative session we were able to double the funding. Then Victory schools came to be. Victory schools also focused on at-risk children, but more in poverty, because we know that also our ability to develop language has to do a lot with our environment, and sometimes if we're in an impoverished environment, our parents are struggling with other needs and they might not have the time to foster that love of reading, that love of vocabulary, that love of the basic words you need to know when you're coming in. Just tried to give the schools the tools to help their kids succeed and, also, help with the frustration of a lot of teachers saying, we have kids coming in with so many diverse and great needs; and, yet, we don't have a ton of support for them. Those were two of the major ones, having had a role in Zoom and then crafting it behind the doors and helping provide that just real candid testimonials in committees and hearings.

Another big one that we were able to secure for the Latino community was the driver's privilege card. That was in—I can't remember if it was '13 or '15. They're all blending now. But under the leadership of Senator Denis and the Hispanic Caucus, we all tried to carry legislation that would allow undocumented folks to get a driver's privilege card because a lot of them take their kids to school on a daily basis, but they're always in fear because they're doing it without the appropriate ID or the appropriate stuff. that was a big win for the community, knowing that they could come out of the shadows and at least take their kids to and from or go to the grocery stores or secure the insurance for their vehicles and whatnot, so that was a big one, too, being just a few years in.

Then every time you're there a session you get a little bit wiser, you learn a little bit more about the state departments. I know a big one was always emphasizing the importance of making things accessible in Spanish, but still somehow we're still having to work that talking point a little bit more. You go on the website and you still don't see a lot of the information readily available in Spanish. You're just constantly have to reemphasize, reiterate, and hopefully these next set of talented Latino legislators will continue to carry the torch because you're there for your couple of sessions and then you have to pass the torch along to somebody else to carry it, and so we'll see.

Zoom is still there. We have seen some really amazing results from the principals that have really stuck to the pillars, really applied the Zoom tenets and principals, and they've seen increases, like at Faye Heron, at Ruben Diaz Elementary. They went from two-, three-star schools to four- to five-. That's where you're like, I made a difference.

Yes, absolutely.

Making laws and all of that. I saw a lot of colleagues that went up there wanting to gas things and get a lot of things done and accomplished fast, but sometimes it's about timing, it's about relationship building, it's about who can you get onboard with your concepts? And working across the aisle. I still talk to some Republican colleagues, and you would think, oh, I'm a Democrat and I'm Latina, and how can I get along with Republicans? But we're people and we just want what's best for people.

Anybody who is a citizen legislator has their heart in the right place because I think very few people really recognize that we don't make money going to be a legislator. I can tell you that every time that I went I ended up being more in the red than me coming out with anything because, one, we only get salary for the first half of session. Then the remaining session all we

get is per diem. I as a teacher would take a leave of absence and wouldn't get put back on the CCSD payroll until after we commenced the new school year. Obviously, you wrap up session in June, you're going a hundred and fifty miles an hour, high pressure, trying to get things done for that legislative cycle, the least thing that I had on my mind was let me line up an interim job. It was like, let me decompress; let me get back to normal; I don't want to be Godzilla when I go back to my family. But then also catching up with them because you've put them on hold for all those months during Carson City. Yes, would I come down here every weekend? Are you here? Because then if you get more responsibility as a chairperson of a committee, as you're a part of leadership team, there are other assignments that get fed to you and you have to be running that. At that level you have to be reading all of the things that are going to get vetted through the committee. You're kind of MIA from January through June of legislative years.

But is it rewarding? Yes. Can you represent your people and can you put a different perspective out there? Absolutely. I hope when I look back people are like, wow, she really was speaking from her experience and her side of things.

Tell us about that transition from assembly to council.

I eventually had to really think about, did I want to go back up to another legislative session? It would have been my fifth. We get termed at six because you can only serve twelve years in each house, so you can go assembly twelve years, senate twelve years. I was at that crossroads, do I want to continue down the path and be an assembly person? I was increasingly aware that my financial situation wasn't solvent enough. I had to face that hard reality of being constantly in a deficit when I come back from a session. I'm barely getting myself back to the surface when I'm ramping up for another one. I had to look at that hard fact of being a working class state legislator.

Then the opening of that door when Councilman Coffin announced that he was no longer going to be seeking reelection. As an incumbent you have a lot of advantage unless you're a very unpopular incumbent, but usually your name recognition and you helping different areas of your community buy you really good regards from that electorate. When he said he wasn't running again, I was like, that's the ward I'm in. I think this would be awesome. There's so much; I could get more to at a local level. It's more grassroots. You really get to engage more with the folks. You really get to hear.

As I campaigned through various cycles, I became increasingly aware that our folks aren't very sophisticated in knowing what levels of government do what. What does a state legislator do versus a council person do versus what does a federal congress and senator do? A lot of people think that—when I was an assembly member, they would promote me to congress person. I'm like, no, no, no, I'm not a congress person; I'm just in the state assembly. I make an impact on state laws, but I don't do anything on a federal level.

I became aware that it would be awesome to have more of a grassroots ability to make impact on the day-to-day kinds of things. Also knowing that a Latina hadn't made it to city council—the ward is sixty-plus percent Hispanic—I was like, we absolutely need somebody, so I decided I was going to shift gears, stop making the state sausage, but come and be more the rubbers on the road because that's what local government is about. It's not about setting broad parameters in which things got done, and that was a frustration of mine in my first win. Okay, we just set the parameters, but we don't actually take it to the ground and execute it. You have to pass the ball to you. I'm the quarterback. I pass it to you; you have to catch it and you've got to run with it and make it happen. That whole disconnect, having to let Nathalie run the ball instead of me, was sometimes like, uh that wasn't my vision; they didn't execute what I was thinking,

the way I saw it play out. I think that's another thing is here you have more of a direct say as to how you want it and get it lined up, or include other people's vision, too.

That's when I decided I was going to shift gears. I ended up resigning from my assembly seat. I had won it, but I resigned from it and ended up running for this council race, which had seven people in the primary. There were three Latinos in the primary, so I was the only female. We had only two female candidates. It was a very different race, let's just say that. I had never realized that running in an even year, at least you have your congress people on the ballot, you have other offices that are usually coming due. On the municipal race, you're the only thing, you and the mayor of your city and maybe municipal judges. I learned that people didn't really feel connected to their local electeds. I'm like, this is really interesting.

I had to work again. I was still teaching, running a Zoom reading center at Ruby Thomas E.S. I got out of my reading center, got into my canvassing gear, got into my 'gotta go do the work.' But this one you have to target a huge, wide audience. It was really, really different. Different campaigning. Had to be everywhere, seen. I think social media has evolved, too, to where it's playing an increasingly different role, with influencers, with what people believe and what people put out. It was a heavy lift.

Did you know or work with Bob Coffin [Ward 3] on anything in any capacity prior to running for his seat?

Not really. We would just run into each other at events that we received a mutual invitation to. But he never sought me out as a legislator when I was there to say, hey, Olivia, these are some of my constituents' concerns; how can we collaborate on making some tweaks or changes? And vice versa, I didn't really connect with him to say we could be accomplishing some common things here. It was a missed opportunity I think on both our ends, but I think sometimes you get

into your space. Now that I've had a year in this council seat, I could see how you're constantly go, go, go. But I have thought of, oh, I need to incorporate my state electeds a little bit more in these conversations, especially because, for example, in this capacity I have had the ability to speak on a more regular basis with my Metro Area Command, so the Las Vegas Police Department, and they've been obviously a heavy topic of discussion as of late, of policing. But you have to know that they're a partner in helping keep public safety, and so I have to talk to the captain, have an open line of communication. I want to still achieve a lot more. We need to strengthen relationships between the law enforcement community and the diverse community so that we can dispel myths and we can see who is for who.

There's a lot of hardworking people that want Metro's help and assistance, but sometimes when they don't get it when they need it, they fall out of love. For example, a big thing in my community is parties. There's people who throw parties in their backyards and they have their blaring music until two in the morning, and here we are, disgruntled neighbors calling this noise ordinance disruption into Metro. But Metro doesn't have the ability to say, sorry, we have these other violent criminals we're chasing down and we don't have enough bodies on the force to come and deploy a unit to go tell the person to please lower their music or to stop their partying.

You kind of see where the need for the community is, and then you see why they don't trust this entity because when they need them for something, they don't come. But you understand why they're not coming, so you're in the middle and you're like, but both people are really good. It's just they're missing opportunities to be better connected and more informed.

I've been out on some walks after criminal activity happens in a neighborhood and the neighborhood didn't call it in. We've been out canvassing those couple of streets around it and

saying, hey, did you hear anything? Did you see anything? Did you call it in? It's still important for constituents to call 911.

You personally go out?

Yes, and we walk the neighborhoods and with Metro officers. I'm a council person. I represent you. But we want to make sure that we're still collaborating and helping each other out. There are still a lot of areas where we still have to understand more about what it is to live in each other's shoes because I think police officers don't understand how often these parties can go on. It disrupts a lot of seniors' sleep patterns. They can only get this much sleep at a certain point. Then we also have to understand about the dynamics that Metro is dealing with and how can we also do our part to make sure that our kids are staying safe, that are kids are on the right path, so that then Metro can have things—right now they have a lot on their plate. It's just education, education. Everything comes back to knowing the other side of things.'

What are the big obstacles right now that you seek to overcome in this city?

Oh my gosh.

Is that too big a question?

Maybe pre-COVID-19.

Right now this pandemic and not politicizing something that's scientific and that the whole world is undergoing. Right now a big responsibility I've taken on my shoulders is just to emphasize to people, yes, wearing a face mask is important. Yes, being part of the Spanish *En Tus Manos* campaign and making sure that we're getting the language in a campaign that people can understand and people can then hopefully take in and internalize. Just trying to relay information from the city level, from the county level that sometimes maybe people were never able to hear before in their first language. We know that Latinos are increasingly the largest

minority group. A lot of the folks that are in Nevada are first-generation immigrant folks. Yes, we have second and third generation, but we still have increasingly people that are new and coming. Because you are new, you're like my mom back when she first migrated; she didn't know about all the traditions; she didn't know about all the nuances of living in a new country with a different set of traditions. But if you bring them under your wing and you teach them and you show them, they find their way and they love the new traditions and they make them their own. I think that there's still so much opportunity to build a greater sense of community regardless of how diverse we are. We have the African-American community. We have the Latino community. We have the AAPI community, the Asian Pacific Islander. Increasingly, when I worked at Ruby Thomas, I was amazed that there's so many kids that were coming in from Nepal; they were coming in from Syria; they were coming in from Afghanistan; they were coming in from different regions in Africa, different tribal areas. Increasingly, Vegas is so diverse, so unique in that sense that we have people from so many countries and so many languages represented.

I'm fortunate that I know the biggest language that's represented and I know that language, but I also have thought in the back of my head, what would it be like to be someone that spoke another language and that hardly hears that language or things conveyed in a way that they understand it? And so I've always tried to emphasize as many languages as we can. I don't want to say I'm language centric, only Spanish, only one culture. I'm all about, how can we meet the needs of everyone to the best of our abilities? Just by smiling at people, being empathetic and understanding.

At the same time, you are a role model as a Latina. Are you cognizant of that all the time, or how does that affect you, knowing that?

I try to always just stay real and humble. My mom always says, “You better not grow too big for your britches.” I’m like, “Yes, I understand, Mom. I know. Yes, I’m here to serve. I’m here to be one of us.” I always try to live with that mindset. It is a great sense of responsibility on your shoulders because you are one of the firsts and people are looking at you and you know that your folks will be judged on how you conduct yourself and how you come across and what you say. Then they’re going to say, all Latinas, look, this is why we shouldn’t have any more because, look, Councilwoman Diaz just said something that’s completely... That is an additional level of responsibility that I do take seriously, and I’ve told people I do feel that that is a responsibility that I do have in making sure that I’m representing us in a good light and saying, we need more Olivias, versus saying, we don’t need any more Olivias. You want to be a positive. You want to be a bright spot.

You want also for the youth and my former students to look up and say, wow, she was my teacher and she was able to make it to city council and to the legislature, so I can do it, too. I want them to also dream and shoot for the stars. You can’t die for trying. You try and if it happens, great. But if you didn’t because you think you can’t make it, you’re always going to be, what if I would have tried that out? Hopefully people feel like this country does afford you the opportunities if you want to work hard at it and you want to take the risk because there is a significant amount of risk in throwing yourself into these kinds of endeavors, but it’s satisfying, too. If your heart is in the work and you want to do it for the greater advancement of your people, you can do some really awesome things.

Going back to your question about what do I want to accomplish at city council, I think what I envision hopefully in this new role is feeling what I felt when I was growing up here in Vegas. I feel like Vegas embraced me. I feel like Vegas helped me and didn’t judge me. I hope

that we can create that same environment for the kids that are coming behind us; that we get to a place where we honor each other, where we respect each other, and where we are trying to lift one another for the greater good of everyone because, who knows? I might motivate that child who wants to become a surgeon and maybe down the road I'm going to need something that child can provide. The same thing, they need to know that we're empowering them to be the next generation of leaders. We need them. I'm not going to serve here forever, and I've told people I don't want to become a dinosaur politician because I feel like you have a shelf life and once you're at that shelf life, you need to pass the torch or the baton. If you're in a race, you've just got to pass it on to the next person who's going to put in the energy, the effort, the passion. You need all of those to really make dynamic change.

I hope that I can leave the city of Vegas a little bit better than the way I found it, after I leave. I just want to bring more people in because I feel like right now we're very disconnected. We don't know how to communicate with each other. I just hope that they feel like they are honored, we are listening, we try to move the levels of government at the speeds we can even with my own internal departments, like maintenance, et cetera.

We've been having this issue with the wash; the Las Vegas Wash this year, we have received little rainfall; water has been stagnant. Because of the stagnation of the water, algae grows that doesn't give the best scent. People have been reaching out and saying, it's been two months since we've been bringing this problem. I'm like, we had to have a bird study before we can bring in the big machines. There's all these ecological factors that then hamper our ability to just get it done as soon as you just put it on my radar. There's other boxes we have to check. It's just letting them know we have it in the queue; we're lining things up, but we have to do it in this order. I'm holding my fingers crossed that we can get that relief for the smell. If I was there and I

had to smell it morning, night and day, I would probably be at my wit's end, too. I try to really emphasize that we're there; we're working; we're trying to get it as soon as we can. But sometimes it's not as fast as people want.

You touched upon this earlier of what your mom tells you, to not let your head get too big. What are some of the cultural values that you think you've adopted into your leadership position?

I think my upbringing, coming from a working class family, seeing that my dad never got anything given to him, he had to work hard for everything he had, he had to save every penny, he had to be resourceful, he had to be prudent, he had to be forward thinking, he was very responsible in his work ethic through his thirty-five-plus years as a casino porter at Caesars Palace. I rarely remember my dad calling out due to being sick. And my mom, just being at the helm of raising six kids. That would drive me absolutely crazy. Mom, mom, look at him; look at her; she did this; she did that. Oh my gosh. But them giving the best that they had to their family for us, it was all for us, the sacrifices they've made along the way, the support, the stability that they've provided. I think the work ethic comes from them in seeing them lead by example. Them keeping to their word. My father never told us he would do something unless he was going to follow through. An example of that is he had five daughters. Obviously with five daughters, if you know about quinceañera, it's like your sweet sixteen for your daughter at fifteen, my dad didn't ever start doing the quinceañera for the oldest because he knew that financially he would be ruined if he tried to have a quinceañera for five daughters.

When my youngest sister was going to turn fifteen, the older sisters came and we all had a conversation and we're like, we need to really have the quinceañera for the youngest. We didn't get a formal one. We just had a small, little family gathering with a cake. We didn't have

the big mass and the big party. We convinced our dad. We're like, "Dad, we know you couldn't provide for all of us, but we're cool. We're all cool with it. The sisters are saying we want this party. Can we have it for my sister? We're all going to pitch in and we're all going to pull our weight and we're going to make it happen." He appreciated, I think, the fact that we had grown up and that we were not going to say, because we didn't have a party, our youngest shouldn't get one. It's about knowing when we can do things how the village is going to come together and make it happen.

I think those rural roots that I have and that experience of living in Mexico really fostered that sense of community because over there everybody says hi to each other. *Good afternoon. Good morning. How you doing? How's the family?* That's the sense of community that I haven't gotten to experience since the '90s here. You knowing your neighbor and you really being super familiar with who is living around you and being comfortable, not that you let your guard down. It adds a quality of life of knowing that you're cared about; that you're valued. I just hope that we can get to a point of where we can strengthen that sense of community in caring about each other because if I find out that you're going through hard times, you just had a surgery and I'm your neighbor, at least I come and I bring you something that was baked or chicken noodle soup or something. It just shows that you're cared about and that it doesn't matter if you're a part of my immediate family or not, but the world still cares about you.

We've recently had an experience with a neighbor in my ward where she lost her husband. Her house wasn't in the greatest condition. We were able to connect her with a program that's going to help her get some TLC for her house. But that's turned the universe around for her and now from being immobile, now she's lost weight. She was starting to give up on life and

I don't want anybody to think that they don't matter when they really do matter. That's what we're here for is to help each other as much as we can with what we have.

Now during this pandemic, how has that balance been between representing your community and also being a mother and at-home education for your son?

It's challenging. My family has gotten neglected a little, a little. It's funny because of the gender roles. A traditional Latina is mostly focused on family and stays a lot at home, right? I'm the opposite. I'm like, the world needs me out here. But I do try to balance that as much as I can. Saturdays I try to be really cognizant that it's my family day. Sundays I try to keep things to a bare minimum.

This weekend we had the U.S. surgeon general come into town, and it was really important because during COVID times, hearing from the Surgeon General Admiral Adams and just hearing his perspective of the pandemic, it's important as a regional, local policymaker to really internalize that and take that in and to gage, am I on the right side of this or not? I was like, oof, okay, we are doing. He's emphasizing the three W's: wear a mask, wash your hands, watch your distance. I've been advocating that to the community. He brought up the disproportionality in terms of diverse communities and getting the word out and how the hospitalization rates are starkly higher for African American, Native American and Latino people versus Caucasian and white people. This should really be a lesson about health disparities and how we need to do better as a society in making sure that we have a stronger foundation for certain communities that have this gap in being serviced on the healthcare front.

But I'm human, I'm make my mistakes, but I do try to give the best. I feel like I have the responsibility as an elected leader to do my best in this capacity, in this vein, in my job, so much so my husband [Frank Alejandre] is like, "Geez." I'm like, "I know, I know." But it's a give and

take. Right now I feel like I'm barely starting to get into my rhythm as a council person and I hope with more experience...Right now things come sometimes out of the blue, and so you really have to take the time to learn it and understand it. But as you come up with the same kinds of situations, you're more verse, you're more knowledgeable, and I can start to relax a little bit, or maybe I won't. I don't know. Maybe this job will keep me going a hundred miles an hour for the next four years that I have in my first term. I don't know.

I do try to listen to my husband. I haven't talked about him much in the interview, but he really has been a supporter. He's not limiting what I can do. I got married really young. He could have been a very traditional Latino, Mexican, in saying, you can only go work from this time to this time, and you need to adhere to X, Y and Z as my wife. But I really have been blessed in that he is there to support and morph and do what we need to do to be a strong family. Sometimes I'll have an event come out of the blue, and we have to figure out for my child, who's going to pick him up? Who's going to drop him off? We try to be there for each other. He's in a very active type of a job being a reporter, so he's on the beat.

What does he do?

He worked forever for *El Mundo* newspaper as an editor, as a reporter, as a photographer; he did everything. Now he's working for *El Tiempo* newspaper, which is another Spanish publication. He is one of the contributors, writers, acting interim editor for *El Tiempo* newspaper, although right now he's like, "We're so small; our team needs to grow." He's seen the growth of the Latino community from the late '80s that he arrived and being one of the pioneer Spanish newspapers in town and how even media channels have changed over time.

Absolutely, yes.

As you said with the surgeon general coming in, knowing that the Latinx community is one of the highest impacted, what are your intentions or plans to help meet that need given that your ward is predominantly Latinx?

We've been trying to be very active during these times. We try to get earned media as much as possible. With the partnership and collaboration with the county, we launched Esta En Tus Manos campaign. We've been on that. We even raised it to the U.S. surgeon general. We said, "We have this campaign that targets the Latinx community and we're really hoping that people understand our message because we've put together a lot of ads. We've mailed fliers home that say, these are the best steps to take." I did start to see in April the tick, tick, tick in the Hispanic positivity numbers. Of all those being tested, Latinos were number one of all the subgroups. I didn't like that. But I knew that our socioeconomic circumstances were such that we were going to be more heavily impacted, one, because a lot of our folks don't have the luxury to telework. A lot of our folks have to be hands on the job and have to physically show up and be surrounded by other people. If they weren't taking the use of the masks seriously and they were hearing about all these conspiracy theories on social media—sometimes unfortunately they listen more to that versus the legitimate information and they can't discern.

That's why education and critical thinking is such an important thing that I want to make sure that our kids come out of our school system with so that they can discern fact versus myth, or this is made up or not. But increasingly people aren't able to easily dispel one thing from another. This is not good; this is great. This is sound; this is unsound.

I think it's been an incredibly fast and furious time for me because when this first came up and this first surfaced, this COVID-19 pandemic, first thing I knew was that our community was going to internalize it differently and that we weren't going to be in the know or up to snuff.

Obviously I had some conversation with some colleagues and I was like, “Look, you don’t understand from a Latino perspective. We need to be giving them the information as quickly as possible, as accurate as possible, and direct.” We’ve tried to do that along the way and we’re trying to engage. But, more and more, I learned that social media has different factions and groups, and so you have influencers saying this, you have influencers saying that. Right now I’m just trying any way that we can get into the bubble, but put it out there in different ways, different modalities. We have done a lot of Telemundo, a lot of Univision. Actually people texted me; from the U.S. surgeon general being here yesterday; we got a little plug-in for (Santos Manos) on Channel 3. People were like, “Oh, I saw you on TV.” I’m like, okay, we delivered. We’re like, “Santos Manos in Española. It’s there for you guys and it’s all about getting tested, where you can get tested, what you should be following, what happens when you’re positive.”

Now the contact tracing is going to be a crucial part if we can get our positivity rates down. We were at a 19 percent; now we’re at 8 percent, but we still have to get 8 percent closer to five for us to continue to reopen. It was good to hear that he said for a pandemic like this that the positivity rate, you had to shut down to drive those numbers down, but a lot of people don’t understand.

I know that we have a tough road ahead of us with a lot of people unemployed. A lot of those jobs still, will they come back; with they not come back? That’s what is, I think, going to keep me very anxious because I know we’re a hardworking people; we want our jobs. But how will we reconnect them to the workforce? Because maybe that traditional role they had or that traditional job will not be there. That’s the next to figure out, if our hospitality industry isn’t able to get back up to speed with all the conventions that have been canceling as of late.

It kind of brings us full circle to the first time I was in the legislature where we spoke about diversity our economy, not putting all of our eggs in one basket, which was gaming. We tried, but we still haven't gotten there. We did Tesla up north and a little bit more tech jobs, but those are staying mostly in the northern or center part of our state, Washoe County, Carson City; that area, Storey. They're staying there, but what are we doing to diversify our workforce in Southern Nevada? We still have to make sure that we don't lose sight of that because we still have our same eggs in the basket, even ten years after we said we needed to change it up.

It is a new day, very challenging times. I think together we'll get there. I've seen an outpouring of people wanting to support each other, and I just hope that spirit stays. I was telling Nathalie it's a very different election time, too. I can't imagine having run my council race during a pandemic because then you don't have that face-to-face contact. I don't know how informed they are going to be of people who they will be voting for and how influenced they will be by what they're seeing in social media. We know that based on the past presidential election, some people got heavily by what was sold to them on social media, and that makes me nervous.

I think you said—I don't know what you just said. I just want to make sure I understood correctly. About unity. There seems to be such a division in our population in general.

We are living highly polarized—

Polarized; there's a good word, yes.

Highly polarized time in terms of partisan and trying to take sides. But, at the same time, we can all feel human suffering, and so regardless of being Democrat or Republican, if you see a human suffering, your heart is going to go out and you want to help. I just think that if we can leave our ideologies, our political ideologies to the side for a bit and not argue over X candidate or Y candidate is better. But we just see the underlying human condition that we are all part of. We

will make inroads, we will make strides, and we will...I just think we need to stop the madness. Stop the madness and just come back and embrace each other and see us, but not label each other. I feel like we're labeling each other, but we're failing to recognize we all have the same color blood, we all have the ability to feel and to feel hurt and to feel like you're not seeing me, invisible. I think everybody is feeling it in their own different way regardless of ethnicity. I think a lot of white, Caucasian folks are saying, but what about us? Why does it have to be all Latinx? Why does it have to be Black Lives Matter? Why does it have to be AAPI? I can sense and I can understand from their perspective, why are we over magnifying minorities' roles? Well, it's because minorities for a long time have been invisible and we really haven't spoken to them. It's a way of lifting them up to say, I see you; I hear you; you are valued. But we have to figure out how we can lift everybody in a way that doesn't make it seem like we're only targeted on one; we all are the community. Different people are the lettuce and the tomato. You can't ever say *melting pot* because I don't think that's a very accurate description because we don't all melt into one another.

No. It's not appropriate today, anyway, now.

But we all add value. We all add different perspectives. We should just honor each other and respect each other. Going to college here I took—maybe I owe this to having majored in English—I took a lot of literature courses and I made sure that my literature courses were varied in terms of African American lit, Native American lit. They learned about the struggles of the slaves who were brought to this country in just abhorrent conditions, and then what they were made to put up with once they were enslaved here. Not only was the voyage horrible and horrific—you were basically taken from your land, strapped to the bottom of a ship where you weren't even allowed to move—if you survived that voyage across the ocean, then you were

expected adhere to the norms and the workload that your owners did unto you. And then the Native Americans and how we took their land and how we put them on the crappiest land, and then we altered their lifestyle to a point where it affected their health and their well-being as a people. Then when you take the Chicano studies, too...

When you read about the injustices that have been done to people over time, you understand that all of us have a different history, and we hopefully learn from it so then we don't repeat it, and that we become better humans because then we can empathize with everybody's trials and tribulations, but bring out the best of us to get us hopefully not repeating what we've seen in the past. That's where I think we need to focus now; we just need to hopefully know that every life matters. All of us add value. We all can do our part to make our community better. There are so many awesome individuals out there that are adding every day, every day, and we need to continue to do the deposits more than we withdraw, especially in our kids right now, to get them on the upward trajectory.

It hurts my heart to hear that there might be teachers who see X student as less than another student. There's no room for that. We're educators and we're supposed to be the ones that are shaping the minds of tomorrow. There shouldn't be distinctions in our students. I remember some of my best teachers. I think I am who I am, too, because a lot of my teachers were my other parents, behind my parents who would just say, you don't look like you're having a great day; what's going on with you? They were checking in. You mattered to somebody else. Maybe your parent didn't have the foresight or the time, but somebody else was checking in on you. I think it does take a village to make sure that we're the best and the strongest we can be.

You've got to remain optimistic. For my nine-year-old, I want to make sure that they have the awesome memories that we all had when we were growing up, which I still have a lot of

going on the Strip. It's morphed into so many iterations. Towers being added. Casinos being demolished. It's constantly reinventing itself. I just hope that at the core we can continue to be that awesome Vegas community. But I think we have grown to be. We're diverse, but I think the diversity brings a beauty that's unparalleled in other areas.

Thank you. Do you have any other stories you'd like to share?

I was thinking that—I don't know if I relayed that. I remember when I was a teen, I was hooked to a summer program. It was through Nevada Business Services and it helped families of low income with a large family. It would help the teens get connected to a job for the summer. It was a summer job. I remember that my summer job was to work in the mailroom at one of the different departments of Clark County, and I can't remember which. It was this huge mailroom and you had to sort the mail and you had to put it in hanging file folders. Then you had to go out in a hundred-and-ten degree heat and push your cart with mail. I just remember that experience; I think I was a sophomore, probably a freshman going to be a sophomore in high school. I remember that kind of experience, being around the workers of that mailroom. I think my sister and I were assigned to similar departments to that way we could be dropped off or picked up at the same point and help.

I just feel like that kind of experience helps open our horizons and see more that's in front of us and give us that work experience that many of us lack sometimes because our parents may not have that kind of experience to showcase. My son is very different in that he's come to my office, he's come to events, he knows all about what community meetings is because he has to sometimes be in the back of the room and listen to them. But growing up I didn't have that same access to being exposed to the different career choices and avenues and just helping me frame my mind as to where I saw myself when I grew up. People say, well, I still am trying to

figure out what I want to be when I grow up. But I think that kind of help is instrumental and I hope that we can continue to provide those kinds of opportunities for our youth because sometimes we judge our youth, but then are we reaching our youth? Are we connecting to our youth? Are we providing the environment and the programs that they need to help?

I think a lot of times it just takes a little bit of mentoring and a little bit of watering and a little bit of sunshine, and they're going to be fine. But they need to know that there's people that are there that can help them, that can advise them. If I'm not the good fit to do that I find someone younger that has more of a current perspective and that it doesn't get lost in translation from me having to register on a phone versus her who is just like *click, click, click, click*, I'm done and can do it when she's probably typing and answering a text and she's doing three things, because I see that with my son. They're so good at multi-modality, and there is a value. We shouldn't be stuck in our old ways.

But there's core values that we shouldn't stop teaching our community. Now that I've been here, I'm like, hmm, maybe we get a language school started or something where kids can go and practice their Spanish in a really cool way, hopefully post-COVID, obviously, when we can get more kids together. I think if we have parents who have the buy-in who want to keep it, we keep it fun, we keep the vocabulary maybe around traditions and holidays and festivities, who doesn't want to party all the time? In any language.

This town has really changed. My husband came from Mexico City. He said that when he first arrived in Vegas, he was like, this is a tiny, little town, compared to Mexico City that has millions upon millions of people hustling and bustling every day. Here, our transit system has yet to change. We have the bus system, but it's not very agile nor fast. Now maybe you have different opportunities. I'm kind of excited for what the future may hold for Vegas because I

think we're finally, maybe, at that point where we're going to hit another urban indicator. It will be exciting to see. Will we get a light rail? You hear about the Boring tunnel under and how a Tesla car is driving underneath. There's going to be just different things.

If we can get the people back to work, which you said earlier.

Yes, yes.

That's a big part of it.

Exactly. We're doing our part.

Awesome. Thank you so much.

[End of recorded interview]