

Chancellor's Office Podcast CCC21042 Episode 42 – Transcript

Eloy Oakley: Hi, this is Eloy Ortiz Oakley, Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, and you're listening to another episode of the "California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office" podcast.

As California and its leaders look to a recovery from the impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic, our state's higher education system will be at the forefront leading the way in creating new technologies, growing our economy and preparing our workforce for the future.

The California Community Colleges Vision for Success continues to focus on ensuring that students from all backgrounds succeed in reaching their goals and improving their families and communities. Latinos are California's largest ethnic and racial demographics, and more than 40% of California Community College students are Latino. Today we're going to have a discussion with Mike Madrid, principal at Grassroots Labs and a nationally recognized expert on Latino voting trends.

Mike started this journey with his senior thesis at Georgetown University on Latino politics. Mike has served as a press Secretary for the California Assembly Republican leader and political director for the California Republican Party. In these roles Mike worked to develop and execute innovative Latino outreach and communication strategies and in 2001, Mike was named one of America's most influential Hispanics by Hispanic Business Magazine, and he's a regular commentator on Latino political issues and statewide and national media publications.

Mike Madrid was also co-founder of the Lincoln Project, which as many of you know, received quite a bit of attention during the 2020 presidential race. As a partner in the political research data and consulting firm Grassroots Lab, Mike has developed new data and analytical approaches to political modeling. He is a fellow at the Unruh Institute for Politics at USC and is the co-director of the Los Angeles USC Times Poll. Mike was appointed to the board of directors of the American Association of Political Consultants.

Now, Mike Madrid's most important qualities are that he is a product of the California Community Colleges. He comes from Moorpark College and also served in a leadership role as the student member on the California Community Colleges Board of Governors. Mike, welcome to the show.

Mike Madrid: Eloy it's so great to be with you, I really appreciate you having me I'm looking forward to the discussion.

Eloy Oakley: Well, it's great to have you Mike, and let's start by just telling our listeners, you know, describe your experiences in the California Community Colleges. What did that experience do for you, particularly now as a successful political consultant, and what made you take on some of the leadership roles that led you to be the student member of the Board of Governors?

Mike Madrid: Well, that's a great question Eloy and as I was listening to that very long introduction, two things ran through my mind. The first is I'm realizing how old I'm getting, and how extended my resume is

Eloy Oakley: You and I, both.

Mike Madrid: But, more importantly, the really impactful understanding that all of that began with my Community college Experience, and I say that because my personal story runs a little bit like this: you know I grew up a young Latino in Ventura County, family of Mexican American parents. My father worked very hard to get a college degree during night school.

College really was not much of a priority for us as kids and what we were focused on, and look, I graduated from high school with a 2.1 GPA and ended up delivering pizza for a couple of years, and genuinely believe, like that was what my career trajectory was going to be. And after a couple of years of doing that, I realized this is probably not what I want to do for the next 60 years and with my 2.1 GPA, where could I go?

What options did I have, and fortunately, because of the vision of the California master plan which I knew nothing about at the time, but would learn intimately later, as a member of the Board of Governors for the Community college system, there were Californians who had the foresight and the vision and made the investment, based off this really radical notion that anybody who wanted to get a higher degree, a higher education, could get one. And as a state, we were going to make that commitment.

And that's what gave me a second chance at life, it gave me opportunity to move from delivering Domino's Pizza which, nothing wrong with that, but within a few years to studying at the top, international relations school in the world, and the bridge to that was Moorpark College, was the community college that said, okay,

for very few dollars, at the time we were in the middle of early recession, the 1990s, you can come and get a second chance if you're willing to make something of your life and want to move up in whatever direction you want to go to. California is behind you. We're behind you.

And everything I have accomplished professionally everything I have accomplished professionally is due to that commitment, and so I have always been a passionate and fierce advocate for our Community college system, because that story is unfolding every single day. And so many people look toward the way that we have created a system of higher education on the West Coast and view the UC system as this remarkable system of higher education and it truly is.

My son is now a senior at UC Berkeley studying physics, I couldn't be prouder. My daughter is studying Fine Arts at Cal State Sacramento, my youngest just got accepted to Cal State Sonoma. But the Crown jewel of the higher education system in California, is the California Community College system because of the breadth of what it has offered to so many millions of Californians since its inception, so I'm starting to go on so long, but it's something I'm very, very passionate about Eloy.

Eloy Oakley: That's quite all right, you don't have to apologize to me I share that sentiment, I share that story. So much of what you just described is a part of my story and a part of you know, thousands if not hundreds of thousands of students of color who have grown up in California. You know I can't help but point out the irony that you started out delivering pizza and you chose a career that eats nothing but pizza.

Mike Madrid: That has never occurred to me after three decades of doing that, so appreciate you pointing that out, but yeah. Look, I mean those are humble beginnings I but I'm grateful for every moment of that. Actually, I got involved in politics at Moorpark College for the 1992 presidential campaign. We were coming out of the recession, there was an extraordinary budget pressures, as we sometimes face in California when numbers start to get bad.

A lot of the weight of the shortfall was going to fall on the backs of poor Latino students and single moms and those second chance students, that I was one of. And I ran for student government President, was the president of the student government there at Moorpark College, and honestly, I started to network with other student government leaders throughout the state and some of the most influential people in California politics today, were those friendships that I

developed back then, as student government leaders fighting to protect and preserve this system for the next generation of Californians.

And so, my leadership, you know my role as an activist, my role as a professional politico really began there on that campus during that unique time in California and when I look back at what has been accomplished, I'm proud of that involvement and I hope to be engaged, as long as I'm able to keep fighting to protect it.

Eloy Oakley: That's a great reminder of where we all start out and how important those experiences are. Now that experience led you to be appointed to the Board of Governors, how did you how did you enjoy that experience working on that 17-member board or whatever size it was in those days.

Mike Madrid: Yeah, it was it was my first real foray into the policy arena, I had already had a couple of campaigns under my belt, and I knew that I was a campaign person and, to be honest, when I would get that thick agenda packet and I would just spend hours going over it and trying to understand legislation.

Eloy Oakley: It's still pretty thick.

Mike Madrid: It's still pretty thick, yeah, and I read every letter of it like three or four times, every time I would get it and just because I knew how important it was. I took it very seriously and I also knew that there were thousands of students that were relying on my voice to be there.

In all candor, I was kind of a quiet voice on the board directly during meetings, it's a little bit intimidating I think sometimes as a student when you're one of 17 members and there's a lot of very involved people and extraordinary experts and I was just kind of this pizza delivery guy 18 months ago, and then found myself in this position, the gravity of it never escaped me.

But a lot of the work that I did was behind the scenes and sitting down with the Chancellor and learning and the Chancellor staff and meeting with legislators, for the first time. And coming to understand how truly extraordinary that opportunity was but also again just the importance the gravity of the decisions that were being made and understanding as a very young man that the decisions that we were making we're going to impact the lives and the futures of 10s of thousands of people who would never know who we were who would never know what a Board of Governors was.

And there was something I think that really impressed upon me. I also did know, in all in all honesty, I knew I was not a policy person from that moment on, like I just, I was a political person. But I understood how important the policy piece was and really truly valued that.

Eloy Oakley: So, you have been a political consultant for quite some time you've been around elections quite a bit. But you really focus on Latino voting, Latino voters. That seems to be what most people associate Mike Madrid with, you know, really understanding Latino voters.

So, in your experience, you know, as you think about educators, as you think about college leaders, what can we do to amplify the voice of voters in California and in the nation, particularly Latino voters who make up the majority of the California Community colleges.

Mike Madrid: Well, the first thing to keep in mind is, especially to those listeners, that representation does matter, and advocates absolutely do matter and I learned this candidly with local members of the Faculty Association of Community colleges and sometimes there were policy differences between Fac and the Board of Governors, but.

Eloy Oakley: There still are.

Mike Madrid: Yeah, there always will be, and I appreciate that. There always will be. That's their job and that's the job of the administration, but when we start talking about these impacts not just as students, but as the largest ethnic group in California emerges, at a time when the middle class is shrinking for the first time.

I take it very personally, that there isn't a commitment to advocating directly for the Latino community because if we're not successful, if we're not successful as Californians within this generation of seeing greater economic mobility, we run a very real risk of creating a socially stratified society, the likes of which has never succeeded anywhere in human history.

When we start to build a society where fewer and fewer people are white and older and homeowners and college educated and more and more of our people are Brown and less educated and are not prepared for the new economy, that story has never ended well. And California is creating that society faster than anywhere else on the globe, at this moment, and the only, the only solution is the California Community college system.

Let me qualify that a little bit. If it's not the only, it's certainly the central piece to it because you cannot, you cannot educate enough people faster within one generation, given the tectonic shifts in our economy and our demography, without a system exactly like the Community college system. Extremely affordable, if not free tuition that allows us to bring people up quickly and prepare them for this economy.

This can't happen on the east coast, for example, and I learned that when I went to Georgetown. I had this tremendous experience as an advocate for the Community college system. Right? Where we have this vision, again with the master plan for higher education back during the Pat Brown governorship. And I went to the east coast and I realized why society was so stratified between wealthier white people and poor black people and it's because their entire system of higher education or most of it is all private institutions.

Eloy Oakley: Right.

Mike Madrid: And there was not that commitment. In California it's the exact opposite. And so, I understand there will always be issues between you know Labor and management, and they're always be issues between students and management. Management's tuff. But the truth of the matter is, we need to stop some of these arguments. Eloy, some of the arguments that I have seen happening on the board now are literally the same fights when I was a student in 1992, like the same fights.

Eloy Oakley: Right.

Mike Madrid: And if we had just given a little bit more, we would have changed dramatically the fortunes of Latinos in this state. So, I take it very personally, because it's my own story, but I also, it bothers me professionally as somebody who studies demography, studies the trajectory of the Latino middle class and knows quantifiably, that if we had a stronger priority on our Latino students at this moment in time, we would yield exponential results 10, 15, 20 years. Hence, that's what the system was designed to do.

And so, we need to remove ourselves from this very siloed interest group looking way of performing for the benefit of some elements of the Community college system and recognize this system, it is extraordinary. And if we just acknowledge that and hold that as the priority, the rest of it is going to take care of itself, it will.

Those issues will always remain those struggles will always remain. But we have gotten our eye off of the ball of the focus of committing to the master plan's original vision, we need to get back to it very quickly.

Eloy Oakley: Right, so let me pick up a little bit on that theme because I read at times some of the minutes or some of the op eds from the 90s for the Community colleges and you're right. A lot of the same issues keep coming up. Given that you know, particularly Today we see more Latino leaders in the legislature, we see more Latinos as influencers in the state of California, we have our first Latino US senator.

Why do you think we still we still struggle with that, in your mind, what do we need to do different, to really engage Latinos in the state and across the country and make sure that they have the economic mobility that we want for them?

Mike Madrid: It's a fantastic question it's actually the question that's probably defined my career, and so what I'll say might be a little bit controversial, so you can feel free to edit this if you need to, Eloy.

Eloy Oakley: Well, that will be nothing new.

Mike Madrid: To me, and again, as somebody who has probably polled and researched and looked at Latino voters more than probably anybody in the country, or at least close to, you know, a handful of people for the past 30 years. The number one issue for Latinos has always been economic concerns and job creation and economic mobility.

Eloy Oakley: mm hmm.

Mike Madrid: Yet we don't find that, as the legislative focus in our state legislature. And almost every Latino legislator is a friend at a personal level, certainly at a professional level, and I do have these conversations with them individually. We've created institute's that that you and I have worked and shared research and data on.

I have spent the better part of my career trying to prioritize this focus but politically what happens, Chancellor, is it's too easy to kind of resort back to kind of the sort of stereotypical issues which have historically defined our issues as civil rights struggles, rightfully so, okay.

There needs to be a voice for the undocumented. There needs to be the voice for the farmworker. There needs to be the voice for the least among us. It's a big driving force in my life. But there also needs to be from a data perspective, an agenda that focuses on creating and building a Latino middle class.

Eloy Oakley: Right.

Mike Madrid: And that begins with a higher education. It begins with access to the new economy. If we focus all of our efforts, and if you look at the agenda of a lot of Latino Legislators, and again, I'm not being pejorative here, I'm not dismissing these efforts. 90% of that focuses on a very small segment of who the Latino electorate and the Latino population is. What I'm interested in is the 90% of the Latino Community, our Community that is struggling to pay for a college tuition that still remains the first to go to college.

Eloy Oakley: Right.

Mike Madrid: That doesn't have the resources to pay rent, let alone tuition that is really central to the success of this state, and this economy. And we have a system in place to solve the problem now if we just commit to it. And so that's a long way of saying, we have the political infrastructure, we have the governmental infrastructure, we have the resources, what we don't have is the political will to say the top agenda for the Latino community is an economic mobility question.

Eloy Oakley: Right.

Mike Madrid: And the shame in all of that is that if we don't solve for that, you can't solve for any of the other problems. Any of the other problems. Our prison population will continue to explode, the fact that we're over-represented in the service industry. It will continue to grow.

Eloy Oakley: Right.

Mike Madrid: The inability for Latinos to buy a home will continue to grow. The lack of brown and black faces in Silicon Valley, will continue to exist, and it will exacerbate. There will be fewer voices in the professional class with names like ours. And so, the frustration, to me, is while representation does matter as the most important piece, the advocacy is equally as important.

We need to ask our Latino legislators and candidly, we need to hold them accountable for the results on lifting up the Latino middle class. We must do that. It's not enough to just say there's a lot of Latino legislators so Latinos are doing fine.

Latinos are probably doing worse by most social indicators in California than any other state in the Union, while we have more Latino policymakers and at any time in our history. That cannot continue. It must not be able to continue, and I don't mean that to attack our legislators, I mean it to strongly, strongly, encourage them to use that as a metric of success.

Eloy Oakley: Right. Well, I mean I definitely agree that we've got to build a middle class and with Latinos being, you know, nearly the majority or the majority depending on where you pick your point in time, we've got to do more to build that middle class, because they are our future in California.

Let me ask you this, I mean you've been pretty straightforward about your thoughts and opinions about Latinos in America. You've taken on significant leadership on this topic. During the last presidential race, you took on a very courageous, you know, point of view in creating, or at least co-founding the Lincoln project. Why did you decide to do that? And what do you think were the results of this crazy presidential election?

Mike Madrid: So, I think it probably strikes a lot of people who know me or have watched my career unfold, that I'm this strange, you know, Latino demographic and voting expert and have focused so much of my time in life and energy on increasing and expanding the vote and representation for Latinos, but I'm also a Republican who's been working in the Republican Party and the irony of that does not escape me, but I also, it's very much the story of my life and reconciling the two worlds, that I lived in. I grew up, again, in Moorpark, where I went to college.

Eloy Oakley: Right.

Mike Madrid: My family moved there in 1971 and we were a Mexican family. A town of 3,000 was probably 80-85% Latino. By the time I graduated from high school, it was the exact opposite. Latinos were probably 20% of the population, is 80% white. Kind of the 80s suburban sprawl, bedroom communities grew up around us, wealthier people were moving in and buying the agricultural land that you know, we had become accustomed to. And so, I had to quickly learn how to navigate both worlds, as a matter of social survival.

And I always believed, and maybe it's just because of my personal experience, that there was so much more in common here. Not just culturally and from a values perspective, but from an economic perspective, economic mobility is so important to what Latinos have been telling us for decades that they want, and navigating that world, I think, was something that I felt I could offer. And so, I found a home in the Republican Party. But even from its earliest days it was not a comfortable home.

Eloy Oakley: Right.

Mike Madrid: There was a rising nationalist creep and that really came full circle in 2016 when Donald Trump announced for President. I was opposed to him vocally and publicly from the moment he came down the escalator. It didn't start when he became the President it started when he started voicing very ugly, you know, things about, and this is important too. You know, Donald trump attacks so many people throughout his tenure, but the very first people he attacked, the very first people he attacked or Mexican Americans, Mexicanos.

Eloy Oakley: Right.

Mike Madrid: He was attacking my people. And there was no way as a voice in the Community, especially as a Republican, that I was going to be quiet. And so I was very, very public very, very early and, one thing about Donald trump is he forced us to take issues on so many things, that we really didn't want to take positions on things like football.

Football became political, every day. I couldn't watch it without, you know, fighting about the national anthem. A pandemic. Science became political. Everything became political. And so, when there's a time for choosing, as Ronald Reagan once said, the choice for me was very clear. It was unequivocal. I'm not going to suggest there wasn't some heartbreak. There's not a whole lot of people that don't have to burn their careers after 30 years.

Eloy Oakley: Right.

Mike Madrid: But I did it, and I would do it again. And so, by creating the Lincoln Project, eight of us as political consultants, eight Republicans, we use the skill sets that we had because the political you know, the political elected class had failed the country. They failed the party. They failed the conservative movement.

But they failed America, and they were failing democracy, and so we stood up with what the resources we had which is we're pretty good at fighting in the political arena. And we brought I think to bear, a lot to that race and I think that we were central to seeing his defeat and too, the defeat of a really nefarious character in American history, and I think it was probably the most consequential election in the last hundred and 50 years and it's,

Eloy Oakley: Right.

Mike Madrid: It's the top of my career to be to have been the person developing the strategy and doing the analytics and the data and the targeting that that brought him down.

Eloy Oakley: Well, you know I certainly agree this was one of the most consequential elections we've seen. I hope it's really energized us as voters to really come out, I mean the turnout that we saw was amazing, particularly places like Georgia and South Carolina. So, I really hope it did light the fire, so that we can ensure that we don't have to experience this again. You know, I appreciate the work that you did, Mike.

Mike Madrid: Thank you for that. Thank you, Eloy. That means a lot, coming from you.

Eloy Oakley: You probably don't hear that, very often, but I do appreciate it. Let me talk to you about something else that you're doing. You've got your own podcast.

Mike Madrid: Yeah.

Eloy Oakley: Since we're on a podcast. You're the host with Gregory Rodriguez and the podcast is called Americanata.

Mike Madrid: Yeah.

Eloy Oakley: Tell us about the podcast and, particularly the space that that you're focused on. Particularly dealing with politics, class, race, culture. Tell our listeners about the podcast.

Mike Madrid: Yeah. Thanks for that. So, Americanata, the name comes from actually an experience that Gregory had had, traveling in Italy. He was giving a

speech in Italy about American identity. And a woman in Italian, kind of dismissed it as, “There's so much Americanata.” What she meant was it was just kind of kitschy, cosmetic Americanness. There wasn't a lot of substance to American culture and, a lot of Americans were offended by that, but the truth of the matter is American culture is extraordinarily unique.

And a lot of the reasons why we are witnessing the rise of Trumpism, these threats to democracy, the separation of the wealthy, the lack of our political system to deal with it is really not just about politics, it is about our culture. It is about our history and our racial history. And so what we decided to do was to explore these issues in a historical context about race and culture and economic class which ultimately also has political ramifications.

Now, Gregory's a writer, a researcher, he's a great thinker. I'm a little bit more of a practitioner, and so we try to meld the two in a very conversational way. But the idea is to be unfiltered in our thinking. There's nothing stilted about it, and sometimes the left would get very offended by something we say because we're talking about, you know, race and culture in a way that is no longer permitted on the left and the right really doesn't like us, I think, because, for many of the same reasons.

We're very critical of the rise of kind of the emptiness of what's happened on the American right, the lack of an intellectual movement, and so what we're trying to do is capture this moment by simply articulating it and giving it voice.

And so, Americanata, in many ways, it's not only the problem but it's a defining feature of American culture. And so, it's been just fantastic to talk about some very heavy very substantive issues in a very light digestible way but yeah thanks for giving the opportunity.

It's really fantastic and actually it's one of the things that I'm focused on and the post trump era. We talked about protecting democracy. And I will be doing a lot more international work, because democracy really is under threat, all over the world.

Eloy Oakley: Right.

Mike Madrid: And as we lose democracies and allies in other parts of the world, we lose the strength of our own democracy. And so much of what we need to do to reclaim the mantle of being the strongest democracy in the world, because I no longer believe we are, is understanding this cultural problem we have that is

manifesting itself on our politics. So, I hope that wasn't too academic and too nerdy, but that's what we do.

Eloy Oakley: Well, I certainly encourage our listeners to check out the podcast. You know, it's a fascinating conversation, we're having across America because we're so focused on either extreme of the spectrum, these days. Every time you turn on your TV, you know it's one extreme or the other, and we're not talking enough about, you know what's what sort of needs to happen in the middle of that conversation. That should make both the left and the right a little uncomfortable so,

Mike Madrid: That's exactly what the podcast is doing. And it's not stilted. It's just, I think we're just we're giving voice to a lot of what is out there there's just both parties have devolved into the extremes, and what we're doing on the podcast is really talking about how both of them get it wrong. And both of them get it right. And I think that's where a lot of America that right now.

Eloy Oakley: That's right. So, as we begin to wrap up, I just want to take a moment to again, you know, having you on the show is great. And you've done a lot. Your career and you particularly done a lot in the last year, it seems like this year is worth 10 years of a lifetime.

Mike Madrid: Yeah.

Eloy Oakley: At least my Gray hair suggested it's at least 10 years. But particularly you know, recognizing your roots in the California Community colleges and I know how proud the folks at Moorpark College are. I know we as the California Community colleges are proud to have you as one of our own, But, let me end with this question. Since I know one of your other passions is baseball.

Mike Madrid: Yeah.

Eloy Oakley: What do you think of a Dodgers this year.?

Mike Madrid: Man, I'm loving Dodger baseball. It's one of the great things of, you know, you're talking about this year and how difficult it was. I mean I've lost a lot of hair and I put 10 years of, in this one year. But you know, beating Donald trump and watching the dodgers win the world series was just It made it all worth it. I feel really, really good about where the Dodgers are at Eloy. I know you and I share that commonality.

You know, I love baseball because it's a connection to my father. It is for so many people, it says so much about America. You're watching Dave Roberts right now saying, you know, I'm probably not going to manage the all-star team if it's in Atlanta because of voter suppression efforts.

Eloy Oakley: Right.

Mike Madrid: I love the Dodgers history of driving social change, beginning with Jackie Robinson. And baseball allows us to move forward as a nation in a way that no other professional sports can. And so, I love that, the social justice part of it, but more than anything, I just love the data. I just I just love the numbers as the numbers guy in politics.

And so, to answer your question, I feel really, really, really good about where the Dodgers are at. Not just this year, but the team that they've built for the foreseeable future, I think we're in a really good place. I think when baseball comes back, you and I are gonna have a lot of good days ahead of us to be to be sharing some good successes about.

Eloy Oakley: Well, that sounds good, I think along the way we lost most of our Giants listeners, but that's okay. But in any case, Mike it's been a pleasure to have you, appreciate you being with us.

Mike Madrid: Eloy I appreciated your friendship over the years you've been a great leader. I've seen a number of Chancellors from the Community college system. What you're doing is innovative and effective and so important at this critical time and I just want to end by saying, you know, I'm extremely proud of my Georgetown degree at the School of Foreign Service, and it has opened so many doors in my life in my career. But I am much more proud of my associates degree from Moorpark College. It changed my life, I'm passionate about it, and I want to thank you and everybody who's working within the system, because what you're doing is changing lives every day, and thank you for that.

Eloy Oakley: Thank you Mike. And you been listening to my conversation with Mike Madrid, partner at the political research data consulting firm Grassroots Lab, proud product of Moorpark College, and he's also co-host of a great podcast, Americanata.

You've been listening to another episode of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office podcast. Thanks for being with us and we'll be back to you soon.

Announcer: Be sure to join us for the next "California Community Colleges" podcast. This has been a California Community Colleges presentation.