



Lawyers Lead the Legislature, 2023: Meet the Lawyers in the Legislature

BY PATRICIA D. CAFFERATA, ESQ.

On February 6, 2023, 13 lawyers will serve in the in the 82nd Session of the Nevada Legislature, six in the state Senate and seven in the state Assembly. All the lawyers have prior legislative experience, except Toby Yurek, a freshman in the Assembly.

Who are the Attorneys in the State Senate?

In the Senate, all the lawyers are from Clark County and are members of the Democratic Party.

The Senate leaders are:

- Nicole Cannizzaro, Majority Leader;
- Dallas Harris, Chief Majority Whip; and
- Melanie Scheible, Co-Majority Whip.

The committee chairs are:

- Edgar Flores, chair of the Government Affairs Committee;
- Dallas Harris, chair of the Growth and Infrastructure Committee;
- James Ohrenschall, chair of the Legislative Operations and Elections Committee; and
- Melanie Scheible, chair of the Judiciary Committee.

On Tuesday, November 8, 2022, James Ohrenschall and Melanie Scheible were re-elected, while “newcomer” Edgar Flores was elected to the Senate. On December 20, 2022, Assemblywoman Rochelle Nguyen was appointed to the Senate by the Clark County Commission to fill a vacancy. Ohrenschall and Scheible are beginning their second terms in the Senate, and Flores and Nguyen served in the Assembly prior to joining the Senate. These four lawyers join Nicole Cannizzaro and Dallas Harris, who are midway through their second Senate terms and were not up for election in 2022.

Five of the senators have life-long connections to Nevada, and four senators were born in Las Vegas. While Scheible was born in Sacramento, California, she grew up in Reno. The four native Nevadans received their undergraduate degrees from Nevada institutions: Cannizzaro from the University of Nevada, Reno; and Flores, Harris, and Ohrenschall from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Moreover, Cannizzaro, Flores, Nguyen, and Ohrenschall received their J.D. degrees from the William S. Boyd School of Law.

Ohrenschall holds another distinction and connection to the state legislature—he is in the second generation of his family to serve in the legislature. His mother, Genie Ohrenschall, served in the Assembly from 1995 through 2005. When she retired, he was elected in 2004 to succeed her in the same district she served in: Assembly District 12. He continued to be re-elected to the Assembly until 2018, when he was elected to State Senate District 21.

Not only did he follow his mother to the legislature, like her, he also became a lawyer. For mother and son, their law school



experiences were life-changing for both of them. When Genie Ohrenschall graduated from Georgetown Law School in 1972, she was one of less than 30 women lawyers in the state.

“My mom helped break the glass ceiling for women in Nevada,” James Ohrenschall said.

Law school also changed his life; when James Ohrenschall attended Boyd, he met his future wife, Riana. Similar to Genie Ohrenschall, Riana Ohrenschall has had a distinguished public policy career. In addition to being an attorney, former Governor Steve Sisolak appointed her to the Cannabis Compliance Board, which regulates the legal cannabis industry in Nevada.

Lawyers’ Approaches to Legislation

Some of the lawyer-senators mentioned the importance of a legal education in considering and working in the legislature. James Ohrenschall believes that law school prepared him not only to read a bill but also to understand how it will be interpreted in the “real world.”

Similarly, Scheible believes lawyers read statutes in a different manner than non-lawyers. She understands how statutes are applied to actual facts. In addition, when addressing or considering legislation, she reflects on her experiences in her legal practice.

On the other hand, Flores believes that lawyers have an ability to work with opponents. Because they do not take the arguments personally, she believes, they reach agreements faster.

Senators are Volunteers, Too

Outside of work, for more than a decade, Flores has mentored young people. Also working with young people, Scheible worked alongside college students to improve responses to sexual violence on Nevada college campuses in 2021. Additionally, during the summer after her first year in law school, Scheible worked in Uganda. On a law school grant, she worked for a nonprofit organization that sued the government over a law violating the rights of LGBTQ people. She is proud she helped to successfully overturn the law when the court declared it unconstitutional.

Nguyen, the first democratic Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) to serve in the Nevada Legislature, co-founded the first AAPI Legislative Caucus in Nevada. The caucus arranged the first celebration of Asian Culture Day on May 18, 2019. Nguyen wants to find ways to make laws and policies work for all Nevadans. She is most proud that she introduced AB 116 (2021), which removes the requirement to list criminal misdemeanor traffic tickets on an application for a job or a license.

The voters selected outstanding lawyers to represent them in the Nevada State Senate. They contribute to the state in various ways and are well-qualified and experienced legislators.



Nicole Cannizzaro
Majority Leader

Born: Nevada
Family: Husband Nate, son Case
Education: William S. Boyd School of Law, J.D.; University

of Nevada, Reno, Business Administration, B.A.
Current Law Practice: Richard Harris Law Firm, partner

Political Party: Democratic
Electoral History: Senate District 6, elected 2016, reelected 2020; Majority Leader (2019-present); Assistant Majority Leader (2018) Interim Committees, 2021: Interim Finance, Legislative Commission, and Legislative Operations, Alternate



Edgar Flores
Chair: Government Affairs Committee

Born: Las Vegas
Family: Parents in Las Vegas, one brother in Texas and one in Mexico

Education: William S. Boyd School of Law, J.D.; University of Nevada, Las Vegas, English, B.A.
Current Law Practice: Gonzalez and Flores Law Firm, focusing on personal injury, immigration and family law

Party: Democratic
Electoral History: Senate District 2, elected 2022; Assembly District 28, elected 2014, reelected 2016, 2018, and 2020



Dallas Harris
Chief Majority Whip; Chair: Growth and Infrastructure Committee

Born: Las Vegas
Family: Wife, 10-year-old-son Lawrence Thomas, and

20-months-old daughter, Delany Harris
Education: George Washington University Law School, Washington, D.C., J.D.; Claremont Graduate University, California, Public Policy, M.A.; University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Psychology, B.A.; University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Computer Science, B.A.
Current Law Practice: Davison Van Cleve, of counsel

Party: Democratic
Electoral History: Senate District 11, appointed 2018, elected 2020
Recreation: Tennis, Tae Kwon Do, 2nd-degree blackbelt

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MEET YOUR FINANCIAL HEROES

Annually, more than \$600 million is held in Nevada lawyer trust accounts. These financial heroes have agreed to pay favorable rates on all IOLTA accounts under deposit. Leadership institutions pay premium rates.

The Nevada Bar Foundation grants more than 97% of the interest earned on these dollars to statewide legal service organizations serving more than 37,000 Nevada families.

American First National Bank

Bank of America
Bank of George
Bank of Nevada
Bank of the West
Chase

Citibank
City National Bank

East West Bank
Financial Horizons Credit Union

First Citizens Bank
First Foundation Bank

First Independent Bank
First Savings Bank

First Security Bank of Nevada
GenuBank

Heritage Bank

Lexicon Bank

Meadows Bank

Nevada Bank & Trust

Nevada State Bank

Northern Trust Bank

Pacific Premiere Bank

Plumas Bank

Royal Business Bank

Silver State Schools Credit Union

Town and Country Bank

US Bank

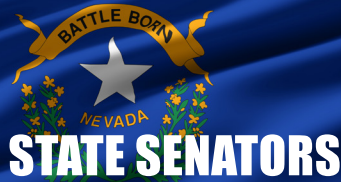
Valley Bank of Nevada (BNLV)

Washington Federal

Wells Fargo

NB

The Lawyers in the Legislature (contd.)



Rochelle Nguyen

Vice Chair: Health and Human Services Committee

Born: Vancouver, Washington

Family: Husband, Matt Lay, son Henry, and daughter, Hannah, father, Thang Nguyen, father-in-law, Dale Lay, and dog, Neil

Education: University of Puget Sound, Washington, B.A. Comparative Sociology; William S. Boyd School of Law, J.D.

Current Law Practice: Law Office of Rochelle T. Nguyen, specializing in criminal defense

Party: Democratic

Electoral History: Senate District 3, appointed December 2022; Assembly District 10, appointed 2019, elected 2020, and reelected 2022



James Ohrenschall

Chair: Legislative Operations and Elections

Born: Las Vegas

Family: Wife, Riana Durrett, and three sons

Education: William S. Boyd School of Law, J.D.; University of Nevada, Las

Vegas, Economics, B.A.

Current Law Practice: Deputy Public Defender, Juvenile Division

Party: Democratic

Electoral History: Senate District 21, elected 2018 and reelected 2022; Assembly District 12, elected 2006, reelected 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016

Appointments: National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, Commissioner



Melanie Scheible

Co-Majority Whip; Chair: Judiciary Committee

Born: California, grew up in Reno

Family: Father in Reno, mother and sister, an eighth-grade teacher, in Sacramento, California, and sister, a speech language pathologist, in Irvine, California

Education: Columbia Law School, New York, J.D.; Stanford University, California, Public Policy, B.A.

Current Law Practice: Craig P. Kenny & Associates, attorney focusing on criminal defense

Party: Democratic

Electoral History: Senate District 9, elected 2018

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The Lawyers in the Legislature (continued)



Attorneys in the State Assembly

In the 2023 Legislative Session, seven attorneys serve in the Assembly. Like the attorneys in the Senate, all the Assembly attorneys represent districts in Clark County.

Six lawyers – Shea Backus, Lesley Cohen, Venicia Considine, Elaine Marzola, David Orentlicher, and Steven Yeager – are Democrats, while Toby Yurek is a Republican.

Unlike the Senate, members of the Assembly have different titles. The Assemblywomen include: Backus, Cohen, Considine, and Marzola. The Assemblymen are Orentlicher and Yurek. And, of course, Yeager is addressed as Mr. Speaker.

The only Nevada native lawyer in the Assembly is Backus, who was born in Las Vegas. Moreover, most of the Assembly attorneys attended undergraduate and law schools not in Nevada. The exceptions are Cohen, who graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno; and Considine and Marzola, who graduated with degrees from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. As to law school, only Considine and Yurek graduated from the in-state institution, William S. Boyd School of Law. However, Orentlicher is a professor at the law school and is the director of the UNLV Health Law Program.

Attorneys Look Back on and Forward to Assembly Sessions

Speaker Yeager said his most proud legislative accomplishment was chairing the Judiciary Committee since 2017.

“When I chaired this committee, my law school education and legal work were helpful to my success,” Yeager said.

Under his leadership, he said, the committee worked hard on enacting comprehensive, smart on crime, criminal justice reform policies; on preventing mass evictions during the pandemic, and on reforming the interim legislative structure to be more effective and efficient.

Aside from his legal and legislative successes, he is also proud of his wife Bitia’s accomplishments and successes. In 2020, she was elected to the Eighth Judicial District Court Bench, Department 1, where she continues to sit.

“My goals are to: continue to foster Nevada’s economic recovery from the pandemic; to improve our education system and outcomes; to address the teacher shortage; to help hardworking Nevada families get ahead; to address the affordable housing crisis; to deal with high vacancy rates in state government; and, to train and empower the legislative leaders of tomorrow,” Yeager said.

Considine is proud the voters re-elected her to a second term. Her goal for the 2023 session is to pass laws to help working individuals and families to have opportunities to build a good life.

“I am pleased to have the opportunity to represent this amazing district again,” Considine said.

Orentlicher said, “I am proud that in the 2021 session, we increased K-12 funding by \$500 million over the two-year budget cycle, the largest increase in education funding in the state’s history. And I am pleased we built on the success of voting by mail in 2020 to make permanent the option of mail-in ballots for all voters.”

On a personal note, he is also proud of the commitment of his wife and children to ensuring justice for all.

Cohen is proud of her legislative work with self-advocates from the disability community during her time in the Assembly.

“The group was able to strengthen the rights of disabled parents to parent their children, to make voting more accessible, and to make decisions for themselves regarding their finances, health and other life important decisions,” Cohen said.

As to Cohen’s goals this session, she plans to continue to work with her colleagues on “both sides of the aisle” to make life better for all Nevadans.

Freshman Yurek said, his “goals are to support public safety legislation, to back laws to protect first responders, to improve education in the state, and seek ways to promote economic diversification and election integrity.”

Legal Education and Experiences Contribute to Success in the Assembly

It’s no surprise that having a legal education and experience assists legislators in being effective and successful in the Assembly. For example, Cohen believes that her legal background, particularly in family law, helps her to understand the importance of building consensus during tense times for her clients. The art of negotiation successfully brings parties in legal disputes and legislators together, she said, so each side receives a benefit, but gives up something to resolve the matter or to arrive at an agreement on proposed legislation.

About serving in the Assembly, Considine said, “The legislative and statutory interpretation class I took in law school helps me, when I reviewed bills, and/or when I plan bills I intend to introduce.”

Additionally, she thinks her work on the Consumer Rights Project that created the foreclosure mediation program in previous legislative sessions exposed her to the legislative process. This experience gave her a good foundation to serve in her first legislative session in 2021.

On her training, Marzola said, “My legal education helps me to ask thoughtful questions, to evaluate the many sides of an issue, and to reach a compromise on bills that come before my committees.”

She mentioned she knows how legislation actually impacts Nevadans, and she perceives how the laws made in Carson City affect her clients. She believes that having learned how to think like a lawyer is helpful during the legislative sessions.

Orentlicher brings more than his legal education to his service in the Assembly. Before attending law school, Orentlicher received his M.D. from Harvard Medical School and practiced medicine. Then, he decided to attend law school, and he graduated from Harvard Law School. Currently a Boyd law school professor, Orentlicher said he “teaches and writes about many legislative issues, including on health care cost containment, end-of-life medical decisions and reproductive decisions.”

Additionally, he lectures on health care advocacy and pairs his students up with a legislator to prepare bill drafts on health care law topics. The students work in groups to prepare one bill draft. He also teaches constitutional law, and he believes this subject is helpful to address proposed legislation that must satisfy constitutional standards. He has prior legislative experience, having served in the Indiana House of Representatives between 2002 and 2008.

In the 2023 session, Orentlicher is sponsoring legislation to reduce preventable illness and deaths in Nevada, and to make health care more accessible for those who need it.

“I also look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure that housing is affordable and that we provide a high-quality education for our children,” he said.



Shea Backus

Chair: Revenue

Born: Las Vegas

Family: Husband, Marc McDermont

Education: Sandra Day O’Conner College of Law at Arizona State

University, J.D. and

Certificate in Indian Law; University of California, San Diego, Revelle College, B.S., Management Science

Current Law Practice: Backus | Burden, a civil and commercial litigation practice

Electoral History: Assembly District 37, elected 2018, lost reelection 2020, elected 2022

Recreation: Crafts and travel



Lesley Cohen

Chair: Natural Resources Committee

Born: New York City, grew up in Las Vegas

Family: Grandmother, mother and sister

Education: DePaul University, College of Law, Illinois, J.D.; University of Nevada, Reno, Political Science, B.A.

Current Law Practice: McFarling Law Group, focusing on family law

Political Party: Democratic

Electoral History: Assembly District 29, appointed 2012, lost election 2014, elected 2016, reelected 2018, 2020 and 2022

Appointments: National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform Law, Commissioner

Recreation: Active with Achilles Track Group, a running group for the visually impaired



Venicia Considine

Born: Queens, New York

Family: Husband, Kenn Merrill and daughter, Sydney

Education: William S. Boyd School of Law, J.D.; University of Nevada, Las Vegas,

American History, B.A. and American Western History, M.A.

Current Law Practice: Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, Director of Development and Community Relations, and previously practiced in the Consumer Rights Project for nine years

Political Party: Democratic

Electoral History: Assembly District 18, elected 2020, reelected 2022

Recreation: Movies, books, libraries and traveling

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Attorneys in the State Assembly



Elaine Marzola
Chair: Commerce & Labor Committee
Born: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Family: Son, Troy, mother and twin brothers in Las Vegas
Education: Thomas M. Cooley Law School, Michigan, J.D.; University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Women's Studies, B.A.

Current Law Practice: Marzola & Ruiz Law Group, LPPC, focusing on personal injury, family law, bankruptcy and criminal record sealing

Political Party: Democratic

Electoral History: Assembly District 21, elected 2020, reelected 2022

Recreation: Family, yoga, meditation and travel



David Orentlicher
Born: Washington, D.C.
Family: Wife, Judy, children, Cy and Shay
Education: Harvard Law School, Massachusetts, J.D.; Harvard Medical School, Massachusetts, M.D.; Brandeis University, Massachusetts, Economics, B.A.
Current Law Practice: UNLV, William S. Boyd School of

Law, and director of the UNLV Health Law Program

Political Party: Democratic

Electoral History: Assembly District 20, elected 2020, reelected 2022; and Indiana House of Representatives (2002-2008)

Recreation: Reading, writing and Cajun dancing



Steven Yeager
Speaker
Born: Brooklyn Center, Minnesota
Family: Wife Bitia Yeager, an Eighth Judicial District Court Judge, Department 1
Education: Cornell Law School, J.D., cum laude; University of Michigan, History and Spanish with high

distinction, B.A.

Current Law Practice: Partner, Battle Born Injury Lawyers, focusing on personal injury and premises liability

Political Party: Democratic

Electoral History: Assembly District 9, elected 2016, reelected 2018, 2020 and 2022, (Speaker 2023)

Recreation: Running, hiking, reading, writing and traveling



Thaddeus "Toby" Yurek, III
Born: Anchorage, Alaska
Family: Wife, Carrie Yuerk, children, T.J., Tyler and Trey
Education: University of Nevada, Las Vegas, William S. Boyd School of Law, J.D.; Boston University, Criminal Justice, M.S.; Hope International University, Church Growth with Emphasis in Preaching, B.A.

Current Law Practice: GGRM Law Firm, Managing Partner; Judge Pro "Tempore," City of Henderson Municipal Court; retired police Lieutenant, Henderson Police Department

Political Party: Republican

Electoral History: Assembly District 19, elected 2022

Recreation: Camping, hunting, spending time with family

Assembly Lawyers' Interesting Backgrounds and Experiences

Yeager said his life experience has helped him. During his undergrad years at the University of Michigan, Yeager lived in Spain for a year. As recently as 2022, Yeager again spent time in Spain. He finds that travel, in country or abroad, makes him a better legislator, because it opens his mind to different cultures, perspectives, and ideas. Consequently, when it comes to public policy, he believes these experiences help him to be a better decision-maker.

In 2001, Yurek made his first visit to the Assembly chambers in the Legislative Building as the commander of the Henderson Police's Color Guard. Then-Speaker of the Nevada Assembly Richard Perkins, a captain of the Henderson Police Department, invited Yurek and his team to post the colors during the opening ceremony for the 71st Session of the Nevada Legislature.

One of Yurek's proudest legal accomplishments came in law school, when to satisfy his capstone writing requirement, he solicited his constitutional law professor to sponsor an independent project that offered criticism of the Nevada Supreme Court's holding in *State v. Harnisch*, 954 P.2d 1180 (Nev. 1998). The case involved the automobile exception to the search warrant requirement, which impacted his duties as a full-time police officer.

Yurek achieved the first two of his three goals when he obtained an "A" on his research paper, and it was subsequently published as a law review article. A short time after graduation, his third goal came to fruition when, in its *State v. Lloyd*, 312 P.3d 467 (Nev. 2013) decision, the Nevada Supreme Court expressly overturned its holding in *Harnisch*(II) with multiple citations and references to Yurek's law review article. "To have such a wide-ranging impact on our state's police officers to effectively do their jobs is extremely rewarding" said Yurek.

The Assembly attorneys come from interesting backgrounds with diverse experiences and educations. During the 2023 Legislative Session, Nevada will be well-served by these seven outstanding and unique lawyers in the Assembly.

PATRICIA D. CAFFERATA received her Juris Doctorate from Southwestern School of Law, graduating in 1989. Cafferata currently serves as Associate Tribal Court Judge for the Fallon Paiute Shoshone Tribe. She also served in the Nevada Assembly in 1981, representing AD 25 in southwest Reno.

