

An Interview with Isaac Barron

Perspectives from the COVID-19 Pandemic: Leadership and Learning in Nevada

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Each interviewee had the opportunity to review their transcript. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the interviewee. This interview features Isaac Barron, City of North Las Vegas Councilman and was conducted on 8/5/22 by Magdalena Martinez. This interview covers topics including reflections on leadership, organizational challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.

Interview with Councilman Isaac Barron

Date: 8-5-2022

SPEAKERS: Magdalena Martinez, Isaac Barron

Magdalena Martinez [00:02]

All right, so the recorder is going. I'm here today, August the 5th, with Councilman Isaac Barron, and also an educator at Rancho High School. And I just want to confirm that you consent to being interviewed, you consent to being recorded, and that you consent to any quotes being attributed to you over the course of our conversation.

Isaac Barron [00:24]

Yes, yes, and yes.

Magdalena Martinez [00:25]

Okay, thank you. And I will send you a copy of the transcript once it's transcribed; we're recording for those purposes as well. Then also, we would like to work with the library in order to archive this as part of the historical COVID experience in Southern Nevada – so if you're okay with that, too-

Isaac Barron [00:42]

Yes.

Magdalena Martinez [00:44]

-I'll follow up with the formal form on that. All right. So, to start with, if you can, Isaac, tell me a little bit about how you saw your role throughout the pandemic, specifically your role as a councilman and as an educator.

Isaac Barron [00:59]

Well, I'm going to start with educator first because that was the biggest mess, you know, and it's going to be real, real simple. There just was not a whole lot of education going on. I mean, I myself, I'm not online-friendly, so to speak. I was not – I myself, I'm not a digital native, although I adapted to, and became operative using Canvas and using online resources.

The problem was if I had 35 students – 36 students who were supposed to be in class, number one, they, the majority, I'd say, 20 or 22, would log on. But very few kept their cameras on, and I strongly suspect that most of them went back to sleep or were doing other things, right? And as much as you try to make the class engaging, it just wasn't happening.

Did people do the work that I left? Yeah, they did that. There was a total disconnect, though, between being the teacher and being a student. It was a mess, you know? And I think my experience, as trying as it was, I saw that I got off easy compared to people who are teaching things like mathematics, which, as you know, to teach online is quite a challenge. Teaching and teaching writing, it isn't so easy doing this. It's just that there are some things that lend

themselves to doing this in a class, where you do a lot of reading and you can discuss it, I guess that works out okay.

Of course [as folklore goes ??02:44] band, any performing arts, and any fine arts, we're not talking – there wasn't a whole lot going on. And we see the scores, you know? Whenever my colleague – I have a colleague who teaches an advanced aeronautics class, and when he has to go back, remediate, and teach kids basic algebra – because they just didn't get it as seventh and eighth graders – he had ninth and tenth graders who he had to go back and remediate, there's a serious problem. That's in our elite program, our nationally recognized program, so that's the easiest one to tackle, it's just that it's been hard.

Magdalena Martinez [03:29]

What do you teach?

Isaac Barron [03:31]

Excuse me?

Magdalena Martinez [03:32]

What do you teach?

Isaac Barron [03:34]

I teach two very readily-adaptable classes - Psychology I, and Latin-American History. With those you can have the students follow along, watch short videos, and do a – kind of like a Google discussion, right, and then do lessons that students can do and then turn in. That's all way easier than say, teaching algebra. Try teaching a quadratic equation through the wonder of Google Meet – when you're talking, you're basically talking [mostly] to yourself. It was just a mess.

Magdalena Martinez [04:12]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [04:14]

However, as a councilman leading our city here, it was – I think we had actually – because we could actually take action on things so that one was a little bit more proactive.

One thing that we did, there's, of course – in the city of Las Vegas, we're leaders in being able to work with the health department. We had a very small team that mostly dealt with vaccinations because they were part of our emergency services team. They were able to go and do things like set up vaccinations, where we literally vaccinated tens of thousands of people in a short amount of time. And that was done with a very small team, who were experts in their field, disaster management people. In working with the school district, for instance, we had a mass vaccination at Canyon Springs High School, very well planned out ahead, and we got some help from the Nevada National Guard, who came to help to administer it, and it went very well. I'm very happy to say that we managed things like that pretty well.

Within our city, we have some really good leadership, and I always tell people that we need to be flexible. The word that we use in Las Vegas is, we're "nimble." So when we shut down our library because they were mandated to be shut down, we could have, very easily, just given everybody a pink slip, and sent them on their way until we needed them back. Instead, we asked our library personnel to come in, and we asked them "Hey, there's some very important jobs that you guys can do for us." "Like what?" "Like calling every business that we have in North Las Vegas, and making sure that they know what the COVID restrictions are." So between either being pink-slipped or taking this on, they adapted, and we had an excellent reach-out to the community.

As a council member, the mayor sat us down and said, "Hey, we need to show our leadership as well. So I was tasked, for instance, with calling the medical providers in North Las Vegas. I started with, of course, the hospitals, and then the nursing care facilities – several of them are on one street on Cheyenne. Of course, the hospitals are doing okay with PPEs. But then when I started calling the nursing homes, I could still feel my hair tingling [at the back of my neck] to find out that these guys were down to individual units, and I'm talking about individual masks. They were down to individual masks, and they were having people donate them, right? They were being made at home.

Of course, they have lots of vulnerable people in a very small area, so again, there goes our emergency services there. Since we got an allotment from the national stockpile, we were able to literally deliver 5,000 units, almost like the next day, to these critical care facilities. So again, we were able to adapt, and we were able to – since we had a small team, but they're professional, we moved very quickly. The city of North Las Vegas didn't have those massive outbreaks of COVID with the nursing homes as other parts of the Valley did, and I think it's because we moved quickly.

Magdalena Martinez [07:55]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [07:56]

I think we were the first city to declare a COVID moratorium on evictions, and then soon after that, ours got overridden by the state. But we were the first city to go ahead and do that because we realized that people were being – that was a big fear; one of our borders is actually so-called the "Corridor of Hope," and the prospect of having that many more people being put out on the street with no protection, that was appalling for us. We were the first city to do that.

Magdalena Martinez [08:35]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [08:36]

Of course, we did other things. We were very fortunate to receive an allotment of some of the Treasury's COVID money that went to Clark County. Since we didn't get anything from the state, Clark County shared a portion of their 22 million bucks that we turned around and put right back into the community. We did business owner rental assistance, we did homeowner rental assistance, and we did utility assistance. Most of the money that we took in, we just turned it

right back, to make sure that people didn't get turned out, businesses didn't go under, people weren't evicted, and utilities didn't get turned off.

So we adapted – we saw, and we adapted. What I really appreciated is the fact that our city leadership, especially our city manager, has a very good working relationship with the County. Our leadership team worked with the County and their team, and if you notice, a lot of our efforts really mirrored each other because we worked pretty close to one another, and then I think that helped out the entire valley.

That being said, some things were quite challenging. You can imagine what it would be like to be a police officer in the time of COVID. You had, sometimes, people who were homeless and they were passed out somewhere, right? How do you go and do social distancing? When a person is COVID-unprotected with no PPE at all, and you're a cop, you have to deal with them. Or even affecting an arrest on someone, right? Again, jailing people was an issue. We closed down our jail and reopened it as a community correction center along with services, and we did that in the middle of the pandemic. It took our teams to become very creative in how they were doing this, right?

Overall, I think the city of North Vegas, could we have done better. You can always do better, but I think, as a city, we weathered the storm pretty well. That being said, the 89030 zip code was one of the COVID hotspots. We had some of the highest infection rates and some of the highest death rates because, of course, where did COVID hit the highest? In the Latino and Black community. There's just no other way to say it.

With the morbidity factors – we have lots of Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes. That's one of the – do they call it morbidity – what do they call it? Is it the morbidity factor? Or – I forget what – I guess I've been trying to put that stuff behind me, even though it's not really behind us all the way, apparently, but it's one of these factors. There's a reason why African Americans have one of the lowest life expectancies in our country. As a matter of fact, Black males have the lowest – not even quite 60 years old.

We saw COVID tear through our communities here, and North Las Vegas is the only minority/majority city, so it went through – it burned through us. Our firemen literally responded to some guy who died on the sidewalk waiting for an Uber to pick him up to take him to the hospital, right?

Magdalena Martinez [12:11]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [12:12]

Of course, they didn't know the guy had COVID until our paramedics put him inside the transport and took him to a UMC. They did a quick COVID test and found out "Well, he had COVID." So that kind of exposed our firefighters, our paramedics. It was challenging, but our city took the challenge on, we have the top professionals, and they adapted. They were nimble, and they did things that we normally didn't do. Whether it's Barone personally handing PPE out, or Scott Black – Councilman Scott Black – he's actually on the Sun Nevada Health

District board there. He's going out and distributing things. Everybody did their part. The only difference was there, I got to be part of the team that was making policy. So that one, I didn't feel as powerless.

Magdalena Martinez [13:15]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [13:16]

As a teacher, my entire teaching world's condensed into this little – to a speaker and a monitor, right? You couldn't do a whole lot about that, and that was very frustrating. So for me, it gives us a chance to shine, but at the same time, as a teacher, there wasn't very much shining going on.

Magdalena Martinez [13:40]

Yeah. Now, you said that the city took the jail and converted it into a community. What did you call it?

Isaac Barron [13:46]

A community correction center. We actually closed our jail before COVID. Four years ago, they wound up closing it for budgetary purposes. Of course, back when I came on in 2013, the city was pretty close to losing its charter. People say bankruptcy, but the thing is, cities don't get bankruptcy in the State of Nevada. If you can't meet your budget requirements, you lose your charter and you get shut down. So for budgetary reasons, we tried to save a couple of million bucks here, a couple of million bucks there by shutting down our jail, and then we contracted our jail services with Las Vegas.

Three years later, we were doing a little bit better financially. We've been creeping our way past our part of the Great Recession. So we tried to reopen it, but this time, we tried opening it with the idea of restorative justice. That was part of the deal. Instead of just blanket arresting people left and right because some guy shoplifted, now our cops – our correctional officers, if they suspect that a person's arrested because they might have a drug or alcohol issue; it might just have been homelessness, they might be a veteran, right? Now, we have a diversionary court to put them in.

So instead of just blindly locking people up, like we used to, we can actually divert them through our partner services here which offer drug treatment, rehabilitation, and mental health services. We have, again, a veteran's outreach, so we're trying to move the city in a different direction now, rather than just trying to arrest our way out of the situation.

Magdalena Martinez [15:41]

Mmm.

Isaac Barron [15:42]

And I am happy that even right now, our jail is only about 33 to 34% full. Granted, some people need arresting, but we're trying to keep that to people who have to be arrested – they have done things. Everybody else, if we think we can get them into a path to rehabilitation – because the idea is to reduce recidivism, we do that. And our cops don't have to use as much force as they

did, let's say, 10 years ago. I think things are getting better with that, but we can always use some more improvement, and there are more challenges ahead. So I'm very happy that we didn't have large outbreaks of COVID in our community crisis center, even though we opened up in the middle of it. If you guys didn't know, they were opening with safety and certain procedures that have promoted that safety as a part of opening up, so we were ready for that one.

Magdalena Martinez [16:51]

That's really interesting. Is there someone I can talk to more about the transition from a traditional jail to more of a restorative justice center?

Isaac Barron [17:03]

Oh, yeah, our director. By the way, the correctional center, although the police department has something to do with it, it's its own department. The correctional center has its own director, and that has been separated from the police department. It's not just merely part of the police department, they have their own personnel. That was done by design because we wanted it to be a standalone part of our city services. Her name is Renee Baker, and I can give you that reference here. I'll just send it to you or give you her number here a little bit later on.

Magdalena Martinez [17:49]

Okay, that's really helpful. Thank you. From your perspective, who do you think were the groups hardest hit by the pandemic?

Isaac Barron [17:59]

Everybody who could least afford to take the hit – the elderly, Latinos, Blacks, anybody who didn't have ready access to preventative medicine. Again, everywhere we see obesity, a lack of exercise, and unhealthy diets, that's where the hammer fell the hardest. Some of it happened to be in the Latino community, and some of it happened to be in the Black community.

Between the two of us, I'm not sure who suffered the hardest, but I'd venture to say we were pretty close in both. All you had to do was look at the data from the Southern Nevada Health District. They charted the zip code to the highest infection rates. I'm sorry to say that myself, Olivia Diaz, Senator Crear, and Pamela Goynes-Brown, it was our section of the city that consistently had the highest infection rates, and of course, the highest death rates. It's because, again, the lack of access to resources, chronic health issues here, and diet and exercise. All these things that snowballed during these times of crisis when you have a health pandemic.

Magdalena Martinez [19:32]

You had said that the city was very nimble. Tell me more about that. What made the city so nimble during the pandemic, and how did it serve to turn around action? What makes it nimble?

Isaac Barron [19:48]

I think one part is because our staff is actually relatively small. We're a city of 270,000 people now, right? During the early part of the Great Recession, when people were being foreclosed on their houses and, of course, city income from taxes took a nosedive, and they had a financial crisis – this is before I came on in 2013 – the city cut half its force. We had an economic development team that, at one point, had 12 to 15 people.

When I came on, there were two people. We cut half the force – now, that had a devastating effect on city services. I have a theory. We can't prove it, of course, but I have a theory. And part of the theory that we've been looking at is the people who survived the cuts were people who we're calling survivors. People who understood, very closely, that everyone's well-being for the rest of us depended upon our residents and their well-being.

Magdalena Martinez [20:58]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [21:00]

I think like one of those survival of the fittest, one of these Darwinist kinds of things here. The people who we had left were some of the most creative people and some of the people who were best placed to survive and to be able to figure out a way forward. I think that everyone realized, including myself, our positions there in the city all depended on how we were able to keep the doors open. As Mayor Lee likes to put it, the first rule of business is that you've got to stay open. You had to keep your doors open. So I think everyone realized that we had to keep the doors open. We had to keep revenue, like getting people into houses again, getting businesses opened up again, and having businesses survive so they can survive long enough to pay business taxes. That was really important.

I think that prompted a change in attitude. Where, as before, when I was on the campaign trail, when I was trying to get elected there in 2012, I would have people constantly comment to me and complain "North Las Vegas has to do business, we can't open up." Then when I got in, we were able to institute some reforms, like expedited plans checking. If you're a contractor, you can actually literally make an appointment to do a virtual inspection of the property, so you don't have to wait, and that really does a lot, of course, to promote productivity.

Our city now also has a self-certification program. A builder, a contractor, has to go through one of our courses, and we'll teach them how to self-certify, and that speeds things up. Just things that really give service back to the people who are the lifeblood of the community. That attitude really, I'm very happy to say, diffused throughout the entire city.

So I think everyone's quite aware of just how important it is for us to give good service back. It wasn't that long ago when, again, half of the city staff were laid off, and the other half were wondering if the shoe was going to drop on them, too.

Magdalena Martinez [23:25]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [23:26]

I think that again, half the numbers were small teams, but they were literally very creative, and we came up with some fantastic solutions. Hey, just – here's a really small one. For instance, we were the first – the Armitage Valley was the first one to move its work week to four 10-hour days, okay?

Magdalena Martinez [23:48]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [23:50]

Four 10-hour days, well, it sounds like, in our tradition, we'd be thinking, if you're only working four days, you'd get less done – no. We found out that, of course, productivity went up, and employee satisfaction also went up with the productivity because it turns out they could actually do in four days what we had been doing before in five. Then they had three days to decompress, be more mentally decompressed, and have better wellness in the long run. Those are little things, right? But we were creative with that, and our little experiment worked. I think we still have other things that we could work on. There are still areas for improvement. But for that one, I'm really happy we implemented that one.

Magdalena Martinez [24:38]

So pre-2013 was a result of the recession, right?

Isaac Barron [24:45]

Oh, yeah, the Great Recession, of course. I tell people that in North Las Vegas, our community is the one that we feel, whenever there's an economic downturn, we will feel it here first, and we'll be the last community to come out. It's only because so much of our population is related to gaming. Here, as soon as you have any sort of panic or any sort of a downturn, well, the CEOs on the strip downtown, they start laying people off – the casino workers.

Magdalena Martinez [25:16]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [25:17]

My parents were casino workers. My dad worked at the old Showboat in the kitchen, and my mom works as a maid at Golden Gate and other places, or she works in the laundry that's, of course, connected to the game industry. So although we never suffered any downturn like that, my family would have been one of the first ones. That's why our city has taken a very deep look at really diversifying.

We just saw what happened – now, one corporation decided they're not going to open two casinos that were shuttered during COVID. They're not going to open them up again. I guess they have cited the fact that these places don't earn like other places, I guess, right?

Magdalena Martinez [26:00]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [26:02]

So we cannot rely on gaming. We had to rely on other sources of revenue to keep the city afloat, keep the services going, to make sure we can hire cops, that we can have firemen make it to your house, so they can drag you out of your burning house and do CPR on you.

So we turned to logistics, and we went after some segments of the economy that made sense in North Las Vegas. These very large distribution centers bring in quite a bit of revenue, right? They were perfect for North Las Vegas because that was one of the assets that we did have – lots of available land near the major axis of transportation. So it made it natural for us to have companies like Fanatics. I myself am not too big a fan of online shopping, but these guys – Amazon has a presence, I think, with five of their mega warehouses. One of them is well over a million square feet, right?

Magdalena Martinez [27:08]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [27:10]

When they were doing the opening for that one, I was on one end of the building; I couldn't quite see all the way to the other end of the building. Even though there was really good lighting, I could barely make it to the opposing wall, about a quarter of a mile away, you know? It just –that's really helped us out.

Magdalena Martinez [27:26]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [27:29]

Getting back to COVID, like I said, I think it's these disasters, whether it be an economic downturn – the Great Recession – or COVID, that really put people in a clutch hold. Definitely, the most creative, the ones who were able to shift gears, they're the ones who get by. I think my city almost didn't make it through the first crisis, but I think because of the creativity that our people showed, we were able to withstand the second one.

Magdalena Martinez [28:04]

Mm-hmm, yeah. That's really interesting, and that gets to one of the questions, what can we learn from the COVID crisis that could be lessons for future crises? And so, you've talked about really harnessing the creativity of people, right? People having to be more creative and thoughtful about how to get stuff done [Isaac interrupts] – go ahead.

Isaac Barron [28:28]

I was going to say when I teach – I don't teach, as you call it – I have a unit called "Creativity." And one of the barriers to creativity is, of course, the functional fixatives. The thing that, you know, for instance, if I have a nail here, [holds up screw] – this is a screw, but I've got a nail here. I know it's hard to – if I don't have a hammer, I can't nail something into the wall. But if you have a rock – well, I wish this was a rock – but if I have a rock, I could just use my flat rock and tap that baby in.

Magdalena Martinez [29:04]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [29:05]

Someone sees a rock; I see a primitive hammer. Functional fixatives keep us from moving past

these really artificial barriers that we put up for things, right? And hey, why couldn't our librarians, who are no longer going to be attending to books, be the first line of communication with all of our businesses? Many of them were bilingual, and they were perfect for contacting these businesses, here in North of Vegas, to make sure that they knew that either A, they were not supposed to be open, or B, that they *could* be open if they were an essential business, and so on and so forth. We were creative with some of our businesses. They did takeout including takeout versions of alcohol. We were creative with business licensing, so they would have sales so they could continue to draw revenue streams.

Magdalena Martinez [30:04]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [30:06]

It's just that you have to be extremely creative, and you can't allow your organization to box itself in. Hey, remember the old thing is to say, "Hey, well, that's not *my* job," right? Well, actually, it *should* be your job because everyone else's well-being also depends upon it. So if you're going to be a widget maker, and now, you're being asked to make -learners, well, you had better learn how to make -learners because we don't need widgets, and if we need -learners, you're not going to be able to make it.

I think, also, another thing is it shows you our city did work well with our sister municipalities, and again, especially with the county. So when a mutual crisis hits, the better lines of communication that you have with your other entities, the better off you are. As a valley, we've been pretty good about that, I think. Years ago – hey, it might rain today. I'm a member of the flood control district, right? I'm the North Las Vegas representative to that. I remember a time when there was no such thing, there was Lake Charleston, and there were rushing rapids through Caesars Palace. Washington had an open ditch that swept cars away.

Magdalena Martinez [31:32]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [31:33]

But as a region, we got together and created an agency that would handle, administer, and build new flood control channels, and with a small investment, for the most part, that has been greatly reduced. We still have, of course, some localized flooding, but now the catastrophic type of flooding that would happen if we didn't have that doesn't happen. As a region, our regional fathers here, a couple of generations ago, had it right, and we did the same thing with RTC. I don't know if you remember the bad old days of Las Vegas Transit, our bus system that didn't hardly go anywhere. They took the strip, of course, kind of lucrative, but they didn't go hardly anywhere else, really bad service, and it really sucked. You can't have a modern city without some sort of decent transportation, and as a region, when it came together, and we had first CAT and then the Regional Transportation Commission, we were able to move large numbers of people across the valley.

So that spirit that can be spirit, now, we've had it before. It's just times like COVID that make us tear down certain barriers for us to adapt. That being said, I know we can't prepare for everything, but there's some things that are just right there on the horizon. Again, we have the South Nevada Water Authority, which is looking forward. Las Vegas and New Mexico have now, I think, a 45-day supply of water. What happens when they get to a five-day supply of water and a two-day supply of water? What's going to happen with them?

Although we've been very good here in Las Vegas, cutting down here, we've actually been seen as a model for implementing and cutting down on water use. We're going to have to go to even using less water, but it's things like that, you know what I mean? We have lots of agriculture that's upstream, and there's going to have to be more of a balance between the agriculture upstream, and then what's left to the people who are downstream.

Magdalena Martinez [33:50]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [33:54]

I want to say there's so many lessons to be learned, and that we always learn from these lessons, but it doesn't look like that. I'm going to say don't look now, but I think the Supreme Court took quite a bit of authority away from the EPA, right? So if we can't even agree on some basic tenets of things, we might be in a little bit of trouble.

Magdalena Martinez [34:22]

Yeah, that's very helpful. In thinking about the different levels of government, is there anything you wish the government, whether it was federal, state, local, or county, did differently or could do differently, in response to COVID and other types of crises like economic crises?

Isaac Barron [34:48]

(pauses) How should I put this? Although we have our sovereign city here in North Las Vegas, we're still subject to a lot of vagaries of political expediency, and that comes from various levels. I couldn't tell you why North Las Vegas didn't, and Reno was afforded \$46 million in COVID relief money that came from the Treasury's second round of allocation to the state, with which the state has its thing that it has to pay for, but the other 40% was supposedly divvied out to all the municipalities and counties that were not allocated money in the first round. The qualifier was that a city or county had to have a certain population.

So Clark County and Las Vegas were allocated directly from the Treasury, and I had no problem with that, but the city of North Las Vegas was not allocated anything from the state. When we read the interpretation, it was supposed to go to a state just like us, and part of that is it's a political decision and politics are involved. Unfortunately, if you don't have the political firepower to get spoken up for, sometimes we're not listened to. We were very judicious and very efficient with the money that we did get from our partners here at Clark County.

Again, for instance, Reno, they have a similar population that we do – about 270,000 people – and we're the only city of color. I'm not saying we had to get 46 million bucks, but something close to that could have really made things a lot easier for our residents, who were really lacking.

Also, there's lots of unintended consequences. Here, of course, we passed an eviction moratorium in North Las Vegas. The big problem was that we didn't have the infrastructure to where people could communicate that they were being evicted anyhow, no matter what we said. That was a little bit of an issue. I can't say that it's just people who are only Latinos or only people who are primarily Spanish speakers because we had lots of native English speakers, right, Latinos and non-Latinos, who were also going through that, and they never communicated the fact that they were being evicted, contrary to-

There were other things that happened. I did take a few angry emails from people. There were a few people who were retirees, who rent two or three houses, and that's their income for retirement, right? I had some of these people telling me "Hey, I have people that now are not paying me." I don't think they were blaming us for that one – "People are not paying me, but I can't evict them. I can't get someone else who could use that housing and could pay me, and you, just now, undercut my income." I mean I took a few of those phone calls.

There are just so many things that you cannot plan for, and there are just so many eventualities that come. Who could have ever thought of these things? Again, although I think the original shutdown was in 2020 – I remember it was in March of that year when we had that shutdown, and we thought it would be for a few weeks. Who was going to be able to anticipate the fact that it would be an entire year and a half until we came back? There was just no way to anticipate that.

Magdalena Martinez [39:14]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [39:16]

I will also say this, and it's like one of the lessons learned. We paid a heavy price as a society, and as a nation, and we paid an extremely heavy price when it came to the fact that our society, our country, and even our local community had not invested that much in community health. Community health is a big deal. If you have a really active and well-informed populace who understands the importance of not eating too many chicharrones, right, who understands and has access to good preventative care, then you don't have the huge problems that we did.

Speaking of political factors, at the time of COVID, we had a guy who, as our president, for a while there, he was doubting that COVID even existed, and then he was giving us bad information. "Hey, some bleach. Just gargle with that. Swallow a light," you know? So much misinformation, and unfortunately, when you have your authorities who are trained and equipped to handle this, when they're being undermined, there's a big drop-off.

I still even have people in my own family who have not gotten vaccinated, and when I ask them, they say, "It hasn't been proven yet." Hold on a second. We have hundreds of millions of people who have been vaccinated with a very small number of people who have side effects. That sounds pretty safe. When people drop off their kids at school, I don't see anybody yakking about that. "Hey, they're ready to drop their kids off to school," and "You're going to get all these vaccinations because I'm not going to keep you at home," right? Are we or are we not going to

trust them? Are we or are we not going to have faith in our leaders? We have these health authorities. Either we're going to trust in their leadership and advice, or why even have them?

So there's all sorts of vagaries that happen. I also think that people 100 years from now will look back upon it, and they won't believe some of the things that actually happened. It's been challenging, and I have to say this with a smile in my voice. My godmother was the second person who was laid to rest here in Las Vegas, and she had COVID.

Magdalena Martinez [42:13]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [42:14]

She was a relatively healthy woman of 64. A beautiful person inside and out. She passed away, and I was not allowed to show up to her funeral, you know? My beloved godmother. It was only just her four sons, and I think only two – they could only allow six people total, so the rest of us weren't able to attend her being placed into eternity.

Another person whom I really respect, and whose mother I really care about, did a fantastic job with her kids. She was laid to rest. The next day, I'm getting a phone call from my brother, and I said, "Hey, Brother, I hope you're taking care of yourself and protecting yourself from COVID," and he used some colorful language to express the fact that he thought that COVID was a hoax – the colorful language is something I'd rather not repeat here – I'm trying to cut down on cursing, okay?

When you have ideological concerns that actually override proven science, things that we believe in, again, a Republican sense of leadership that we have, we elect people because we believe that they're going to serve our nation, not necessarily push certain ideologies.

Magdalena Martinez [43:50]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [43:53]

I don't think even yet, we still haven't recovered from that. I remember as a child, in the 70s growing up, I was part of that little generation of children who, when the United Nations got together and decided we're no longer going to have polio, wreaked havoc amongst our young people and children. The richer nations got together to help the poorer nations do mass vaccination across the globe. And it seemed that in the wild, polio went extinct because everybody believed and everybody did their part. I got my shot, and then you see the levels of polio almost drop off – I guess it's coming back now. There's been a few little, tiny outbreaks here and there.

Magdalena Martinez [44:43]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [44:44]

We see what has happened in the past. The entire planet got together to eradicate a common foe.

Whether it's going to be COVID – I'm a history teacher. It's only a matter of time before we have yet another pandemic. The biggest killer of humanity over time has not been wars. It's been a disease, one disease after another, and it's only a matter of time before we have another one. Or we're facing, again, an existential threat with climate change, right? We have shown that we have the ability to come together to address this. But it's political willpower that will decide whether these things actually happen or not.

Magdalena Martinez [45:33]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [45:35]

And so, I want to say that I'm very optimistic about it, Professor, but I'm very worried. Right now, I'm actually close to tears thinking that my granddaughters are going to have a world that is much less than the world I grew up in. As caretakers, stakeholders, and stewards of our society, it's very hard to admit that we have *not* met the challenge.

Magdalena Martinez [46:14]

Actually, you started to touch on the last question, and that was, are you hopeful, and if so, what are you hopeful for?

Isaac Barron [46:23]

By my nature, I think I'm an optimist. I think you have to be an optimist if you're a teacher because, you know, I've been doing this for almost three decades. This is my 28th year, right? And so, you've seen everything, and you've seen every possibility for – I've had students who are the 4.85 GPA, little supercomputers that went full rides to West Point, to MIT. They work for Raytheon; they work for McDonnell Douglas; they're doctors, and they've opened up their own practices; they're psychologists; they're teachers, right?

Then, of course, you have kids who have challenges, and they don't even get past the first couple weeks of school. For them, not even knowing where your next meal is going to come from is a challenge. I think if you're an educator, you deal in hope. You can't possibly be here, stand in front of young people, and tell them that there's no hope, or else, what are you doing?

At the same time, again, I'm acutely aware of the people who I grew up with in my neighborhood. My friends – I'm 52, and the lifespan here for a typical Latino male, I think is like 65, which is a little bit less than a Caucasian male, but still, like six years more than my Black friends. I've had my friends, my own brother who's passed away, and many young men from my neighborhood. They've been passing away for the last few years, right? So you notice that and you're wondering, so, what's going on here?

There's lots of things, you know, that are actually frightening; at your own university, there's a study on micro particles that are spilled through the use of diesel fuel and all the micro particles that come from the tires on the freeways. And your university tracked the instances of asthma and other respiratory diseases along the corridors of I-15 and 95, cutting right through the heaviest African American and Latino parts of our city.

Magdalena Martinez [49:05]

Mm-hmm.

Isaac Barron [49:06]

And have we really addressed it that much? Eh, kind of yes, but kind of no. Heat islands. Well, who lives in these heat islands the most? It happens to be – if you just overlay the map where the heaviest concentrations of Blacks and Latinos are, that's also the places where they have the highest heat islands. I represent downtown North Las Vegas which was built under a different standard of building. They didn't understand that back in the 50s and 60s, the importance of green zones and vegetative zones, right?

You can tell when you're flying – I told these people who came to relocate apart from us; a park equipment convention came, and they actually renovated one of our parks. I told them that they would know when they were flying over North Las Vegas. It's the part where you don't see all those glimmering swimming pools. A lot fewer green spaces. That's how they'll know they're over North Las Vegas and parts of East Las Vegas because we had different design standards. And to retrofit it, eh, it's not always the easiest thing to do. All of these are things that, you know, – and then all you have to do is look at the pictures like me. I have resisted driving over there because I don't think I want to be shocked. I see the pictures of where I used to go fishing with my grandfather there in Las Vegas/Wash. There used to be 50 or 60 feet of water over there – I could drive up there, and if there's any fish, I could probably just pick up their carcasses, right? Or maybe if they're in pools, probably just club them with a bat. It's staring at us right in the face, you know? I drive north to see my granddaughters, and there's a haze of smoke – wow. It just makes the entire midday into a twilight from all the incredible forest fires and rain fires in the area.

I want to be a positive prof, I really do. At the same time, the Supreme Court, again, just went ahead and cut the authority of the EPA, they were founded now to try to protect our natural resources and environment. What's wrong with *that*? There is a way to have business profit, and you can still protect the environment at the same time. There is a way. But here, things in our country are just – we're told that it's a zero-sum game, and it doesn't have to be.

There are things that we can do now to mitigate this, right? I'm planning on finding if there's a showerhead that will allow me to go ahead and hit a button to let the water flow so I can shower myself and get nice and wet. I'll lather myself up, and then turn it back on to rinse off. I'm hoping that will cut my own personal usage. Years ago, I started turning the water off while I'm brushing if I'm not actually brushing.

All it takes is to go to a society that's been used to doing more with less. You go to Mexico, where you have to pay for the water that's dumped into your cistern, and you have to pay for drinking water, right? You have to go get it from the corner store there. And you realize that people have been doing a lot more with a lot less. It's like in our country, whereas we have the – if we actually believe that we're an exceptional country, if we really believe in American exceptionalism – if we actually believe that, then we're the ones who should be setting the pace for the rest of the world when it comes to preserving it and being good stewards of our natural

resources. I'm sorry to say that I think we're lacking. I think we could do a lot better, and that's with me too.

Magdalena Martinez [53:35]

I really appreciate you taking the time, Isaac, to talk to me. Thank you so much. I will have these transcribed and send them your way. At that point, you can review it and mark up or take out any things that you would like to be included or not included. So thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it.

Isaac Barron [53:58]

No problem. And I hope I wasn't too depressing here. Like I said, I start off being very optimistic, but sometimes it's hard. Prof, it's hard sometimes, you know? It really is. I'm hoping that the future looks a little bit better. Maybe my generation, the Gen X-ers, maybe we couldn't do it. Maybe we couldn't find ourselves to do it. But maybe the Gen Z-ers, you know, at first I get really frustrated with them, but maybe they'll have the answers that my generation didn't have.

Magdalena Martinez [54:37]

Thanks so much, and good luck next week when school starts.

Isaac Barron [54:41]

Oh, it's going to be fun.

Magdalena Martinez [54:42]

Yeah. Take good care.

Isaac Barron [54:45]

Thank you. You too.

Magdalena Martinez [54:46]

Bye.

End of audio: 54:50