

Nevada Legislature is a Citizen Legislature and Invites the Bar's Participation

BY SCOTT G. WASSERMAN, ESQ.

The Nevada Legislature has oftentimes been called a “citizen legislature.” This term is used to describe a legislature with members who hold outside occupations and are not full-time professional politicians. It is practically impossible to be a full-time professional politician in the Nevada Senate or Assembly, as the members are only paid a daily salary for the first 60 days of the regular legislative session. Nev. Const. art. 4, § 33. Unless called into a special session (and then salary is limited to 20 days of a special session), the Nevada Legislature only meets in odd-numbered years. Nev. Const. art. 4, § 2.

Legislators do receive travel expenses, housing expenses, and per diem for living expenses during the entire length of the legislative session, and they also receive a stipend for days they attend an interim committee meeting. However, the sum of these allowances would likely not be adequate for a member of the Nevada Legislature to consider it a sufficient living wage for an entire biennium in lieu of a salary earned from an occupation outside the legislature. Hence, with the exception of the few retired members who may serve during a given legislative session, this means that the vast majority of Nevada legislators have full-time occupations—they are employed in outside of legislative sessions—a true citizen legislature.

While some members of the 2023 Nevada State Senate and Assembly are attorneys as profiled in this issue, other current occupations that are represented



Nevada State Capitol Building in Carson City

PHOTO CREDIT: SCOTT WASSERMAN

in the Senate include teachers, business managers, educators, health consultant, minister, national director of sales, pharmacist, physician, plumbing contractor, rancher, and Realtor. In the Assembly, current occupations include business development, custom manufacturer, disability support service provider, educators, electrician, executive producer for film and television, FBI special agent, geologist/environmental consultant, grievance specialist, management analyst, nonprofit executive, optometrist, plumbing contractor, public relations, Realtors, small business owner, team clerk, and utility manager. A few members of the 2023 legislature are retired from military service and law enforcement.

While a citizen legislature brings a variety of occupational experience and knowledge to the legislative arena, it also means that its members must rely on the expertise of lobbyists and citizens, including members of the State Bar of Nevada, who testify before them to bring additional light to the intended, and sometimes unintended, consequences of proposed legislation, especially

legislation outside of a member's personal expertise. It is natural then, that a "citizen legislature" not only relies on, but invites the participation of the citizens in the legislative process.

This issue of *Nevada Lawyer* magazine is devoted to providing members of the Nevada bar with tools and knowledge of ways of participating in the legislative process in Nevada. Our legislature is very accessible to the bar. Committee meetings are broadcast online via the legislative website. Many committee meetings connect the north and south of the state via videoconference, and testimony can be provided by attending meetings in the legislative building in Carson City or the state office building in Las Vegas via videoconference. Some legislative meetings have also allowed for participation by telephone.

Even if you are unable to attend a meeting, the legislative website lists the contact information for both legislative members and staff. The members' telephone and email information is available there. (For ease of reference, the legislative office telephone number

for each member of the legislature is also included in this issue on page 23.) Members of the bar who would like to express support, opposition, concerns, questions, or general comments regarding proposed legislation are urged to use the available contact information to communicate with legislators and staff. Such input often leads to amendments to proposed legislation as it goes through the legislative process, leading to a more refined final legislative product.

The members of the Nevada Legislature are generally not only accessible but would also invite your input into the legislative process. The intent of the information in this issue is to encourage you to communicate with members of the legislature and their staff regarding the many bills that are now proposed and will be proposed (and can be tracked online) during the legislative session.

SCOTT WASSERMAN'S biography is available on page 6.



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