



# Change in Leadership: Parraguirre Becomes Chief Justice of Nevada Supreme Court

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With the end of the year comes a change in leadership at the Nevada Supreme Court. The figurative gavel of administrative authority is being passed from Chief Justice James W. Hardesty to Justice Ron Parraguirre, who will serve as chief justice through 2010.

The chief justice is the administrative head of the judicial branch and the public voice of the Supreme Court. The chief justice also plays a major role in setting the direction of the Judiciary's activities. A majority vote of the full court, however, is necessary for any major action.

For Hardesty, it was one of the busiest and most challenging years that any chief justice has experienced, with a legislative agenda that involved adding new District Court judges, the creation of the Foreclosure Mediation Program and the near-loss of the Senior Judge Program. In today's hard economic times, the court has managed to keep the wheels of justice turning and the doors open for business and still has been reverting more than \$2 million annually to state coffers.

"The chief justice should be the leader of our legal system," said Second Judicial District Judge Brent Adams. "Chief Justice Hardesty certainly exemplified that role in the past year. He has represented the Supreme Court and the court system superbly."

"He has been a steady leader for all courts in the state," added Eighth Judicial District Chief Judge Art Ritchie. "He obtained resources for

urban and rural courts, and set a good example in fiscal responsibility for all courts in the state."

"Chief Justice Hardesty did a tremendous job in terms of dealing with the Legislature," said Fourth Judicial District Judge Andrew Puccinelli. "His 'business plan' in Assembly Bill 65 (increasing fees on civil filings to fund court operations) was phenomenal and has been very good for the rural courts."

Beyond the legislative activities, Hardesty initiated an innovative Family Court settlement program in Clark County, utilizing senior judges as mediators or as judges presiding over short trials. The program's resolution rate was 77 percent, which allowed many families to complete their divorces and settle child custody disputes quickly rather than through prolonged litigation.

Another series of settlement conferences is scheduled for January and February, and will involve about 100 cases.

Eighth Judicial District Presiding Family Court Judge Gloria Sanchez credits Hardesty for the settlement program's success. "If we need him, he's there for Family Court. He listens, cares and tries to help with solutions. We are blessed to have him as our chief justice."

Hardesty also promoted the use of senior judges to settle lingering medical malpractice cases during a so-called settlement marathon. Of the 75 cases involved, 38 were settled.

Other accomplishments involved a comprehensive study of CLE rules, allowing attorneys to appear in certain court cases telephonically or by videoconference, establishing an e-filing system at the Supreme Court, and saving the Senior Judge Program by trimming administrative costs.



**Left: 2010 Chief Justice Ronald Parraguirre  
Right: Former Chief Justice James W. Hardesty**

"Despite adversities, the judiciary had a number of successes during 2009," Hardesty said. "Many achievements, such as the implementation of the highly successful Foreclosure Mediation Program and the addition of new judges in Clark and Washoe Counties, were accomplished without increasing the burden on taxpayers."

"Any success this year should be credited to the hard work and dedication of the entire Supreme Court and the hard work of the judges and court staff throughout the state. Nevada's courts should be proud of our accomplishments and I am confident our fellow Nevadans will benefit from the improvements made by Nevada's judiciary."

"I have no doubt that Chief Justice Parraguirre will continue our path of progress toward making the Nevada Judiciary one of the best in the country," said Hardesty.

Parraguirre, however, will face new challenges, including fiscal issues as state revenues continue to be strained. "For the immediate future, the court will be focusing on facilitating more dispositions and more opinions," Parraguirre said. "In this economically challenging environment, resources are stretched to the limit. The court will need to be very thoughtful and enterprising in developing procedures to meet the demands of increasing caseloads at the Supreme Court."

"The court will also need to be ready to assist the judiciary throughout Nevada in addressing their ever-growing caseloads," said Parraguirre. "Timely and efficient resolution of cases is always a prime concern for trial judges. Facilitating the use of technology in urban and rural courts will promote savings in both time and expense for courts and litigants."

"I also want to address those things we can do as a body to foster public confidence in the judiciary. The public expects a fair, honest and impartial judiciary. They also expect the judicial process to be open to public scrutiny and expeditious in the resolution of cases. I intend to work closely with judges to identify

impediments to the process and then collectively determine what procedures and resources are needed to overcome those impediments," Parraguirre said.

Another project Parraguirre said he intends to promote is the Article 6 Commission's judicial performance evaluation proposal. "Judicial accountability and public confidence go hand-in-hand. Recent changes to the process of judicial discipline were applauded by both the public and the judiciary. A comprehensive judicial performance evaluation would similarly promote enhanced public confidence and be a welcome source of information for judges and the public. I will be working to implement the recent recommendations from the Article 6 Commission to create a meaningful, substantive judicial performance evaluation model," Parraguirre said.

"Our challenges in 2010 will be great and our work will be difficult, but I am confident that at the end of the year we will have met our goals and honorably served the citizens of Nevada," said Parraguirre. ■

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Chief Justice Ron Parraguirre