



UNIQUELY QUALIFIED LEGISLATORS: LAWYERS IN THE 2017 LEGISLATURE

BY PATRICIA D. CAFFERATA, ESQ.

In 2017, 15 attorneys are members of the Legislature, the largest number of attorneys in the Legislature in recent history. In 2015, 10 lawyers served, while in 2013 there were 12 attorneys.

In the current legislative Session, all the lawyers represent districts in Clark County. Among those attorneys is Lieutenant Governor Mark Hutchison, who presides over the state Senate as part of his official duties. In both houses, the majority of all members are Democrats. The same is true of the lawyers: a majority are members of the Democratic Party. Of the six attorneys in the state Senate, Aaron Ford, Tick Segerblom and Nicole Cannizzaro are Democrats, while Mark Hutchison, Mike Roberson and Becky Harris are Republicans. In the Assembly, lawyers Elliot Anderson, Lesley Cohen, Edgar Flores, Jason Frierson, Ozzie Fumo, James Ohrenschall, Justin Watkins and Steve Yeager are Democrats, while Keith Pickard is a Republican.

Six of these legislators are native Nevadans: Lt. Governor Hutchison, Senators Cannizzaro and Segerblom, and Assemblymen Flores, Ohrenschall and Watkins. When it comes to education, three of the lawyers in the 2017 Legislature received their undergraduate degrees from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) and three from the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR); six are graduates of the William S. Boyd School of Law, while two senators graduated from the J. Reuben Clark Law School.

Most of the lawyers are not novices to the legislative process; the freshmen this session include Cannizzaro, Fumo, Pickard, Watkins and Yeager.

EVERYTHING YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE LAWYERS IN THE LEGISLATURE

Senators' Remarkable Backgrounds

Each senator arrived at the Legislature after some remarkable work experiences, including previous interaction with the Legislature. For the second Legislative Session, Hutchison will preside over the state Senate in 2017. Last session, he was the first attorney to serve as president of the Senate since Lt. Gov. Bob Miller in 1989. Furthermore, Hutchison is the first former legislator and lawyer to serve as president of the Senate in many years. In December

2014, Hutchison resigned from the Senate after being elected Lt. Governor in November. The last lawyer and former legislator to preside over the state Senate was Harry Reid, an assemblyman when he was elected Lt. Governor in 1970.

While Hutchison had served in the Senate before his current duties, freshman Senator Cannizzaro's first contact with the Nevada Legislature was during law school as a legal extern with Snell & Wilmer, working

primarily on behalf of the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce. A “local girl who made good,” she was born and raised in Las Vegas, educated in its public schools and attended UNR on a Millennium Scholarship, becoming the first in her family to attend college.

Ford, the first African-American Majority Leader in Nevada, clerked for Ninth Circuit Judge Johnnie Rawlinson and for U.S. District Court Judge Denise Page Hood in the Eastern District of Michigan. Harris, on the other hand, became the first female Republican lawyer and second female lawyer to be elected to the state Senate in 2014. (The first was Democrat Lori Lipman Brown.) Previously, Harris ran for the Assembly in 2012 and won the Republican primary, but lost the general election. Roberson, the ranking lawyer in the Senate, worked for a political mentor, former Majority Leader Tom DeLay in the U.S. House of Representatives, before he moved to Nevada.

Finally, Segerblom comes from a long line of legislators and is the latest member of his family to serve in the Nevada Legislature. In the fourth generation in his family, he is the only one to serve in both houses of the Legislature. His great-grandfather, William “Johnny” Bell, represented Humboldt County in the Senate from 1907 to 1913, his grandmother Hazel Bell Wines represented Humboldt County in the Assembly in 1935, his mother Gene Wines Segerblom represented Clark County in the Assembly from 1993 to 1999, and Segerblom succeeded her when she retired.

Clearly, these senators bring a wide and diverse range of legal and political experience with them to the Legislature.

Assembly Lawyers’ Interesting Backgrounds

The Assembly members are just as remarkable and interesting as their fellow attorneys in the Senate. Several of these lawyers spend time volunteering in their communities and/or have diverse experience both in and outside of the legal field. For example, Anderson, a former Marine, served in Afghanistan as a machine gunner for four years. Currently, he is a member of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. The newest lawyer in the legislature, he was sworn in as a member of the State Bar of Nevada in May 2016.

Cohen volunteers at the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, and has been active in the Greyhound Pet Adoptions of Las Vegas group. She is also a member of the Clark County Bar Association Continuing Legal Education Committee.

Before his election to the Assembly, Flores assisted Assemblywoman Lucy Flores (no relation) in researching various immigration issues. Flores’ volunteer work includes more than 15 years mentoring young people.

Frierson, the first African-American Assembly speaker in Nevada, graduated in the first Boyd School of Law class in 2001. He then clerked for Nevada Supreme Court Justice Myron Leavitt.

A seasoned trial lawyer, Fumo brings a wealth of courtroom experience to the Assembly. He has selected state and federal juries in numerous trials.

Ohrenschall is a second-generation legislator; his mother Genie Ohrenschall served in the Assembly before her son was elected to the same seat. The district he represents radically changed during the last reapportionment in 2001. Originally, Ohrenschall represented the old Huntridge neighborhood in Las Vegas, where he grew up, but now, following the reapportionment, he represents parts of Henderson, Lake Las Vegas and part of the unincorporated areas of Clark County. He serves on the Uniform Laws Commission and expects at least four to six bills from this commission to be introduced this session.

Pickard and his wife volunteer at their church’s addiction recovery program for youth between the ages of 12 to 18; the program addresses any compulsive behaviors that can destroy lives. A faith-based program, it is similar to the 12 Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).



State Senate



MARK HUTCHISON, Lieutenant Governor and President of the Senate

Born: Nevada

Family: Wife Cary, six children and six grandchildren

Education: UNLV, Business Administration, B.S., Phi Kappa Phi and J. Reuben Clark Law School, J.D., Magna cum Laude

Current Law Practice: Hutchison & Steffen, LLC with emphasis on business and complex tort litigation, constitutional law, and trust and estate litigation

Political Party: Republican

Legislative History: Senate District 6 (2013-2014), elected Lt. Governor in 2014



NICOLE CANNIZZARO

Born: Nevada

Family: Husband Nate

Education: UNR, Business Administration, B.A. and William S. Boyd School of Law, J.D.

Current Law Practice: Deputy District Attorney, Clark County

Political Party: Democrat

Legislative History: Senate District 6 (2017)

Committees (2017): Judiciary (vice chair), Commerce, Labor & Energy, Legislative Operations and Elections (chair)



AARON FORD

Majority Leader

Born: Texas

Family: Wife Berna and four sons

Education: Texas A&M University, Interdisciplinary Studies, B. S.; George Washington University, International Education, M.A.; Ohio State University, Educational Administration, M.A.; Ohio State University, Educational Administration, Ph.D.; and Ohio State University, Moritz College of Law, J.D.

Current Law Practice: Eglet Prince firm with emphasis on complex commercial litigation, products liability and alternative dispute resolution

Political Party: Democrat

Legislative History: Senate District 11 (2013-present); Minority Leader (2015)

Majority Leader and committees (2017): Finance, Judiciary, and Revenue and Economic Development (vice chair)



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Photo by Scott G. Wasserman, Esq.

State Senate

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BECKY HARRIS

Born: Utah

Family: Husband Garth and two children

Education: Brigham Young University, Political Science, B. A., and UNLV, Political Science, M.A., and J. Reuben Clark Law School, J.D.

Current Law Practice: Jerimy Kirschner and Associates with emphasis on homeowner advocacy and estate planning; also alternative dispute resolution

Political Party: Republican

Legislative History: Senate District 9 (2015)

Committees (2017): Finance, Judiciary and Education



MICHAEL ROBERSON

Minority Leader

Born: Missouri, grew up in Kansas

Family: Wife Liberty Leavitt-Roberson

Education: University of Kansas, Political Science, B.G.S. and University of Kansas Law School, J.D.

Current Law Practice: Kolesar & Leatham, Chtd., with emphasis on corporate and business transactions, real estate, and commercial litigation

Political Party: Republican

Legislative History: Senate District 20 (2011-present); Majority Leader (2015)

Minority Leader and committees (2017): Judiciary, Revenue and Economic Development



TICK SEGERBLOM

Born: Nevada

Family: Wife Sharon and three children

Education: Pomona College, B.A.; Sturm College of Law, University of Denver, J.D.

Current Law Practice: Law Office of Richard Segerblom represents employees in disputes with employers

Legislative History: Senate District 3 (2013-present) and Assembly (2007-2013)

Committees (2017): Judiciary (chair), Legislative Operations and Elections, and Education



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Watkins worked as a civil engineer before attending law school. Yeager used his undergraduate degree in Spanish while living in Spain from 1999-2000. He practiced civil litigation at a large law firm for five years before joining the Public Defender’s office in 2009.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN THE LEGISLATURE

A few of the senators commented on the importance of a legal education and how it contributes to their success as legislators. For example, Cannizzaro believes that in school, lawyers learn the law, how to apply it and how the law affects people. She stated that understanding the process of legal research helps a lawyer gain the necessary information needed to make wise decisions, and she believes this skill will help her make good decisions on the bills presented. Roberson too believes that legal education and experience go hand-in-hand with success as a legislator. He summed up his thoughts when he said, “I am a better legislator because of my legal background, and I am a better attorney because of my legislative experience.”

Segerblom commented on serving in the Legislature as a lawyer, with a lawyer’s perspective. He said that he finds the legislative legal staff to be phenomenal. He believes being in the Legislature is like being in the biggest law firm – any legal question you might have can be answered by an expert in the field almost instantaneously.

The Assembly lawyers agree that their legal education and law practice will contribute to their success in the lower house. Cohen believes that her background in family law will help her succeed, because her practice taught her how to build consensus during trying times for her clients. Flores believes that lawyers have the ability to argue with the opposing sides, but still reach agreements faster than non-attorneys, because they do not take the arguments personally; they hold no grudges.

Frierson believes that term limits prevents legislators from having the kind of experience that could better serve Nevada. Thus, he calls his legal training, during which he learned to read statutes in a way that reflects legislative intent, vital to his legislative success. With a 120-day limit on the session, being a lawyer means that he has the ability to delve into the details of proposed legislation and to anticipate as many unintended consequences as he can, resulting in a greater outcome. He embraces a citizen’s Legislature because of the rich backgrounds various members bring to the process, but he believes having some lawyers in the Legislature helps tie the process together.

Because he lobbied in the 2015 Legislature, Pickard knows that his legal background will be useful during the 2017 session. He understands the law and the language of the bill, and as a litigator he understands how laws are applied. As a lawyer, he explained, he has the ability to consider both sides of a story. He understands he needs to listen to all the testimony and review the evidence before making a decision, and that he needs to avoid making decisions based on emotional responses.

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Ohrenschall believes that law school prepared him to read a bill and understand how it will be interpreted in the “real world,” while Watkins thinks his real-world experiences as a businessman and lawyer are helpful, because he understands the consequences of legislative proposals. Finally, Yeager knows his legal background will serve him well, because he lobbied on behalf of the Public Defender’s office during the last two legislative sessions. With a mix of legislative and other legal experience, he recognizes the importance of making sure that the bill language matches the desired policy.

It seems clear that these legislators’ legal training and experience will be a boon to them as they work toward success in the Legislature. They understand the meaning of the law, the importance of listening to both sides of an argument and how to work with those on opposing sides.

Legislative Goals

Three senators offered insights into their specific legislative goals for the session. Cannizzaro is interested in improving the public school system, investing in workforce development, improving college affordability and accessibility, and fighting to protect seniors. As a lawyer, she is interested in improving the criminal justice system to ensure safe communities, while ensuring the criminal justice system is fair. Roberson’s goal is to safeguard the historic reforms achieved in the 2015 Session and to see that those achievements are carried through to full implementation this session. Segerblom’s goals are implementation of recreational marijuana and criminal justice reform. Their goals will represent an interesting mix of proposed legislation.

Some of the Assembly members mentioned their goals or plans for the 2017 Session. Cohen is interested in ecotourism. Frierson’s main goal is to work hard to bring integrity and consistency back to the institution of the Nevada Legislature, after

the chaotic 2015 Legislative Session. He is committed to fostering an environment where meaningful dialogue about important Nevada issues can take place. He plans to strive to further a progressive values agenda that is also conscious of the impact legislative decisions have on the business community. Along these lines, he will work for bipartisan improvement of the education system, reform of criminal justice measures that are smart about the state’s resources to best protect the community and to advance efforts to improve equality for all Nevadans.

Fumo is also interested in criminal justice reform, but he also wishes to help working families by increasing the minimum wage and by supporting activities that create jobs, such as the stadium and the solar industry.

Ohrenschall is co-sponsoring with Segerblom a bill to abolish capital punishment. Among Ohrenschall’s additional goals is criminal justice reform, including smart sentencing. He believes the state should focus on sending violent criminals to prison, while those who need drug treatment should be treated and not incarcerated.

Pickard set a couple of goals: first, to bolster vocational education and effective teaching methods; and second, to improve the family law statutory scheme. Watkins represents the legislative district with the most nonpartisans in the state, so his goal is to cast the best informed votes for his district.

Remarkable Lawyers Will Serve in 2017

The lawyers in the Nevada Legislature traveled diverse and unique paths to reach their seats in the Nevada Senate and Assembly. Because of their combined educations and experiences, Nevadans will be well represented in the 2017 Legislature by these remarkable individuals from the legal community. **NL**



PATRICIA D. CAFFERATA, a past chair of the Nevada Lawyer Editorial Board, works for Attorney General Adam Laxalt as Special Assistant Attorney General for Law Enforcement, Counties and Municipalities. Cafferata served in the Assembly representing Assembly District 25, is a former state treasurer (1983-1987) and served as district attorney of Lincoln, Lander and Esmeralda counties.

State Assembly



ELLIOT ANDERSON

Born: Wisconsin
Education: UNLV, Political Science, B.A. Magna cum Laude, and William S. Boyd School of Law, J.D. cum Laude
Current Law Practice: Haines & Krieger, LLC.
Political Party: Democrat
Legislative History: Assembly District 15 (2011- present)
Committees 2017: Education, Judiciary and Legislative Operations and Elections



LESLEY COHEN

Born: New York, grew up in Las Vegas
Family: Grandmother, mother and sister
Education: UNR, Political Science, B.A. and DePaul University, College of Law, J.D.
Current Law Practice: Reza Athari & Associates, practices mostly family law
Political Party: Democrat
Legislative History: Assembly District 29 (2017), appointed in 2012, lost reelection in 2014
Committees 2017: Judiciary, Natural Resources, and Mining (vice chair) and Taxation



EDGER FLORES

Born: Nevada
Family: Parents, two brothers
Education: UNLV, English, B.A. and William S. Boyd School of Law, J.D.
Current Law Practice: Law Office of Rodolfo and Gonzalez, specializing in personal injury, immigration and family law
Political Party: Democrat
Legislative History: Assembly District 28 (2015 to present)
Committees 2017: Education, Government Affairs (chair) and Taxation



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State Senate

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JASON FRIERSON

Speaker

Born: California

Family: Wife Abbie, one son and one daughter

Education: UNR, Health Science, B.S. and William S. Boyd School of Law, J.D.

Current Law Practice: Surratt Law Practice with emphasis on assisted reproductive technology (surrogacy)

Political Party: Democrat

Legislative History: Assembly District 8 (2017), first elected in 2010, reelected in 2012 and lost reelection in 2014

Committees (2017): Commerce and Labor, Taxation, and Ways and Means



OZZIE FUMO

Born: Virginia

Family: wife Ellen, five children and three grandchildren

Education: University of San Diego, Business Administration, B.B.A and Whittier College School of Law, J.D.

Current Law Practice: Pitaro & Fumo with emphasis in criminal defense and personal injury

Political Party: Democrat

Legislative History: Assembly District 21 (2017)

Committees 2017: Education, Judiciary and Transportation



JAMES OHRENSCHALL

Born: Nevada

Family: Partner Riana Durrett and two sons

Education: UNLV, Economics, B.A. and William S. Boyd School of Law, J.D.

Current Law Practice: Deputy Public Defender, Juvenile Division, Clark County represents children in delinquency proceedings

Political Party: Democrat

Legislative History: Assembly District 12 (2007-present)

Committees 2017: Commerce and Labor, Judiciary (vice chair) and Corrections, Probation and Parole (chair), and Legislative Operations and Elections



State Senate

Committee Assignments*

FINANCE: Aaron Ford (D) and Becky Harris (R)

JUDICIARY: Tick Segerblom (D) (chair), Nicole Cannizzaro (D) (vice chair), Michael Roberson (R), Becky Harris (R)

COMMERCE, LABOR & ENERGY: Nicole Cannizzaro (D)

EDUCATION: Tick Segerblom (D) and Becky Harris (R)

LEGISLATIVE OPERATIONS AND ELECTIONS: Nicole Cannizzaro (chair) (D); Tick Segerblom (D) (vice chair)

REVENUE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Aaron Ford (D) (vice chair), Michael Roberson (R)



Assembly

Committee Assignments*

COMMERCE AND LABOR: Jason Frierson (D), James Ohrenschall (D)

EDUCATION: Edgar Flores (D), Elliot Anderson (D), Ozzie Fumo (D), Keith Pickard (R)

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS: Edgar Flores (D) (chair)

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES: Steve Yeager (D)

****JUDICIARY /CORRECTIONS, PROBATION AND PAROLE:**

Steve Yeager (D) (chair)/Ohrenschall (D) (chair), Elliot Anderson (D), Justin Watkins (D), Lesley Cohen (D), Ozzie Fumo (D), Keith Pickard (R)

LEGISLATIVE OPERATIONS AND ELECTIONS:

Elliot Anderson (D), James Ohrenschall (D)

NATURAL RESOURCES, AGRICULTURE, AND MINING:

Lesley Cohen (D) (vice chair), Justin Watkins (D), Steve Yeager (D)

TAXATION: Edgar Flores (D), Jason Frierson (D), Lesley Cohen (D), Keith Pickard (R)

TRANSPORTATION: Ozzie Fumo (D), Justin Watkins (D)

WAYS AND MEANS: Jason Frierson (D) (vice chair)

**Democrats, the majority party, are listed first with the chair or vice chair, if any, listed before the Democratic members in alphabetical order followed by the Republicans in alphabetical order.*

***This is a joint committee, with Judiciary meeting certain days and Corrections on other days. Yeager and Ohrenschall alternate as chair and vice chair.*

State Assembly

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KEITH PICKARD

Born: California

Family: Wife Margaret, seven children, four grandchildren, two older brothers and a twin brother

Education: Brigham Young University, Construction Management, B.S. and William S. Boyd School of Law, J.D.

Current Law Practice: Nevada Family Law Group LLC (owner) specializes in complex divorce, custody and relocation disputes and real estate law

Political Party: Republican

Legislative History: Assembly District 22 (2017)

Committees 2017: Education, Judiciary and Taxation



JUSTIN WATKINS

Born: Nevada

Family: Wife Marni, two daughters, one older brother

Education: Oregon State University in Corvallis, Civil Engineering, B.S. and University of San Diego in California, J.D.

Political Party: Democrat

Legislative History: Assembly District 35 (2017)

Committees 2017: Judiciary, Transportation and National Resources, Agriculture and Mining



STEVEN YEAGER

Born: Minnesota

Family: Wife Bitia

Education: University of Michigan, History and Spanish B.A. with high distinction, and Cornell Law School, J.D. cum Laude

Current Law Practice: Chief Deputy Public Defender, Clark County

Political Party: Democrat

Legislative History: Assembly District 9 (2017)

Committees 2017: Health and Human Services, Judiciary (chair) and Corrections, Probation and Parole (vice chair), Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Mining



**Democrats, the majority party, chair and vice chairs are listed first, then the members who are Democrats, in alphabetical order, followed by the minority party Republicans in alphabetical order. NL*

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