

Review-Journal endorsements: Judicial races



Legal law concept image

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Nevada is one of 17 states that require all or most judicial candidates to stand for election in nonpartisan races. Efforts over the years to move the state to a retention or appointment process have failed to carry the day.

These contests present challenges for many voters, as the campaigns are often low-profile, more cordial affairs absent debates and other forums, while the candidates are all typically professional and well-educated. Voters can make their job easier by availing themselves of various sources, including candidate websites, the Review-Journal's Judging the Judges survey and information available from the state Bar and the Nevada Commission on Judicial Discipline.

This election features a relatively limited slate of contested campaigns.

In the Court of Appeals, Department 1, Rhonda Forsberg faces Deborah Westbrook. Judge Forsberg has been on the Family Court bench since 2019 and says it's inappropriate to legislate from the bench. Ms. Westbrook has practiced law for 19 years, including the past nine as a public defender, where she handles appeals for the office. She describes her judicial philosophy as leaning toward textualism and says she "wants to be a judge, not a legislator." We believe **Deborah Westbrook** has the temperament and breadth of legal experience to succeed on the court.

In District Court, Department 9, incumbent Maria Gall faces former university regent James Dean Leavitt. Judge Gall was appointed in June by Gov. Steve Sisolak. She holds degrees from the London School of Economics & Political Science and from Vanderbilt. In addition to a long legal career, she is a trained concert pianist. We see no reason to replace her after just a few months on the bench. **Maria Gall** is the clear choice.

Judge Ellie Roohani faces a challenge from Anna Albertson in District Court, Department 11. Ms. Albertson said she's "a different kind of lawyer" who would be a "different kind of judge" and vows to be "fair" and "community-minded." Judge Roohani was appointed to her post in 2021 and has served as an assistant U.S. attorney and adjunct professor at UNLV law. She says it's important to her to "respect everyone" and treat both sides professionally. We urge a vote for **Ellie Roohani** and her experience.

The Review-Journal offers no endorsement in District Court Department 17 and Department A of Family Court.

Las Vegas Justice Court handles preliminary hearings, misdemeanor cases and small civil matters. Five seats are on the ballot.

In Department 6, Bill Gonzalez, who served one term on the Family Court bench before losing two later elections, faces personal injury attorney Jessica Goodey. Mr. Gonzalez cites his judicial background, "integrity" and "work ethic." Ms. Goodey vows to run her courtroom efficiently, make timely rulings and treat those before her with "kindness, dignity and respect." She believes criminal justice reform has gone too far in some instances and would emphasize "community protection." This is a tough race, but we lean toward **Jessica Goodey**.

Amy Wilson and Max Berkley face off in the race for Department 7. Mr. Berkley is a 10-year public defender who was born and raised in Las Vegas and says he's "enthusiastic about the opportunity to serve." Ms. Wilson has practiced law for 25 years and served as a prosecutor and civil attorney. She promises to treat people with compassion but to hold them accountable. Mr. Berkley has the demeanor and background to succeed, but Ms. Wilson would bring a wider breadth of experience to the bench. We urge a vote for **Amy Wilson**.

Department 9 features a race between incumbent Joe Bonaventure and Danielle "Pieper" Chio, who has worked as a prosecutor for 20 years. Judge Bonaventure has served since 2004 and was instrumental in crafting policies to ensure defendants see a judge quickly after an arrest. He describes himself as "fair, impartial, knowledgeable and independent" and has dealt for years with all aspects of Justice Court. Ms. Chio is a fine candidate, but **Joe Bonaventure** won't need on-the-job training.

Incumbent Cybill Dotson is running against Noreen Demonte in Department 10. Judge Dotson was appointed to the bench in 2021 and said she has made it a point to ensure that if "you're coming in front of me ... I'm going to listen to your case and give you an opportunity to be heard." Ms. Demonte has been in the district attorney's office for 18 years and also worked as a defense attorney. She believes many criminal justice reforms have gone too far at the expense of public safety. Ms. Demonte is a quality candidate, but Ms. Dotson deserves more than just 10 months to prove her mettle. In a close call, **Cybill Dotson** gets our nod.

In Department 13, incumbent Suzan Baucum faces Rebecca Saxe, who has served as a chief deputy public defender for 12 years. Judge Baucum has been on the bench since 2010 and her scores in the RJ's 2019 judicial survey were mediocre, as she earned a retention rating of just 54 percent. Ms. Saxe said

she “understands the value of constitutional principles” and has “every desire to ensure the community is safe” with her decisions. Judge Baucum has served honorably, but we believe **Rebecca Saxe** would be an improvement.