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Gonzalez

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state of the time. He's seeking office again, he said, because he and his allies are unhappy with the district's current administration and want to spur change from the inside.

"I believe when people vote for us, they're voting for us to do our job right now, they're not voting for 20 years ago," Gonzalez said. "I'm looking for people to trust my intuition, to trust my ability to make decisions."

The criminal case against Gonzalez focused on an ill-considered deal at Avenida 53 and Calle Avila, which, in 1988, Jesus and Ruben Gonzalez agreed to purchase for \$70,000. The brothers intended to build single-family homes but defaulted on a mortgage loan, sending the property into foreclosure.

The deal didn't sit right with local and county officials, whose concerns led to a grand jury investigation. A subsequent criminal complaint alleged that Francisco Gonzalez had given some of the money from the transaction to her brother, Jesus Gonzalez, called it a loan. Prosecutors called it a bribe. And they said he had solicited the case to move swiftly to trial, but the hearings dragged on over the course of six years.



A handcuffed Jesus Gonzalez is paraded through Riverside on way to his arraignment on Oct. 28, 1993.

"What happened 20 to 30 years ago was city politics. This is totally different. We're trying to do what's best for our students and parents."

JESUS R. GONZALEZ Candidate for CVUSD board

thing missing was their KKK hats." He smiled defiantly for the cameras. Gonzalez maintained that the Coahuella city manager and attorney at the time had assured him everything he had done was above the law. The charges, he insisted, were intended to kill his chances of reelection. He was arrested on Oct. 28, 1993, five days before voters went to the polls. Prosecutors said the timing was coincidental. Gonzalez just the election to a challenger.

Gonzalez pointed to a federal civil rights lawsuit he had filed less than a week before his indictment, claiming that the county was trying to "vex, harass, annoy and oppress" him because of his opposition to a Mountain Pylon to that, Coahuella joined several other cities in trying to stop tons of garbage, originating in Los Angeles, from being shipped through the desert.

The DA's Office had expected the case to move swiftly to trial, but the hearings dragged on over the course of six years. Meanwhile, the criminal case built against Steward, the developer, was dismissed on a technicality — although years later, he would be back in court on federal corruption charges involving public officials and other businessmen in San Bernardino County.

In 2000, Gonzalez pleaded guilty to violating Government Code 806, which prohibits public officials and employees from approving contracts that might benefit them financially. He agreed to pay \$1,500 plus fees. In return, the other 15 charges were dropped, so long as he didn't violate probation, he would be allowed to re-enter politics.

Gonzalez's campaign has been low-key, although he and his running mates — Rod Sanchez, Frank Becerra and Adrian Rodriguez — plan to open campaign headquarters on Thursday. All four men are motivated by what they see as the current board's lack of respect and its prioritization of technology over basic classroom needs.

Gonzalez's running mates say they have no qualms about linking their campaigns. Sanchez, who has known Gonzalez since they were children, described him as an "upstanding



Frank Becerra is running for one of four seats on the Coahuella Valley Unified School District board.



Adrian Rodriguez is running for one of four seats on the Coahuella Valley Unified School District board.



Rod Sanchez is running for a seat on the Coahuella Valley Unified School District board.

citizen" and said, "I know he has never done anything illegal. He's always been a good man." Becerra said he sat down with Gonzalez this summer and found that they agreed on a lot — including the need for greater financial transparency and communication in the district. "I know he has some political baggage from nine years ago, but it doesn't concern me. I had a heart-to-heart with him and believe me there's a vested interest," Becerra said. Four of his children have gone through the district and another is in middle school.

Rodriguez said he and his colleagues were focused solely on the present needs of the district, noting "What happened 20 to 30 years ago was city politics. This

is totally different." He added, "We're trying to do what's best for our students and parents."

Last year, all three men were backed on a successful recall petition to oust three incumbents. They took issue with the low test scores and what they see as tax dollars being "misdirected."

In May 2014, the school board voted to use \$60 million of bond money to build new district offices. The district has also spent about \$20 million for technology upgrades and to purchase new buses. Teachers have long complained that they never received proper training on how to use iPads effectively in the classroom.

In response, some board members say the district has spent \$100 million on school improvements since 2005. They point out that the current administrative offices are housed in portable, temporary buildings.

Nevertheless, Gonzalez and his companions say the community was misled. When the bond passed, Gonzalez said, "We all believed it was for new schools."

Campaign signs for Sanchez, Becerra and Rodriguez do not list Gonzalez's name. Sanchez cautioned against looking into this fact too deeply and said he's especially proud of Gonzalez's children, two of whom attend school in the district. Another was class president at Coahuella Valley High School last year and is currently attending UCLA.

Does that come from somebody with bad parents? No, it comes from good parents, loving parents," Sanchez said. Gonzalez said he stayed out of the public eye in an official capacity to focus on his family — but he has always "had the tension in a public servant. He's ready, he said, to give it another shot.

At a recent board meeting, Gonzalez asked the board why they couldn't find the money to give the gates at Coahuella Valley High School a new coat of paint. The gates, he complained, are "more rust than paint."

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