

# BRIAN SANDOVAL

## NEVADA'S FIRST HISPANIC

BY: MAE FLENNY, EDITOR



*Growing up in rural Sparks, Nevada tending cows, chickens and sheep, the newly-appointed Judge Brian Sandoval had ambitions of a career in veterinary medicine. His brother, however, saw visions of courtrooms, briefs and depositions. But as fate would have it, their destinies were swapped. Sandoval's brother became the veterinarian in the family and, well as they say, the rest is history.*

At only 42, Sandoval has already celebrated many milestones guaranteeing him a place in Nevada history books. At age 35, Sandoval was the youngest person in Nevada history to serve as chairman of the Nevada Gaming Commission. As attorney general, he became the first Hispanic elected to a state-wide office in Nevada. Most recently, an equally notable achievement was added to his repertoire. Judge Sandoval became Nevada's first Hispanic to take the bench as a U.S. district court judge.

Sandoval is also among the youngest U.S. district court judges in the country and among the youngest in Nevada's history. Judge Howard McKibben was 44 and Judge Philip Pro was 41 when appointed.

There was little surprise about Sandoval's appointment. The legal community had been abuzz for several years about the possibility of Sandoval donning the federal judge's robe. Some five years before President George W. Bush appointed Sandoval to the bench, the judgeship had been dangled before him. A younger, less experienced Sandoval was courted for the position by Sen. Harry Reid. In 2005, Senators Harry Reid and John Ensign officially nominated Sandoval to succeed McKibben, who took senior status in April 2005.

"The first time, I just didn't feel I was ready to be a federal district court judge," he says. "I felt I needed some more experience. I was very pleased when Senator Reid made the offer again."

Sandoval dismisses claims that he lacks courtroom experience.

"I'm very confident in my litigation skills and confident in the courtroom," he says. "I'm no stranger to criminal prosecution with the wide latitude of the AG office. As attorney general you are confronted with litigation from every part of the legal spectrum, criminal,

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habeas corpus, and civil. You're exposed to complex litigation that some lawyers won't see in their entire legal careers. I believe it prepared me well."

Confident and raring to go, Sandoval is not daunted by the task ahead.

"First and foremost, my goal is to be an effective, prepared judge," he says. "I want the legal community to be confident that I will be well prepared when they come in my courtroom. I want to be the best possible judge I can be. I want to be seen as somebody who is fair. I want individuals to know they are going to be treated with dignity and respect."

Sandoval brings to his role numerous accolades from his previous career. Sandoval graduated from the University of Nevada and The Ohio State University College of Law. During law school, he served as an extern to the Ohio Supreme Court. As a private practitioner, Sandoval had a varied law practice, where he engaged in litigation, administrative and adoption matters.

Under his direction, the commission adopted regulations that limited neighborhood gaming, prohibited child-themed slot machines and enhanced protections for problem gamblers. As chairman, Sandoval also testified before the United States Congress and the Nevada Legislature.

As attorney general, Sandoval led the fight against the storage of nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain, developed the state's first Public Integrity Unit and served as an advocate for seniors and children.

As the state's chief law enforcement officer, Sandoval led a staff of 350, including 140 attorneys, and administered a budget of \$42 million. Sandoval was also the chairman and a member of several state boards and commissions, including the Nevada Boards of Pardons, Prisons, Transportation, and Examiners, the Nevada Cyber-Crime Task Force and the Prosecutorial Advisory Council.

Sandoval also served two terms in the Nevada Legislature where he sponsored 14 bills that became law. As a legislator, Sandoval served on the Nevada Legislative Commission, the Advisory Commission on Sentencing,

the Juvenile Justice Commission, the Advisory Council on Community Notification of Sex Offenders and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Oversight Committee. After serving as a legislator, Sandoval spent three years as Nevada's at-large member of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board. The Board is a bi-state agency that adopts land use policies for Lake Tahoe.

"I'm very proud and honored to have served as attorney general for the people of Nevada," he says. "I never would have been successful without their help. During my tenure, the cases we brought with Yucca will lead to its demise. We set up senior protection and child protection programs. I wanted that to be a focus of my administration. We set up a public integrity unit that dramatically increased prosecution of people who violated public trust. I will look back with nothing but pride. I feel I accomplished everything I set out to accomplish."

Sandoval willingly accepts the title of role model for Nevada's youth and Hispanics. He touts the importance of education, just as his parents instilled that value in him. Sandoval's exposure to the legal world came through his mother, a legal secretary at that time.

"There were no lawyers in our family. When I was young, my mom was a legal secretary and worked for U.S. Attorney Larry Semenza and a magistrate judge. That was my first exposure to the law," he says. "I would sit at the courthouse and wait for her to get off work. At 13, I worked at the cafeteria at the old federal courthouse in Reno. As I grew older, I became very interested in government and law. It was something I grew to be very passionate about. I had a dream that I never gave up on. I hope other Hispanics and young people will see if they work hard and stay in school they can achieve it as well."

Sandoval's courtroom is located in Reno, Nevada. Sandoval is married to Kathleen Sandoval, a Reno native who is the Program Director at the Children's Cabinet of Reno, Nevada. They have three children, James, Madeline and Marisa.