



NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

Meet Devon Reese: Wants to Pave Way for Other LGBT Leaders

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In high school, Northern Nevada native Devon Reese garnered state and national attention as a debate champion. Then, in 2019, Reese cemented his place in Nevada history when he became the first openly gay member of Reno’s City Council in its more than 160-year history. A year later, in a strong show of support for Reese’s leadership, he became the first openly gay vice mayor of Reno when his colleagues on the city council voted to appoint him to that position.

When asked about how he feels about making Nevada history, Reese said that it is “hugely meaningful.” He added that serving the public has given him a sense of history and accomplishment, but also a strong sense of duty to ensure that he is the first of many.

Reese was born in Carson City as the last of eight children. His mother was a nurse’s assistant, and his father was a janitor. His mother prioritized education and leveraged it to work her way up from a nursing assistant to a registered nurse, eventually serving Reno as a medical professional for more than 50 years. Reese responded well to his mother’s example, declaring at an early age that he wanted to be a judge. His mother explained that he would need to go to law school first. At the ripe age of 6, Reese knew he would do so.

Reese viewed debate as a precursor to law school, so he joined the McQueen High School debate team and fell in love with it. His passion for debate earned him national recognition—he was a state champion and national qualifier. Upon graduating high school, Reese had his choice of college scholarships: Arizona State University, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), and Lewis & Clark to name a few. He elected to stay home and joined University of Nevada, Reno’s (UNR’s) debate team. He loved the experience. However, and unfortunately, UNR cut its funding for the debate program before Reese’s sophomore year. Unable to imagine college without debate, Reese knew he had to transfer schools.

Never having been east of Denver, Reese packed up his Mitsubishi Montero and drove to the University of Missouri, Kansas City, where he was offered a full scholarship. There, his team earned national championships in two of his remaining three years in college. He also worked part-time at Applebee’s to earn extra money and ended up falling in love with his co-worker, Emily.

After graduating college, he coached high school debate for a year and attended University of Kansas for law school. He married Emily and they welcomed their first daughter, Max, during his 3L year. The family moved back to Nevada after Reese’s graduation so Reese could clerk for Justice Cliff Young, and the pair added two more children, KJ and Thomas, to their family. With three children under three, Reese formed his own firm and later acted as general counsel to a builder/developer.

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Meet Devon Reese

At 30, and in an act of self-actualization, Reese came out as gay to his wife and children. Even after their divorce, Reese and Emily remained best friends, bonded by years of friendship, love, and a common goal to ensure their children remained their first priority. In fact, their example of co-parenting made them become part of the national conversation on marriage equality.

Ensuring that his children remained his first priority, Reese became a “debate dad” and coach. Reese coached high school debate for nine years as his three children went through McQueen High School. With Reese’s help, McQueen became one of the most successful public school debate programs in the nation, and his children secured full-ride debate scholarships to the University of Southern California, the University of Michigan, and UNLV. Other students Reese coached went on to earn debate scholarships at Harvard, Michigan, Cornell, Cal State Long Beach, Emory University, and UNLV.

Reese eventually remarried. He met his husband, Felipe, while volunteering at Toys for Tots. Felipe, a Marine and a teacher by training, was a natural addition to the Reese family—even caring for Reese’s ex-wife during several bouts of cancer.

After more than two decades in the law, in 2019, Councilman David Bobzien’s departure from the Reno City Council left the council’s at-large seat open. More than 150 people, including Reese, applied for the position. The city council narrowed the list down to four candidates and then unanimously voted to appoint Reese.

Always one to jump right in, Reese dove into his new work and was appointed to the Capital Projects Surcharge Advisory Subcommittee, Community Homelessness Advisory Board, Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Governing Board, and Washoe County Stadium Authority, just to name a few.

“I feel a deep sense of connection to Reno,” Reese said. “I live in the same neighborhood my parents bought their first house. My children went to the same high school I attended. McQueen High School’s Knights & Ladies was my foundation for public service. I feel a special obligation to give back. I have been so lucky to contribute to legacy projects in Reno, like the first public pool and a new police station. Serving Reno has been the highlight of my career.”

When asked about his future plans, Reese said, “Reno gave me so many opportunities, and I owe it such a debt of gratitude. I would love to continue a life of public service to repay that debt.”

By all accounts, it appears that Reese has made substantial progress on any alleged debt. Mayor Hillary Schieve had genuine praise for Reese’s public service thus far.

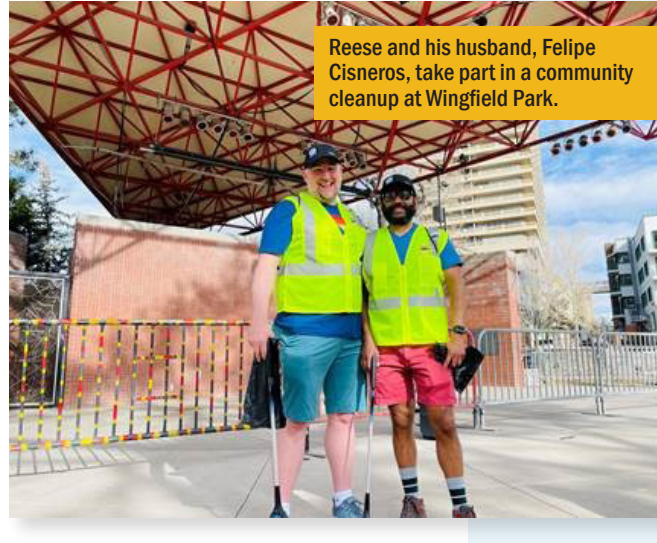
“Devon won’t tell you this, but he is one of the most generous people I have ever met,” Schieve said. “I have personally watched Devon donate his time and money anonymously to people and causes more times than I can count. It’s the things that people do when no one is watching that speak volumes about who they are. His empathy and compassion for others is unwavering in our community, it’s what makes him a tremendous public servant.”

Reese has also maintained a small practice as a partner at Hutchison and Steffen, primarily representing labor unions, small government entities, and businesses.

In his (very little) free time, Reese likes to play tennis, listen to true crime podcasts, and loves to travel.



Reno City Council member Devon Reese speaks at the unveiling of the Bee City USA sign at City Plaza.



Reese and his husband, Felipe Cisneros, take part in a community cleanup at Wingfield Park.



Reese tours the construction of the Public Safety Center with City Engineer Kerrie Koski.



Reese practices goat yoga at Ferrari Farms.