

Interview with Daniel Valenzuela, 2024 Candidate for Maricopa Board of Supervisors (District 3)

By Clay Latimer, April 2024

Daniel Valenzuela recalls it vividly as if it were yesterday, not decades ago.

Without warning, his mother collapsed in their Phoenix home, leaving her son, then 7, almost frozen in fear.

Then a local fire crew showed up.

“They took action and saved her life and changed my life,” he said.

“What I noticed immediately is that they didn’t care what our house looked like, they didn’t care how much money she had in the bank, they didn’t care where she was from.

“And that was also the first time I’d seen a Latino firefighter. I was thinking ‘Maybe I can do that.’ I’ve never, forgotten that experience.”

In a way, that experience set the tone for Valenzuela’s life, as his resume shows: a Glendale firefighter for decades. A two-term Phoenix City councilman. A candidate for Phoenix mayor. And now, the Democratic candidate for Maricopa County Board of Supervisors in District 3, a politically purple region that includes a vast swath of central and northern Phoenix.

Valenzuela knows every corner of the district. Born and raised in Phoenix, the youngest of six children raised primarily by a single mom, he attended 13 public schools in Phoenix and lived in more homes than that.

“We certainly had our challenges,” he said. “But it was the people of this community who helped us when we needed help.

“They made me who I am - a public servant. A coalition builder and a problem solver. I’m excited about (running for Supervisor) because the role is truly to be a coalition builder. All five supervisors are working with one another.”

The Board of Supervisors has long been a Republican stronghold. But demographics in the Valley are changing, offering Democrats an opportunity to crack the conservative's hold on the powerful board, particularly in District 3, which was remapped for 2024. Although the GOP still retains a slight registration edge there, Democrats had a strong track record before restricting.

In the 2022 midterms, for example, the Dems outpolled Republicans for the U.S. Senate, governor, secretary of state, attorney general, and superintendent of public instruction. State treasurer was the only race won by Republicans in the district.

In 2020, meanwhile, the district's voters favored Joe Biden over Donald Trump and Mark Kelly over Martha McSally and backed Democrats for U.S. Senate, secretary of state and superintendent in 2018.

But Valenzuela isn't taking anything for granted. He can't. In both 2020 and 2022, Democratic voters failed to cast ballots in down-ballot races at the same clip, which is why Republican Gates narrowly defeated his Democratic opponent for the Board of Supervisors post.

"The decisions made in these local offices are incredibly vital to our everyday lives and the lives of our children," he said. "It's just a matter of drilling down and educating people on the importance of these races. We have to drive home that message.

"If we can get people to vote from the bottom up â€¦"

As a Supervisor, Valenzuela intends to address problems with tangible, measurable programs rather than dipping into the cultural wars - much as he did as a councilman.

These issues include:

Economy: As a Councilman, Valenzuela helped refocus Phoenix's economic development on cutting-edge high-TD industries like information technology, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, technology, and entrepreneurship.

"We have to put entrepreneurs in a position to thrive," he said.

Valenzuela raised \$1 million of private sector funds to create CodePHX, making coding accessible, equitable, and free to students 3-17 across Phoenix regardless of

neighborhood. He also secured more investment capital for start-up projects and pushed hard for the Northwest Light Rail Extension, which created 1,500 jobs.

Valenzuela also chaired the city's two pension reform efforts saving Phoenix taxpayers more than 1 billion dollars spanning 20 years.

Public safety - As a City Councilman, Valenzuela fought to lift the hiring freeze to add more police officers, worked to secure federal grants to add more resources for public safety, and helped enact the city's Anti-Discrimination Ordinance.

"There are also some real challenges that we need leadership on - housing issues, the homeless issue, the social issues that are tied into behavioral health. The county can really take a leadership role. We truly have an opportunity to move the needle here."

Though he's retired, Valenzuela remains a fireman at heart. While running for mayor, he stopped to render aid at a serious crash involving a pedestrian.

"It was dark and there was quite a bit of traffic. It all happened quickly," Valenzuela said. "But when this person was struck by a vehicle, I know I did what any first-responder would do. I have an obligation to act."

That was a lesson he learned as a boy.