Political History of Nevada

Chapter 1

Politics in Nevada, Circa 2016

CHAPTER 1: POLITICS IN NEVADA, CIRCA 2016

Nevada: A Brief Historiography

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The *Political History of Nevada* is the quintessential reference book of Nevada elections and past public servants of this State.

Journalists, authors, politicians, and historians have used this official reference for a variety of questions. In 1910, the Nevada Secretary of State's Office first compiled the data. The Office updated the data 30 years later in 1940 "to meet a very definite and increasing interest in the political history of Nevada," and has periodically updated it since. This is the first edition following the Silver State's sesquicentennial, and the State's yearlong celebration of 150 years of Statehood in 2014.

But this brief article will look to examine something other than political data. It's more about the body of historical work concerning the subject of Nevada's political history—a brief historiography.

A short list of its contributors includes Dan De Quille and Mark Twain; Sam Davis and James Scrugham; Jeanne Wier and Anne Martin; Richard Lillard and Gilman Ostrander; Mary Ellen Glass and Effie Mona Mack; Russell Elliott and James Hulse; William Rowley and Michael Green.

Their works standout as essential secondary sources of Nevada history.

For instance, Twain's *Roughing It* (1872), De Quille's *Big Bonanza* (1876) and Eliot Lord's *Comstock Mining* & *Mines* (1883) offer an in-depth and anecdote-rich—whether fact or fiction—glance into early Nevada and its mining camp way of life. Other sources on the State's early history include "mug" histories—or snapshots—providing brief biographies and narratives of counties, events, and groups. Published by Thompson and West and compiled by Myron Angel, *History of Nevada* (1881) is one of the earliest and most referenced, but others include Thomas Wren, *A History of the State of Nevada: Its Resources and People* (1904); Sam P. Davis, editor, *The History of Nevada* (1913); and former Nevada Governor James Scrugham, editor, *Nevada: A Narrative of the Conquest of a Frontier Land* (1935).

During the first half of the twentieth century and the post-World War II era, historians produced more long-form narratives about the past. Many sought to explain the political trends of the State. For example, Mary Ellen Glass' *Silver and Politics in Nevada: 1892-1902* (1969) sought to explain the three-decade-long Republican dominance and the rise of the Silver Party in the 1890s through the arguments of the "Free Silver" movement, which handed Nevada's presidential votes to Populist candidates such as William Jennings Bryan and eventually created a Silver-Democrat fusion steered by Senator Francis Newlands.

This crumbling of the old system—the Comstock mining barons and the power of the South Pacific Railroad—gave way to progressive reforms after the turn of the century. From 1904 to 1914 reformers adopted a series of laws at the Nevada Legislature and at the voting booth: the referendum (1904); direct primaries (1909); initiative and recall (1912); expansion of the role of the State government in the regulatory powers of the Public Service Commission (1911), and suffrage for women (1914). These reforms succeeded in changing Nevada, but many historians argue the progressive wave that swept the nation affected the Silver State less than other western states such as Oregon and California because of its transient male population and mining camp culture.

Following the roaring 1920s and into the Great Depression, Nevada developed and expanded a tourism industry in Reno and Las Vegas. Countless journalists and many authors wrote about this unique economy in the Silver State. In his book *Desert Challenge* (1942), Richard Lillard claimed Nevada rather boldly and successfully created new revenue streams through easy divorce, gambling and as a tax haven, popularly referred to as the "One Sound State," but Nevada remained "in new terms, a real, not a figurative, frontier," given its aridity and emphasis on vice economy.

For Jeanne Wier, the longtime director of the Nevada Historical Society, these changes and gambling economy highlighted the "mystery of Nevada," where "the daily habits of more stable and permanent population" successfully co-existed with the State's rising gambling industry. She added: "This conservatism and stability bracketed with a constant holiday spirit, constitutes what has been called the 'mystery of Nevada.'"

This discussion on the "mystery of Nevada" permeates the ongoing historiography—or history of the history—in Nevada. Modern day historians often describe Nevada as a peculiar sibling in the family of states. For many, this invokes slogans such as "Independent like Nevada." The State's grit in the arid Great Basin—"East of Eden and West of Zion," as historian Wilbur Shepperson once described Nevada's position in the American West—sets Nevada apart, neither the diverse thriving economy of California nor the cultural uniformity of Utah. According to Shepperson, "Nevada, in its own peculiar way, has transcended its environment."

Several authors have railed against this uniqueness. As the Silver State turned from progressivism to a loosening of regulations on divorce and gambling in the early 1920s, suffragist Anne Martin called Nevada a "Beautiful Desert of Buried Hopes" in *The Nation* magazine's series "These United States." Martin, president of the Nevada Equal Franchise Society in 1914 when Nevada voters passed suffrage for women, became disenchanted, calling Nevada "a vast, exploited, undeveloped State with a meager and boss-ridden population."

Additionally in 1966, Gilman Ostrander titled his history of the State, *Nevada: The Great Rotten Borough 1859-1864*, using a term out-of-state lawmakers employed during the mining depression of the 1880s and 1890s to expose Nevada's small population with equal representation in the nation's capital. Martin and Ostrander, progressives and liberal thinkers of their time, often opposed the State's pro-business and reactionary machine politics.

In the 1960s, literature on Nevada history grew. James Hulse's *Nevada Adventure* (1965) and Effie Mona Mack's *Here is Nevada: A History of the State* (1965) expanded the scope of Nevada studies following the State's centennial. Russell Elliott's *History of Nevada* (1973) further added cultural and social topics: religion, education, labor, women's history, and histories on Native Americans in the Great Basin. Along with this expanded study came more attention to the study of political structures through the application of the new discipline of political science. Eleanore Bushnell's *The Nevada Constitution: Origin and Growth* (1968) and Don Driggs' *Nevada Politics and Government: Conservatism in an Open Society* illustrated this advancement in this field. Michael Bowers' *The Sagebrush State: Nevada's History, Government, and Politics* (2002) builds on that area of study.

Additionally, a long list of biographies exist that tell the stories of Nevada's key political figures: Jerome Edwards' *Patrick McCarran: Political Boss of Nevada* (1982), Elizabeth Raymond's *George Wingfield: Owner and Operator of Nevada* (1992), William Rowley's *Reclaiming the Arid West: The Career of Francis Newlands* (1996) and Michael Archer's recent biography *A Man of His Word: The Life & Times of Nevada's Senator William J. Raggio* (2011). Other illuminating sources include the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* (first published in 1957 and available online).

This brief historiography only scratches the surface of the important library of Nevada historical studies.

In a state accustomed to volatility—the boom and busts of the mining camp and the recent recovery following the housing crisis of the Great Recession—Nevadans remain optimistic today about the future. As Nevada allures diversified businesses in energy development and a digital information economy, there's reason for optimism in what Governor Brian Sandoval describes as the "New Nevada."

In 1980, Hulse wrote in *Forty Years in the Wilderness* that Nevada history falls "neatly into three forty-year periods": the rise and fall of mining (1859-1899); a revival of mining and the second fall as Nevada recovered following the Great Depression (1900-1940); and the rise of gambling and welcoming of defense-related and military activities to the region (1940-1980).

What will future authors of Nevada history write about the State's now-completed fourth forty-year period and the "New Nevada?" That depends on the outcome of current hopes—and the people who take up the pen and write it.

Cheers! Nevada Statehood Celebrations Through the Years

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On October, 31, 1864, President Abraham Lincoln, with the stroke of his pen, admitted Nevada to the Union. Territorial Governor James Nye, campaigning for the U.S. Senate in Unionville in Humboldt County, learned via a telegraph line near a mining camp that Lincoln signed the proclamation declaring Nevada a state. When he announced Lincoln's actions to his friends, they quickly raised their glasses to toast the grand occasion. This marked the first of many celebrations of Nevada's admission to the Union. Ever since, Nevadans marked this milestone in their history with grand shindigs every 25 years, including the 150th anniversary—or sesquicentennial—in 2014.

25: Silver Birthday of the Silver State

On November 1, 1889, an article in Carson City's *Morning Appeal* described Nevada's first quarter century of existence. The column stated that the State joined the Union when "the Republic needed the sinews of war and Nevada's silver provided the sinews." The reporter expected that the high price of silver during the State's early years promised a bright future for its residents.

Alf Doten, the celebrated Comstock newsman, arranged a special banquet at the Capitol Rotisserie in Virginia City for the Pacific Coast Pioneers, those who had been on the West Coast since 1850. Later, he bragged that the food was sumptuous, and no empty seats were found around the table. Congressman Horace Bartine and F. M. Huffaker, the former Storey County district attorney and superintendent of schools, addressed the crowd on this auspicious occasion. Other old timers recalled their adventures since 1864, sang old favorites tunes and warmly recalled "when they looked to fill their pockets with that yellow dust, in the days of the Forty-nine."

That afternoon another event marked the State's anniversary at the university in Reno. Instructor Kate Tupper opened the program warbling her own lyrics to the tune of Hail to Columbia. One of her stanzas included: "Hail Nevada! Sun kissed land! Hail the heroes, dauntless band!"

Frank Norcross, a student who later graduated in the first university class and years later served as a justice of the Nevada Supreme Court, spoke about Nevada's birth and reminded his audience that the North and South were in full battle in the Civil War when Nevada became a state. He stated that President Lincoln needed another state loyal to the Union, not the Confederacy.

During his speech, Norcross pointed out that the Nevada Territory not only contributed soldiers to the Union cause, but also raised at least $200,000 for those wounded in the war with a clever election bet. In Austin, Nevada, storekeeper Reuel Gridley, a Democrat and Confederate sympathizer, bet Union supporter Dr. H.S. Herrick that the Democratic nominee would be elected mayor in the April 1864 election. If a Republican was elected and Gridley lost the bet, he agreed to carry a 50-pound sack of flour for a mile down the main street marching to the tune of "Old John Brown." If Herrick lost and a Democrat was elected, he had to carry the sack marching to the tune of "Dixie." Gridley lost the bet, and Herrick trimmed the flour sack in red, white and blue ribbons and stuck American flags to the bag before he gave it to Gridley to carry.

As he proceeded down the street, onlookers cheered and steam whistles blew. Gridley delivered the flour to Herrick with great flourish. Then, after much discussion, the crowd proposed to put the flour up for auction repeatedly selling it to raise money for the Sanitary Commission, the forerunner of the Red Cross, to benefit the Civil War wounded. After a large sum was raised, Gridley traveled to other Nevada towns and other states to auction the flour sack off to raise as much money as possible for the soldiers. Ultimately, he raised about $275,000 for the Sanitary Fund. Today, the famous Gridley sack is housed in the Nevada Historical Society's collection of artifacts.

50: Golden Celebration in 1914

Governor Tasker Oddie proclaimed October 31, 1914, as the semi-centennial of Nevada's statehood. To celebrate the occasion, Nevada Historical Society Director Jeanne Wier arranged a four-day celebration in Reno to mark the State's 50th birthday.

The events began with a parade followed by the Pageant of Nevada History at the university's Mackay Athletic Field. Bands from the Stewart Indian School and the University of Nevada provided music for the play. Three hundred men, women, and children from kindergarten to high school starred in the show.

The pageant depicted the State's development with Native Americans playing the roles of their ancestors in the "early age" of the State. A later scene in the play reenacted the sale of the Gridley sack of flour in Austin. After Wier's pageant, she arranged for a costume ball in the university's gymnasium. To pay for the celebration, Wier charged 25 cents to attend the pageant and 50 cents for the dance.

On Friday, public school exercises were held in the afternoon. Wier suggested the students study some Nevada poems, such as, "Washoe, The Humboldt Desert" by Pacific Coast poet John Ridge; "The Lure of the Sagebrush" by Sam Davis and "To the Sierras" by California poet J. J. Owen. She also proposed the lesson plans include studying the national poem "The Flag" and the song "America."

In 1917, the State published a 48-page hardbound book describing Wier's program and the details of Nevada's semi-centennial celebration of statehood.

75: Diamond Jubilee in 1939

In 1933, Governor Fred Balzar signed the bill designating October 31 as Admission Day, but the law failed to create the day as an official State holiday. Recognizing the significance of remembering the State's past, Balzar requested the residents observe the day celebrating the admission of Nevada into the Union.

In 1939, the Legislature appropriated money for the celebration and approved the bill establishing October 31 as Nevada Day, an official State holiday. The Legislative Committee on State Publicity passed Assembly Bill 283 appropriating $5,000 to celebrate the new holiday, the State Assembly and Senate passed the bill, and Governor Edward (Ted) Carville signed it. The act created a three-person committee appointed by the governor to plan the celebration. The committee members served as volunteers and were charged with determining the best way to publicize and remember the State's diamond jubilee.

Long-time District Court Judge Clark Guild, the general chair of the celebration, suggested the Reno parade be moved to the State capital in Carson City—a brilliant recommendation because more than 42,000 people, including 3,000 Native Americans, participated and enjoyed the three-day celebratory spree.

100: Centennial Birthday in 1964

Nevada's centennial was a yearlong celebration with special emphasis on the eight days leading up to Nevada Day in 1964. The Centennial Commission led by Tom Wilson began planning the activities in 1961. Many of Nevada's 17 counties created committees to prepare celebrations of the State's first 100 years.

Kicking off the start of the observance, Washoe County held a special lighting of the newly designed and installed Reno Arch on New Year's Eve. During the year dedicated monuments commemorating the State's 100th anniversary of statehood. Around the State, local governments and community groups scheduled and held various activities, such as pageants, television shows, bowling tournaments, fashion shows, fireworks, Indian festivals, and Pow Wows and a variety of other events. For example, in September, Bill Stead instituted the National Championship Air Races. The air show featured a cross-country race from St. Petersburg, Florida, military displays, pylon races, and acrobatic championships.

In Carson City, the townsfolk were invited to sample a gigantic cake in the shape of Nevada. The governor's wife, Bette Sawyer, used the sword of Henry Blasdel, Nevada's first governor, to cut the cake.

In 1964, one of the other main events was the Nevada Day Parade with 230 entries—the largest ever at the time. Actors from the show Bonanza—Loren Greene, Michael Landon and Dan Blocker—led the parade riding horseback as grand marshals. Governor Grant Sawyer presented "Adoption" plaques to the Bonanza television show cast. An estimated 70,000 people lined the main street in Carson to watch the procession of floats, marching bands, and other entries.

The federal government also recognized Nevada's 100th birthday by issuing a stamp that was released in Carson City on July 22, 1964. The stamp depicted a view of Virginia City with the shape of Nevada on the right side.

125: Quasquicentennial in 1989

Governor Richard Bryan appointed a committee to decide the events for celebration with Secretary of State Frankie Sue Del Papa as the chair.

In 1998, a major change in the Nevada Day celebrations occurred. The people voted to advise the Legislature that they would like to hold Nevada Day on the last Friday in October rather than on October 31. The Legislature agreed and voted to change the law making the last Friday in October Nevada Day, the official State holiday. The parade is now held on the last Saturday, so that the high school students from across the State can travel on Friday to be in Carson City for the parade the following day.

150: Sesquicentennial in 2014

As had been done in previous statehood celebrations, Governor Brian Sandoval appointed a planning committee in 2012 for the State's Sesquicentennial. Kathleen (Neena) Laxalt and Bob Brown served as the co-chairs of the committee. The committee met during the year and established a timeline for the celebration and proposed several projects, including the refurbishment of Nevada's historical roadside markers, a commemorative book, and legislation authorizing Sesquicentennial license plates to help fund the celebrations' activities.

In 2013, the Governor appointed a 13-person Sesquicentennial Commission with Lt. Governor Brian Krolicki as the chair of the Commission. No general fund moneys were appropriated for the planning committee or the Commission.

The Commission struck four different medallions at the Nevada State Museum in Carson City during the year. The designs featured the sesquicentennial logo, a miner, a big horn sheep, and a clever combination of the Las Vegas, Reno arch and Wendover Will signs.

Additionally, the Commission set aside up to $165,000 to refurbish the historical markers nearby highways across the State. Among other events, the Commission added a plaque to the Nevada State Veterans Memorial explaining the monument; a bronze relief of President Abraham Lincoln's head created by sculptor Benjamin Victor was hung in the State Senate chambers in the Legislative building; and two time capsules were buried in Carson City and Clark County with identical mementos reflecting the State's history.

Sandoval's wife reenacted Bette Sawyer's cutting of the Nevada shaped birthday cake, but she used Governor Charles Stevenson, the fifth governor's sword. The cake measured 21-feet long and 13-feet wide and weighed about 1,300 pounds.

For the first time, the residents celebrated Nevada Day with parades in Carson City, Las Vegas, Virginia City, and Elko. In Carson City, Kay Winters, widow of the late rancher JohnD Winters, a member of a pioneer Nevada family, served as the grand marshal of the parade. Sandoval followed her and led the 200 entries in the parade of marching bands, mounted groups, county floats, vehicles, commercial entries, and others.

On May 29, 2014, the U.S. Post Office issued a Forever Stamp of Fire Canyon in Nevada's first State park, the Valley of Fire. The dedication took place in the Smith Center for Performing Arts in Las Vegas with Sandoval, Krolicki, U.S. Senators Harry Reid and Dean Heller, stamp artist Ron Spears from Reno, and others in attendance.

Nevada's statehood celebrations aren't simply a day off work—they present a time to remember and learn about the State's history. These major celebrations also presented an opportunity to create new events that will later become part of the State's history. Additionally, events such as the National Championship Air Races and major parades are examples of the traditions established during statehood celebrations. Every year—and especially every 25 years—Nevadans are reminded of Lincoln's role in establishing the State and of all the important events that have occurred in Nevada since 1864.

The "First Friend": The Political Bond of Ronald Reagan and Paul Laxalt

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Often referred to as "the First Friend," Paul Laxalt's friendship and professional relationship with Ronald Reagan was well known and widely publicized. Laxalt, a longtime Republican public figure in Nevada, became a notable and highly visible player on the national political stage beginning in the mid-1970s. The son of Basque immigrants, Laxalt rose through Nevada's political ranks to become the State's twenty-second governor in 1967. Later, in 1974 he became the first Basque-American ever elected to the U.S. Senate serving until 1987. His tenure in office was marked by a dedication to conservative politics and his friendship with Ronald Reagan.

In 1950, after being discharged from the U.S. Army and receiving his law degree from Denver University, Laxalt returned to his hometown, Carson City, and ran for District Attorney of Ormsby County, defeating longtime incumbent, Dick Waters. After one term, Laxalt resigned in 1954 and practiced law for the following nine years.

Though Laxalt claimed that he was never overly influenced by partisan politics of either persuasion, he ran on the Republican ticket for lieutenant governor in 1962 against former congressman, Berkeley L. Bunker. During a campaign rally in Las Vegas, Laxalt's running partner, Republican gubernatorial candidate Rex Bell, suffered a massive heart attack and died. Republican leaders across the State encouraged Laxalt to consider taking Bell's place, but he declined and remained in the race for lieutenant governor. Laxalt's family and volunteer-run grassroots, "shoe-leather" campaign in the "cow counties" coupled with ambitious radio and television ads aimed at Las Vegas (where he had very little name recognition) helped him to easily defeat Bunker. Laxalt served one term as lieutenant governor, under Democratic gubernatorial incumbent, Grant Sawyer from 1963 to 1967.

In 1964, Laxalt entered a tough race for the U.S. Senate against incumbent Howard Cannon. In one of the closest U.S. Senate elections ever, Cannon defeated Laxalt by 48 votes, which immediately raised suspicion of election fraud.

Meanwhile, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater was competing on the national stage with Lyndon Johnson for the presidency. It was against this backdrop that Laxalt's unique personal and political friendship with Ronald Reagan began. The two met at a 1964 Goldwater campaign event in California where Reagan gave his notable "Time for Choosing" speech. Two years later, each was elected governor of their respective neighboring states, Nevada and California.

In 1966, Laxalt challenged Governor Grant Sawyer on a platform that promoted cooperation with the federal government on issues of investigating corruption and organized crime in Nevada's gaming industry. Laxalt defeated Sawyer by nearly 6,000 votes. As governor, Laxalt backed corporate ownership of gaming operations in Nevada (including Howard Hughes' purchase of multiple hotel-casinos in Las Vegas). Additionally, Laxalt, in collaboration with Reagan, was integral in establishing the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) to protect and conserve Lake Tahoe. During their governorships, Reagan and Laxalt frequently visited back and forth between Sacramento and Carson City, occasionally meeting for skiing at Lake Tahoe.

After his governorship, Laxalt's political activity was minimal. He focused his attention on his family, building and opening the Ormsby House hotel-casino and practicing law. He maintained occasional contact with Barry Goldwater, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan, but that was the extent of his political dealings during that time. In 1973, however, U.S. Senator Alan Bible announced his plans to retire. In February 1974, Laxalt announced his candidacy, and easily won the Republican primary to face off against Democrat Harry Reid. By late 1974, the Republican Party was suffering from fallout created by the Watergate scandal and President Gerald Ford's subsequent pardon of Richard Nixon. Laxalt defeated Reid by only 624 votes. Given the state of the Republican Party at the time, Laxalt's victory was considered a major triumph.

Laxalt's ability to accomplish much in the United States Senate during his first four years was curtailed because Republicans were the minority in both houses of Congress. In 1975, Laxalt found himself a minority within the minority when he made the decision to endorse Reagan to unseat President Ford in the looming Republican primary. Laxalt was the only U.S. Senator to back Reagan—serving as the chairman of his campaign. Though this decision was largely unpopular among his colleagues, polling numbers revealed Reagan was a credible conservative candidate seemingly free of the baggage of the Washington scene.

Voters gravitated toward his charisma and genuine appeal, which paved the way for a resurrection of the Republican Party and Reagan's election to the presidency four years later in 1980. Following Reagan's narrow loss in the 1976 primary, Laxalt went on to work for the Ford campaign in the general election. It has been suggested that Reagan's insurgency within the Republican Party attributed to Ford's eventual loss to Jimmy Carter in November 1976. The events of 1976, however, laid the groundwork for the 1980 presidential campaign and marked a period of revitalization in the conservative movement in America.

During the Carter Administration, Laxalt found himself as the leading conservative critic of the new administration—most notably for his opposition to the transfer of the Panama Canal to the Panamanian government. As the 1978 congressional midterm elections approached, Laxalt was thrust into the Senate spotlight where he became the leading conservative spokesman. Though they remained the minority in both the House and Senate, Laxalt's efforts contributed to an increase of Republicans entering the Senate in 1979. By that time, Laxalt gave up trying to fashion policy and instead turned his focus to issues that would be important in the 1980 presidential election including the Family Protection Act, encouragement of the Sagebrush Rebellion, and promotion of the Republican Party for the 1980 election.

For Laxalt, 1980 was to be a significant year. Not only was he up for reelection in the Senate, but Reagan was again seeking the presidency. Since Laxalt had spent the previous two years in the inner circle of advisors working on behalf of Reagan's candidacy, there was serious speculation that he might be considered for the vice president slot. He understood that strategically for the party his selection was impracticable. Although Laxalt may have been Reagan's personal choice, the more moderate George H. W. Bush, Reagan's strongest opponent in the primary elections, was selected as running mate.

The events of 1980 were indeed pleasing to Laxalt. Not only was he reelected by an overwhelming margin over his liberal opponent, Mary Gojack, but the Republicans gained control of the Senate for the first time since 1954, and Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter by a landslide, receiving 489 electoral votes. After Reagan's election, the media began referring to Laxalt as "the First Friend." Republicans, Laxalt especially, believed that the stage was set for a "great new beginning."

In the 1982 midterm elections, Republicans maintained a majority in the Senate losing only one seat, but the Democrats cemented their majority in the House by gaining 27 seats. The gains made by the Democrats were largely a result of Reagan's unpopularity, which was brought on by a deepening recession. Voters blamed the downturn on Reagan's economic policies, but despite some national dissension, those close to Reagan, like Laxalt, believed that the prospects for reelection were bright—much brighter than they had been in 1980.

By 1984, the economy had rebounded and Reagan's popularity resurged—making him one of the most popular presidents in modern American history. As the 1984 election cycle began, Laxalt was at the zenith of his political career. He was the general chairman of the Republican Party, chairman for Reagan's reelection effort, chairman of two legislative subcommittees, and the spokesman for Republican causes. Laxalt was the intermediary between the president and his Senate colleagues of both parties. As Laxalt had done two times before in 1976 and 1980, he again nominated Reagan at the

Republican National Convention, in Dallas. Laxalt and his colleagues in the Republican National Committee had begun planning for the convention as early as 1982. There was very little doubt within the party that Reagan would seek reelection in 1984. Due to an economic boom, lower inflation, reduced tax rates, decreased unemployment and a robust gross national product, Reagan and his supporters in Congress enjoyed a high degree of popularity.

Shortly after the successes in 1984, though, Laxalt privately decided it was the appropriate time to make a graceful exit from the Senate. Amidst pressure from friends, colleagues and staffers and after much self-reflection, Laxalt retreated to Marlette Lake, his Sierra Nevada refuge and decided to retire in 1987. He offered his support to Jim Santini who ran a hard campaign, but lost to then-Congressman Harry Reid. Despite losing Laxalt's seat to the Democrats, the Republicans managed to hold a slight majority in the Senate. Although Laxalt tossed around the idea of running for the presidency in 1988, and even formed an exploratory committee, he eventually abandoned the effort when he failed to raise his campaign funding goal. He remained politically active, though, helping with Bush's campaign in 1988 and acting as an advisor for Bob Dole's 1996 presidential bid. Laxalt continued to work in Washington as a political consultant and lobbyist with his business, "The Paul Laxalt Group," but maintained his ties with his home state and his beloved Marlette Lake.

Laxalt's legacy is lasting, from humble beginnings as the son of a Basque sheepherder to national prominence as the best friend of one of America's most beloved and admired presidents. His independent instincts and distinctive political style enabled him to accomplish many of his goals. On August 2, 2012, Govenor Brian Sandoval declared that that date should be designated as "Paul Laxalt Day" in Nevada.

The Reagan materials contained in the extensive Paul Laxalt U.S. Senatorial Papers, housed in Special Collections & University Archives at the University of Nevada, Reno Libraries, are available for use. The recent processing of these materials was made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services, administered by the Nevada State Library and Archives. A portion of the materials have been digitized and are available online through the Library's website.

Nevada Senators Historically Wield National Political Power

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With Harry Reid's retirement from the U.S. Senate at the end of 2016, Nevada will have two U.S. Senators in their first full terms in office for the first time since Reid's first term, a quarter of a century ago. That development is unusual in Nevada's history, and a reminder of how the State gained and wielded national political power—and how Nevada does and does not fit what the framers of the *U.S. Constitution* intended. Nevadans often have kept their U.S. Senators in office long enough for them to gain influence disproportionate to the State's population.

The Great Compromise at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 created a bicameral Congress with a House of Representatives elected to two-year terms by the voting public and generally representing equally sized districts, and a Senate with two members from every state, regardless of size. Until the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913 for voters to choose their senators, state legislatures made the selections.

The founding fathers had no plans to create a democracy. Alexander Hamilton, one of the delegates to the convention, called the public "a great beast." Thomas Jefferson, one of the more democratically inclined founders, never contemplated African American or female voters. Accordingly, they expected the Senate to serve as a check on the House, whose members would presumably be more susceptible to popular pressure. The Senate would provide a check in a related way: by giving each state equal power in one of the houses of Congress.

But some states proved more equal than others. Nevada exemplifies this point. Since statehood in 1864, many of Nevada's U.S. Senators have wound up holding key leadership roles in the Senate. They have benefited from the Senate's long-standing seniority system, but they could not have done so if their State's voters had not kept them in office—and they have. Indeed, seven of Nevada's U.S. Senators have served for at least 20 years, and figured out how to deliver federal assistance to their State or, in turn, stop some federal actions that they and others saw as harmful. What the five who have done so have accomplished in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries speaks to the way Nevadans have made the system work for their State.

Key Pittman won his first term in 1912 and died five days after being reelected in 1940, prompting the conspiracy theory that he had been dead before winning the race (actually, he was dying). The Democrat benefited from the benevolent neglect of George Wingfield, who was the State's political and economic boss until he went bankrupt in the Great Depression and believed that Nevada benefited if it had a senator on each side of the aisle. In 1932, Pittman was one of Franklin Roosevelt's leading campaign advisers, and FDR's landslide carried Democrats to control of the Senate again after a dozen years. Pittman became chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and President Pro Tempore. Whatever Roosevelt wanted to do in foreign policy, Pittman was part of it—and that meant keeping Pittman happy. That Nevada led the country in per capita federal spending on New Deal projects was no coincidence.

In 1932, Wingfield's economic collapse, Roosevelt's coattails, and an influx of new Democratic voters helped elect Pat McCarran to the Senate on his sixth try. Once there, McCarran was determined never to leave and built a formidable political machine. He sought control of the State party and all patronage appointments. He emphasized constituent service and created scores of patronage jobs for young Nevadans who worked their way through law school by moving to Washington, D.C., then returning to Nevada to practice law and aid their benefactor. McCarran won a national reputation for his crusade against communism, which many Nevada voters supported. But, most importantly, McCarran understood power and how to get it on Capitol Hill. He maneuvered himself onto two key committees, Judiciary and Appropriations, right after his election, and eventually chaired the former and headed subcommittees on the latter. Every federal judicial appointment required McCarran's support, and he took advantage of his position to help Nevada win military bases and atomic testing, and to help Nevadans with any number of problems personal and financial. One of his patronage appointees, Ralph Denton, hoping to avoid a military assignment overseas, sought McCarran's help and wound up meeting with the chief of staff of the U.S. Army, who gave Denton a post near the Capitol and then said, "Would you do a favor for me? Now, would you keep that gray-haired old ----- off my back?" That is power.

After McCarran's death in 1954, Alan Bible, his first patronage appointee two decades before, won and stayed until his retirement in 1974. Bible was more self-effacing than his mentor, but he learned how to use the levers of power. He became close to Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson, who repaid him for his support by putting Bible on Appropriations, positioning him to send federal funds to Nevada. Bible parlayed that position and his friendship with Johnson into pushing the Southern Nevada Water Project through Congress. The SNWP made it possible to pump enough Lake Mead water into the Las Vegas valley to propel the area's population and economic growth. Although Bible came from rural Nevada and lived in northern Nevada, he did a great deal to make possible The Mirage's volcano, the Bellagio's fountains, and the Venetian's gondoliers.

As a U.S. Senator from 1959 to 1983, Howard Cannon became known as "Mr. Aviation." A onetime Army flyer who often would test-fly new proposed planes himself, Cannon pushed for the expansion of Nellis Air Force Base and other military installations in Nevada. He teamed with Bible on the water bill. He and Bible also engineered a federal rebate of slot machine taxes and a major tax reduction for the State's betting operators. Cannon also fashioned the bill that led to airline deregulation, at the time creating a boom and a boon for Nevada's tourist economy.

Elected to the Senate in 1986 after two terms in the House, Harry Reid engineered an agreement on water rights issues that had vexed northern Nevadans for decades, and went on to obtain funding for airport expansions and federal projects around the State. Even before moving up to majority leader (2007-2015), he did more than any other official to block the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository—which Congress had approved in 1987, when Nevada had a pair of first-term U.S. Senators without the power to stop it.

Yet seniority has its limits. What also can matter are personal relationships, as Pittman's friendship with Roosevelt and Bible's closeness to Johnson suggest. Reid even suggested to a then-freshman senator named Barack Obama that he think about running for president, and as majority leader, Reid became a national lightning rod as Obama's supporter, defender, and key legislative operative.

No personal relationship between a U.S. Senator from Nevada and a leader won more national attention than that of Paul Laxalt and Ronald Reagan. Both became governors of their respective states in 1966 and worked on issues of mutual interest to California and Nevada. They became close friends in the process. Laxalt chose not to seek a second term as governor in 1970, but, as Reagan was leaving the California governor's office in 1974, Laxalt sought and won the U.S. Senate seat from which Bible was retiring.

When Reagan challenged President Gerald Ford for the Republican nomination in 1976, Laxalt, having barely begun his Senate tenure, served as his national campaign chair. Laxalt did the same in 1980, and Reagan wanted the Nevadan to be his running-mate, but Laxalt said no, pointing out that being from a neighboring western state and sharing the same conservative ideology, he would add nothing to the ticket, in contrast to the more moderate George H.W. Bush. But with Reagan's election, Laxalt rejected pleas to run for the post of Senate GOP leader and instead became known as the "First Friend."

In that position, Laxalt helped Nevada. How much he did remains open to debate, for a couple of reasons. Laxalt made clear that he wanted to avoid taking advantage of a close personal friendship. Also, because they were so close, Reagan and Laxalt had no great need to correspond, meaning that they wrote little to nothing to each other about issues of importance to Nevada. But speculation continues that Laxalt helped dissuade Reagan from continuing Jimmy Carter's administration's commitment to the MX, a controversial and costly missile system proposed for southern Nevada and southern Utah. Laxalt also brought numerous Nevadans into national politics and government, including advertising executive Sig Rogich as a party image maker, Reno attorney Frank Fahrenkopf as national party chair (and he later served as the founding president of the American Gaming Association and a founder and later co-chair of the Commission on Presidential Debates), and southern Nevada politician Bob Broadbent as commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. For a State whose image suggested that everyone who lived there was a cowboy or a mobster, it was a significant step that Laxalt made possible.

That the senators from Nevada who gained power within the Senate were Democrats is not a partisan statement so much as a reality: since 1900, Democrats have held Senate seats far more than Republicans have, and the Democratic party dominated that body so thoroughly that between 1932 and 1980, Republicans controlled Congress for only four years. Both sides have used the seniority system to their advantage, and senators from smaller states have understood its value for protecting their interests. Few states have played the game as well as Nevada.

Nevada and the Federal Estate

By WILLIAM D. ROWLEY, Ph.D.
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About 86 percent—or just more than 60 million acres—of Nevada's approximate 110,000 square miles of mountainous ranges and basins remains in the hands of the federal government. Since Nevada's 1864 admission to the Union, the omnipresence of federal land ownership forged controversies and opportunities for Nevada. Like other western states, only more so, Nevada's rugged sagebrush-dotted lands and arid mountain sides invited only minimal private land ownership other than urban centers clustered about gold and silver mining strikes. By the twentieth century, Nevada contained the largest federal estate percentage-wise followed by: Utah, 63 percent; Idaho, 62; Oregon, 53; Wyoming, 49; Arizona, 47; California, 45; Colorado, 36; New Mexico, 32; Washington, 28; Montana, 28. Much seemingly worthless land, and certainly bad lands, offered little inducement for purchase and alienation from the public domain under the various land laws Congress passed for the sale and distribution of its public domain in the West.

Ranking first among the western public land states often draws charges that Nevada is a victim of the federal government's determination to own the West. However, even the *Nevada Constitution* conspires to restrain Nevada from its proper destiny in the family states by prohibiting the State forever to claim the federal land. Congress's 1864 Enabling Act, which authorized Nevada to make the transition from a territorial government to statehood, demanded that Nevada include in its State *Constitution* the words "forever disclaim all right and title to the unappropriated public lands" and that such lands would "always remain at the sole and entire disposition of the United States." While it is true that Nevada came into the Union at the end of the Civil War under the aegis of a federal government determined to assert its paramount sovereignty over the states, the restrictive disclaimer did not single out Nevada. Other states before and after the Civil War entered the Union with similar admonitions. This is to say that the federal government historically guarded its ownership of western lands.

From the republic's beginning under the Articles of Confederation the central government owned the western lands. During the Revolutionary War, states with claims to western lands ceded them to the Confederation government. The 1783 Treaty of Paris, ending war with Great Britain, recognized the sovereignty of the United States to the Mississippi River—which entirely ignored indigenous rights. Both sovereignty over and ownership of western lands went together. In subsequent acquisitions across the continent the fusion of the two continued: Louisiana Purchase, 1803; Florida, 1819; Oregon, 1846; the Mexican Cession in 1848, which included Nevada, according to the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (with the exception of the annexation of Texas in 1845 when Texas retained ownership of its public lands). Sovereignty, of course, was malleable and shared with the states as the federal state system expanded westward. But the central government's ownership of acquired lands remained a constant in the midst of state making.

Soon after the Revolutionary War, the Confederation Congress approved the Land Ordinance of 1785 that devised a grid system of townships and ranges imposing rectilinear boundaries and dimensions on the land for its orderly dispersal through sale and grants from the central government. With no direct taxation power the Confederation looked to its ownership and sale of western lands as a revenue stream to support its operations into the distant future. To say the least, western land ownership was of crucial importance to the central government and remained so after the establishment of the federal system under the new *Constitution* in 1789.

Nevada's environment and topography presented special problems for the sale and distribution of public domain lands. For example, the State was not at all similar to Iowa where the land was rich throughout for agricultural possibilities. By the 1830s settlers and squatters eagerly staked land claims and purchased acreage in Iowa at local land offices established by the General Land Office. This was not so in Nevada where Americans mostly clustered in mining towns with the Comstock being the most prominent and famous by the early 1860s. In 1863, Congress, in part, responded to the Nevada situation with the passage of a Townsite Act that opened the sale of town lots for purchase in a bidding process wherein lots must not be sold less than the appraised value. Also, surface ownership did not include mineral rights. Mining claims fell under the rules of local mining districts with their "local traditions and customs." Along rivers and around other water sources ranch operations started in the territorial years (1861-1864) as squatters took up land without formal land patents or claims under any of the federal land laws: the Pre-emption Act (1841) and the Homestead Act (1862). Even when land was successfully acquired under the various land laws, the acreage usually did not extend far from water sources leaving vast adjacent sagebrush and arid spaces still in the public domain.

After the Central Pacific Railroad (later the Southern Pacific) built its route across northern Nevada to Utah in 1868 and 1869, it was the largest private land holder in Nevada with approximately five million acres of land. As a land grant railroad, the Central Pacific received from the federal government every other section of land (one square mile) in a checker board pattern 20 miles on either side of its also granted 500 feet of right of way. While it could use its land grants as collateral to finance borrowing for construction, the sale of railroad land was disappointing to say the least. The government, of course, retained its sections in the forty-mile-wide swath through the State, but it too found little success in disposing lands even in proximity to the railroad. Congress also tried with the 1893 Carey Act to give land to the State for it to sponsor and administer the irrigation of lands, but Nevada state government failed to move forward with the program.

So valueless were most Nevada lands that the General Land Office did not bother to survey them. With no rectilinear survey, there could be no identification of the school lands promised by Congress to the states. The original 1785 Land Ordinance designated section 16 and 36 of each township to be donated to the state for the support of the common schools. Nevada was entitled to over three million acres of school lands, but without a survey they could not be identified nor could they in all probability be sold after a survey. In 1880, Nevada and Congress negotiated a solution. In exchange for Nevada reducing its school land claims, Congress donated to the State 2 million random acres of public domain. The State in turn invited buyers to select land parcels, in some cases as small as 40 acres, for purchase at $1.25 an acre under generous credit terms. Buyers, usually ranch operations, chose lands around water sources and in ribbon like parcels along streams. Sale of "selected lands" proceeded at a quick pace with the consequent monopolization of water sources, largely by early ranch enterprises. Beyond land ownership adjacent to water sources the vast public domain of Nevada remained intact in the hands of the federal government to be used mostly as free open range by stock operators.

A resource open to all invited many users, but in Nevada monopolization of water sources made access by newcomers difficult and fraught with conflict, especially between cattle and sheep grazers. Water was the key to more land utilization in the view of Nevada and national advocates for the irrigation of the arid lands of the West. And while private irrigation projects brought some lands under the ditch in valleys with perennially running streams, other lands required larger investments beyond the means local enterprises. With the Reclamation Act of 1902, Congress provided national funding. Still federal reclamation projects only served a miniscule number of acres in the vast federal estate in Nevada.

During the Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt from 1901 to 1909, the first federal management of public domain lands came to Nevada with the designation of National Forests largely in the high mountain ranges running north to south in the State. About 11 percent of the State came under the management of National Forests whose administration also imposed grazing regulations limiting the number the stock, the kind of stock and season of graze. Generally, U.S. Forest Service grazing regulations favored cattle ranchers who were issued grazing permits limiting the number of stock, designating the locality of graze, and restricting the season or months of grazing from spring into the fall. Beyond the Forest Service's lands, the public domain remained open with unregulated range use causing a continuation of conflicts over water and range, especially as itinerant sheep herds moved through the state's open ranges. In 1916, Congress tried to address the public range problem by giving away more land with the Stockmen's Homestead Law that granted 640 acres of lands for ranch operations. Few applied in Nevada as the range problem persisted through the 1920s with many cattle ranchers petitioning for the expansion of the National Forest system to bring more of the public domain under Forest Service grazing regulations to protect it from roving sheep bands. In desperation, the 1931 Nevada Legislature extended state police powers over the public ranges to protect life and property, but with no administrative apparatus for enforcement.

In 1929, President Herbert Hoover's administration offered a solution to the public domain problem in the West hoping to satisfy both federal government and the states. It proposed to grant the remaining public domain to the states, but without the mineral rights. Western state governors and legislatures turned down the offer with Idaho's U.S. Senator William Borah declaring the land grant was "like handing (the states) an orange with the juice sucked out of it." As the impasse continued into the Great Depression and New Deal years, Congress passed the Taylor Grazing Act in 1934 that authorized the organization of grazing districts by local range users to regulate grazing affairs and eventually a Grazing Service to administer and oversee the operation of grazing districts. All was brought to an end by Senator Patrick McCarran in 1944-1945 when he derailed funding for the Grazing Service. In response, President Harry Truman by executive order created the Bureau of Land Management in 1946 to replace the longstanding General Land Office in the Department of Interior.

Today, two principal land management agencies administer most of the public lands in Nevada—the U.S. Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Land Management in the Department of Interior. In 1976, Congress passed the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) to give more authority to the Bureau of Land Management as it moved to comply with requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969-1970. Among other provisions, FLPMA declared that the Department of Interior was the permanent owner of the public lands. The lands would never move to the tax rolls of local governments. To soften this realization, Congress in the same year passed Public Law 94-565 for payment in lieu of taxes to compensate local governments for the land owned in perpetuity by the federal government. The law authorized payments to state and local governments from revenues collected on grazing fees and timber sales.

Still, such measures did not quell fears in some circles, especially in Nevada, over the assertion of a permanent federal ownership of public lands and the enforcement on these lands of new environmental compliances growing out of NEPA and Endangered Species Acts. In 1977, Nevada's legislature launched what became known as the "Sagebrush Rebellion" to persuade and even compel the federal government to cede the public lands to the states either through congressional action or court decisions. The movement did not succeed when federal courts ruled against the arguments and Congress did not act. Since those events of the late 1970s and early 1980s, an uneasy truce has prevailed around the permanent presence of the federal government as a manager and protector of public land resources with occasional flare ups in the form of misguided local attempts to defy federal management authority.

The Cozy History of Politicians and the Fourth Estate in Nevada

By SEAN WHALEY
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> I shall not often meddle with politics, because we have a political Editor who is already excellent and only needs to serve a term or two in the penitentiary to be perfect. – Mark Twain, a Biography

Newspapers and the public officials they put under the microscope on a regular basis go together nowadays like toothpaste and orange juice, but it was not always so. While the two sides look warily at each other when the Nevada Legislature is in session every other year, there was a time when the three branches of government and the Fourth Estate had a more cozy relationship. Especially when those newspapers were owned by public officials themselves. One notable example is Vail Pittman, who served as Nevada's nineteenth governor from 1945 to 1951 while at the same time owning the *Ely Daily Times*. Prior to his foray into the newspaper business, another notable Nevadan and future politician, Charles Russell, served as editor of *The Ely Record* starting in 1929.

In their book *The Newspapers of Nevada: A History and Bibliography, 1854-1979*, authors Richard Lingenfelter and Karen Rix Gash noted that "Russell used the paper to further his political career, winning six consecutive terms in the Nevada Legislature, beginning in 1935." Russell retired as editor in 1946 when Pittman bought out the rival Ely newspaper. But Russell went on to serve in Congress and later became Nevada's 20th governor, serving from 1951 to 1959. Pittman, a Democrat, and Russell, a Republican, were political rivals, with Russell defeating Pittman twice for governor.

The importance of a newspaper's support for a politician was made clear in 1944, when Pittman ran in a Democratic primary against Senator Pat McCarran, D-Nevada. In Jake Highton's book *Nevada Newspaper Days - A History of Journalism in the Silver State*, he wrote that Pittman found he could not get his ads in the Pioche paper because the owner was a McCarran backer. "With no other in the Pioche circulation ara, Pittman put out a one-issue, four-page newspaper for free distribution," Highton wrote. But Cannon won the primary and in later years worked against his fellow Democrat when he ran for governor against Russell in 1950.

Other examples of the overlap between politicians and the press include Walter Cox, a native of Virginia City who learned the newspaper business when his father purchased the *Mason Valley News* in 1919 and the *Yerington Times* in 1932. Cox went on to serve in both the State Assembly and Senate and is known for the *Mason Valley News* slogan: "The Only Newspaper in the World That Gives a Damn About Yerington." Cox also served on the Nevada Gaming Commission, the Nevada Planning Commission, and the Yerington City Council and as president of the Nevada State Press Association.

Another Nevadan who walked the line between newspapers and politics was Warren (Snowy) Monroe, publisher of the late *Elko Independent* who served in the State Senate. Mike O'Callaghan, who moved into the newspaper business after his stint as Nevada's twenty-third governor from 1971 to 1979 and served as executive editor of the *Las Vegas Sun*, recalled Monroe in a 1988 "Where I Stand" column. O'Callaghan was also the publisher of the *Henderson Home News* and *Boulder City News*. "Snowy was also a State Senator during my years as governor and he protected Elko in both debate and print," O'Callaghan recalled in a column he wrote when he was inducted into the Nevada Newspaper Hall of Fame. "He held the speed record driving from Carson City to Elko. Every highway patrolman knew him and several of them gave him tickets." So much for the power of the press.

In the newspaper world of today, where profits have been hard to come by due to changes in technology and reader habits, a new breed of wealthy individuals have invested in prominent publications. In Nevada, Sheldon Adelson and his family purchased the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. Elsewhere, the *Washington Post* is owned by Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos, the *Boston Globe* was purchased by Boston Red Sox owner John Henry, and the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* is owned by Minnesota Timberwolves owner Glen Taylor. It remains to be seen whether this trend will lead to a new era of newspaper owners seeking political office.