



# The Privilege of Gaming

By Ogonna M. Brown

Gaming is the heart of Nevada's business and the industry touches the lives of so many people in Nevada and around the world.

Holding a gaming license is truly a privilege. Gaming license holders are responsible for protecting the industry, the public, following a myriad of regulations and rules and answering questions when investigators call. They are charged with the task of maintaining the integrity of gaming in the State of Nevada. The gaming application process mandates honesty, transparency, and the willingness to answer hard questions when the occasion arises. The decorum maintained during the gaming proceedings is formal and respectful, and titles such as Madam Secretary, Chair, and Commissioner are consistently used by applicants and their counsel.

It is not only a privilege to hold a gaming license, it is also a tremendous privilege for me to have served as one of five commissioners on the Nevada ("Gaming Commission") for four years. My very first day on the job was exceptionally challenging because a matter had worked its way up and down the gaming application process for years, and the day had come for the Gaming Commission to decide whether or not the application would be granted or denied. After peppering the applicant with a series of questions, and asking counsel legal questions regarding strict constructionism, I ultimately voted to reject the application instead of denying it, a new feature promulgated by the legislature that was used for the first time by the Gaming Commission in 2020 when I first served on the Gaming Commission. The intellectual exercise was engaging and complex, and marked the beginning of a rewarding experience for me in the world of gaming.

Before moving to Las Vegas, I lived in Munich, Germany, for 18 years, and found that serving on the Gaming Commission taught me so much about Nevada's communities I never would have had the opportunity to glean from practicing law in Nevada as a litigator for over 20 years. The practitioners and the applicants are part of a tightly knit gaming community working in a heavily regulated industry, with experienced gaming investigators who are sharp, talented, knowledgeable, and do not miss a beat – some of them with decades of experience. In many instances, legacy families with second and third generations of family members being passed the torch for succession planning appeared before me, and the elders shared their genesis stories of how they came to be involved in gaming.



Every month I had the pleasure of meeting Nevadans from all over the state as well as applicants from all over the world, including Austria, Japan, England, and Australia. During my tenure as a Gaming Commissioner, I have had the opportunity to observe the importance of maintaining the integrity of the industry while making the industry accessible to smaller operators. I have been fascinated and intrigued countless times during presentations over the years not just by the larger casinos with seemingly endless resources and sleek marketing teams, but also by smaller operators who present with so much heart and enthusiasm. The innovation they foster is what brings the gold standard to Nevada and keeps it here. The four years flew by! I have learned so much about our beautiful State and have come to appreciate all of the intricate facets of the gaming industry. Gaming remains a strong and vibrant industry in Nevada, and I will continue to watch and learn about the technological advances and forward-thinking innovation Nevada continues to bring to the world.



While serving the State of Nevada for four years, I learned invaluable lessons about personal stories that make the fabric of Nevada's history so rich and beautiful, and endeavored to approach each applicant with empathy, understanding, thoroughness, and willingness to listen before deciding how to vote. Sometimes I would hear uplifting presentations of achievement and success, and other times I would be faced with heartbreaking stories followed by applicants' remorse for lapses in judgment. But at the end of the day, each and every applicant had the opportunity to seek a license and present their case why a majority of the Gaming Commissioners should vote in favor of granting an application to hold a gaming license. In the unfortunate instances when applications were rejected, the applicants had the opportunity to seek licensure after 1 or sometimes 2 years to allow the Nevada Gaming Control Board and Gaming Commission to assess positive changes before voting to grant access to the privileged world of gaming.

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Ogonna Brown served on the Nevada Gaming Commission from 2020 until 2024, and is an equity partner at Lewis Roca in the Litigation, Bankruptcy and Creditors' Rights practice groups. Ogonna focuses her practice on creditors' rights, secured party representation, commercial litigation, and bankruptcy litigation. Mentorship and pro bono work are part of Ogonna's core value system, and she currently serves on the Board of Legal Aid of Southern Nevada.