

Sandoval poised for the national stage

By Kyle Roerink, Las Vegas Sun

The Paradise Park Barber Shop sits in a strip mall still gripped by the recession. It's a suburban relic anchored by a Kmart, Family Dollar and coin laundry. Twelve storefronts in the plaza are empty. The barbershop is not the kind of place where you'd expect to find the CEO of a state paying for a trim. But every few weeks, a navy blue SUV pulls into the parking lot, and Gov. Brian Sandoval steps out.

At public appearances and in campaign ads, Sandoval looks like a man whose haircuts are fashioned by stylists. But the governor waits his turn for a \$14 trim surrounded by trophy buck mounts and bobblehead dolls in a strip mall 30 miles from the Capitol.



Gov. Brian Sandoval is golden in the Silver State.
Photo/LTN

When Sandoval walked in Oct. 16, he was met with handshakes and fawning. A customer who had been alerted the governor was coming handed Sandoval a grocery bag full of venison steaks. A picture of Sandoval and a local Boy Scout troop hangs on the wall. A collegiate pennant from Sandoval's son's college also has a coveted spot. No one talks politics. Why would they?

Sandoval's re-election campaign came without the negative ads, debates and vitriol seen in other statewide races. Despite being vulnerable on a number of fronts – education and health care among them – Sandoval didn't draw a single serious challenger. Even Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev, the architect of the state's Democratic machine, couldn't persuade anyone to step forward.

So why is a governor with an imperfect record being treated as untouchable? The answer lies partly in Sandoval's connections to the state's tight power structure and partly because of his knack to keep headlines positive while maintaining a clean-cut image that goes beyond his regularly trimmed hair.

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