

By Clay Latimer

For Julie Cieniawski, it was a telling moment.

While collecting signatures for Arizona's right-to-abortion amendment, the Democratic candidate for Maricopa County Supervisor in District 2 watched as young men and women, independents, Republicans, and angry Democrats of all stripes line up to support a ballot measure that would enshrine abortion access in the state's constitution.

A new emerging coalition? A pivot point for moderate Republican and independent women? The path to a victory in 2024 - and beyond?

Cieniawski certainly hopes so.

"We had some gentlemen and young men coming to the table and putting their name on the line to try to get this constitutional change on the ballot. To me, that's very eye-opening," she said.

"And it's exciting to me because this isn't just an older person's issue. I think young people are waking up. They want to have some impact on their own destiny

"Even in areas that have typically been red, I'm seeing huge excitement. Republicans saying this used to be my party but it's no longer my party; Democrats saying 'I'm so excited for the stance they take on humanity.' They're starting to rise up and organize better.

Added Cieniawski: "I've worked all my adult life investing in our children and our families and our communities. And I see the Arizona Supreme Court having set us back, obviously, to the territorial era. That's insulting to the citizens of Arizona, specifically women and families. But it's not just a woman's issue. This is a human issue."

Born and raised in New Hope, Minnesota, Cieniawski attended neighborhood public schools and is a first-generation college graduate, receiving both her bachelor's and master's degrees in education from the University of Minnesota.

As a middle-school teacher, she received the Scottsdale Unified School District Foundation's Quest for Excellence Award recognizing Excellence in Civic Leadership and was named a Scottsdale Charros Outstanding Teacher.

She also worked on SUSD Bond and Override oversight committees, was Scottsdale Education Association President for three years, and served on Arizona Education Association's Board of Directors for six years.

Cieniawski says her decision to run for Supervisor is a continuation of the four years she served on the SUSD School Board, which was an extension of the four decades she worked as a teacher, mom, and community leader in Mesa and Scottsdale.

She makes little distinction in those roles.

"For the last 34 years, I've been active, whether it's coaching youth sports or helping an organization or feeding people or stuffing envelopes. Whether it's helping a teacher out at school when my children were in school, or being the room mom and the scout leader. I've always just had this interest and desire to serve in the community. This is about continuing this effort, but only on a larger and more impactful scale. "

Cieniawski turned to electoral politics in 2020, winning an at-large seat on the Scottsdale school board by a commanding margin.

It was a rough ride - COVID and MAGA cultural issues turned school boards into war zones. She received death threats during a tumultuous tenure, but held her ground and proved a powerful voice for teachers and students.

Democratic leaders turned to her to run for MC Supervisor, and despite joining the race only recently, she quickly amassed the necessary signatures to secure a ballot spot.

In District 2, which includes Scottsdale, incumbent Thomas Galvin, a Republican, faces a primary challenge from Republican Michelle UgentiRita.

Cieniawski is the sole Democrat running, so she'll have to wait until Nov. 5 to face the winner of the Republican face-off.

"There are many issues that the supervisors oversee that I'm concerned about," she said. "If I had to prioritize, I would definitely include the integrity of our elections.

"I'd also include safe communities, which include things that impact our families like issues of recidivism, public safety, and not just opioid epidemics and deaths but also the fentanyl issues that our children and families are dealing with."

In many cases, voters tend to lose interest in down-ballot races, focusing instead on national and congressional contests. That's a concern for Cieniawski, who stresses the impact of local offices on daily, everyday life.

"That's the message I'm sharing with people. But I think we have a long way to go with that. "I hope voters are realizing the impact they will feel in their daily lives from (local elections). " .