

EDITORIAL: Judicial elections pose challenges for voters



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Judicial elections pose challenges for voters. The candidates are generally well-qualified and the campaigns typically garner only minimal attention. Information about those running is often hard to come by.

But there are sources available for responsible voters to tap to better evaluate those running for judicial office in Nevada. Candidate websites offer positions and perspectives — perhaps self-serving, but potentially useful. The Review-Journal's 2025 judicial survey (www.reviewjournal.com/tag/judging-the-judges-2025/) reveals how practicing lawyers feel about the performance of those on the bench. Voters may also lean on attorney friends or acquaintances in search of valuable insight.

Below, we offer our recommendations in the 10 contested District Court races on the November ballot.

If Clark County residents were to make only one change in the District Court judicial lineup, it should be in Department 8. Incumbent Judge Jessica Peterson in January revealed her lack of understanding of the First Amendment when she ejected three Review-Journal employees from her courtroom in an effort to dictate the paper's coverage of a sexual assault trial. It took the Nevada Supreme Court only a day to intervene. Her less-than-stellar retention rating — 54 percent — in the RJ's judicial survey last year should also be a concern.

Judge Peterson's opponent is Austin Beaumont, a chief deputy district attorney who says he has appeared a few times in the incumbent's courtroom and "wasn't impressed." He called her actions in opposition to the First Amendment "horrificing." **Austin Beaumont** is the clear choice in Department 8.

In Department 5, Judge Veronica Barisich faces challenger Tracy Hibbetts, a Clark County prosecutor since 2023. Judge Barisich earned a 73 percent retention rating in the Review-Journal's most recent judicial survey and cites her "experience," "fairness" and integrity." She says she would "love to continue serving my community." We urge a vote for **Veronica Barisich**.

Judge Michelle Leavitt has been on the District Court bench since 2002 and seeks another term in Department 12. Public defender Dan Gilliam is her

opponent. Judge Leavitt has deep ties to the community and a wealth of experience. **Michelle Leavitt** is our choice.

Judge Jennifer Schwartz, elected in 2022, is running against Jacob Villani, a Clark County prosecutor, in Department 17. Judge Schwartz says her job is to “interpret and apply the law to the facts in front of me,” adding she’s “not going to legislate from the bench.” She earned a 75.5 percent retention rating in our survey. We see no reason for change in this department. **Jennifer Schwartz** deserves re-election.

Judge Tara Newberry faces Alex Hubert in Department 21. Judge Newberry earned a modest 68 percent retention rating in this paper’s judicial survey. “We have an obligation to grow and improve,” Judge Newberry said. “That’s how I took it.” She appreciates the “importance of transparency” and how it serves as a check and balance on public servants. Mr. Hubert has been a public defender for nearly 20 years and says his time in District Court has prepared him for the bench. But he has little civil experience, and Department 21 features a split civil/criminal docket. We recommend returning **Tara Newberry** to the bench.

In Department 23, Judge Jasmin Lilly-Spells is running against Martina Bauhaus, an attorney for the Las Vegas Police Protective Association. Judge Lilly-Spells received low marks in the Review-Journal judicial survey, with just 57 percent of attorneys who responded recommending she remain on the bench. She was arrested on a misdemeanor domestic battery charge in 2023. The charges were dropped after she completed community service and anger management courses. Ms. Bauhaus, meanwhile, says she is frustrated by a justice system with “too much focus on the criminal” and not enough on the victims. She says she is committed to “integrity, fairness and independence.” **Martina Bauhaus** is the better choice.

In Department 28, Noreen DeMonte, a judge in Las Vegas Justice Court, faces Danielle Tarmu, an attorney, for an open seat. Judge DeMonte says her goal is to “balance the rights of individuals with the importance of public safety.” She scored well on the RJ’s judicial survey, earning a retention rating of nearly 80 percent. Ms. Tarmu acknowledges she would have a “learning curve” when it comes to criminal law. Judicial experience makes **Noreen DeMonte** the best candidate in this race.

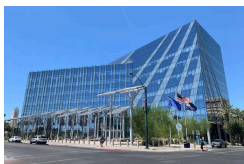
Department 29 features a contest between Judge Jacob Reynolds and prosecutor Alex Quagge. Mr. Quagge is a member of the National Guard and an Army veteran with significant criminal experience. But this department currently deals primarily with probate and civil matters. Judge Reynolds, who was appointed in 2023 and ran unopposed in 2024, has performed capably during his three years on the bench, earning a 73 percent retention rating in the RJ survey. **Jacob Reynolds** has earned a full term.

Judge Jerry Wiese is running against challenger Josh Santeramo, a worker’s comp attorney, in Department 30. Judge Wiese has been on the bench for 16 years and consistently rated highly in our judicial survey. He was elected chief judge by his peers in 2022. “I try to listen to people and appreciate where they’re coming from,” he says, adding he tries “not to legislate from the bench.” Mr. Santeramo is a good candidate, but he offers no compelling reason to replace the incumbent. Voters should support **Jerry Wiese**.

In Department 31, Judge Joanna Kishner drew a challenge from Alexandra Beth McLeod, an attorney for nearly 25 years. Judge Kishner, first elected in 2010, cites her “breadth and depth” of experience and her commitment to the community, but her retention rating in our 2025 judicial survey was an abysmal 46.6 percent. Ms. McLeod’s background in civil litigation is a plus, given that the department primarily deals with such cases. She says she will bring “civility and courtesy” to the bench. Judge Kishner’s experience is an asset, but her declining retention rating is a red flag.

It's a tough choice, but we urge a vote for **Alexandra Beth McLeod**.

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