

## **Interview with David Sandoval, 2024 Candidate for Maricopa Board of Supervisors (District 4)**

**By Clay Latimer, March 2024**

To win a seat on the Maricopa Board of Supervisors, David Sandoval must defeat Republican star Debbie Lasko in a conservative district where Democrats have to scrap for votes.

That's the easy part.

The real adventure begins if Sandoval wins.

Once a sleepy, low-profile office, county supervisors now find themselves on the front lines of the bitter culture and political wars roiling the nation.

Look no further than Clint Hickman and Bill Gates, loyal Republican supervisors who quit rather than face endless harassment - even death threats - from their party for voting to certify Biden's win over Donald Trump.

Sandoval knows the feeling. As president of the Peoria School Board during the pandemic and bitter culture wars, he was caught in the crosshairs. From mask mandates to critical race theory and gender identity, his leadership was tested in unforeseen ways.

Yet Sandoval calmly guided the district through the ordeal, finding common ground where there appeared to be none, a skill he hopes to call upon as a county supervisor.

"It's scaled differently, but when you look at the role of a Supervisor, it's very similar to what I do with the school district," he said.

"It's about understanding what leadership means. That means not to be in charge but to serve those in charge.

"One of the perspectives I live by is leading with empathy. All of our communities have different stories and different aspirations. It's about humanizing what they do and how they see things. It's about bringing humanity back into these roles and getting back to normalcy. "

Maricopa County's Board of Supervisors is made up of five elected members. They oversee a \$4.5 billion budget in the fourth most populous in the nation.

Sandoval is running District 4, a conservative-leaning area that stretches across the northwestern Valley, encompassing some of the same geographic areas as Lesko's congressional district.

A third-generation Arizonan with deep roots in Peoria, Sandoval hopes his local bona fides will help distinguish him from Lesko.

"I'm deeply rooted in the city of Peoria and certainly the West Valley," Sandoval said. "My mom and her siblings graduated from Peoria High School in the 1930s. My Aunt Toni Lebario was the

first Hispanic woman business owner in Peoria. My wife, myself, and our children all attended West Valley public schools.

"I'm grateful for the chance to wake up and do what I can to make a difference."

As longtime President/CEO of Blender Marketing Group, Sandoval served on the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and was named "Who's Who in Hispanic Business" by Hispanic Business Magazine.

He was first elected to the school board in 2017, serving four years as president. As a county supervisor, he would continue his full-throated support of public schools.

"I'm a big proponent of public education," he said. "I think there are areas of collaboration between the county and our public schools that can be better. For example, making sure our students are prepared for 21st century workforce."

During his time on the board, Sandoval witnessed a stunning transformation in the office. The spread of COVID and election denialism in the wake of President Joe Biden's win over Donald Trump radicalized many Republicans, some of whom targeted Sandoval and his family.

"There were certainly threats online, via social media," he said. "Our family goes to

the same restaurant after church. There was a time when we were being followed to the restaurant. When they approached us they'd say, 'We're disappointed in your decision.' I think that was their way of trying to intimidate me.

"We had to stop going to that restaurant. Unfortunately, we had to sit down with our kids and say, 'Look, this is what's going on.'

"I will always do my best to stand in another's shoes to try and understand how they came to the perspective that they did," he continued "But that's not always reciprocated. "

Much of the same venom was directed at the Board of Supervisors. Gates was labeled a traitor who should be shot or hung. One person wrote on social media that his daughters should be raped. After months of abuse, he said he suffers from PTSD and retired.

Hickman, the recipient of a lynching threat, pulled out too despite years of loyalty to the Republican Party.

"I was looking way too much in my rear-view window," he said.

Adding a Democrat to the Board of Supervisors would bring much-needed balance, but beating Lesko won't be easy in a red district.

A key issue for Sandoval: Lesko's support of Trump's unfounded accusations of election fraud.

She voted against certifying the 2020 presidential election results in Pennsylvania and Arizona and signed onto an election challenge lawsuit that was swiftly dismissed by the U.S. Supreme Court.

“We all know that allegations have been unfounded,” he said. “This is where I go back to the idea that we sit in seats that are designed to serve people. That’s what is important to me. I don’t allow politics to have a weighted voice in the decisions I make.

“I will not negotiate my values. I am this is who I am I love people and I thrive and prioritize relationships and am very intentional about that. But I’m also very engaged and I’m not going to come in and make a decision just because of a small group. I’m gonna make a decision based on, you know, the 12 cities that this district represents.”