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Item 13

BECOMING A COUNTY COMMISSIONER

The decision to ask your peers and neighbors to elect you to represent them is one of the most rewarding and even difficult decisions you will ever make. Because they touch and influence all three branches of government, boards of county commissioners constitute the most powerful administrative body in county government. They make laws through the adoption of ordinances, carry out those laws by directing staff and working with other elected officials, and apply laws by making quasi-judicial decisions during planning and development decisions and show-cause hearings. These diverse responsibilities affect many very important aspects in the lives of Nevada's citizens.

Why Do I Want to Be a County Commissioner?

Running for any elected office is not a decision to be made lightly. There are many reasons people decide to run for public office. Some are based solely on the desire to make a difference while others may be driven by a special issue. Some candidates run because they are called to help work on local policies that have affected them directly such as the condition of local roads, development and land use decisions, or ensuring that the services provided to taxpayers by county governments are provided efficiently and justly. Before you make the decision to file for the office of county commissioner, look at the checklist below, check the answers that apply to you, and consider your decision carefully:

Why Do I Want to Be a County Commissioner?

- I believe I have the expertise to do the job, or am willing to learn
- I am angry or concerned over a particular issue
- I believe I can help make local decisions that will best represent my constituents
- I disagree with a sitting county commissioner or other elected official
- Others are urging me to run
- I need to supplement my income
- I believe in public service
- This seems like a good opportunity to advance my career
- Prestige
- I really have a desire to help build a better future for my county
- I enjoy building consensus and working as part of a team
- My business success could translate to political success
- Stepping stone to higher office
- Other

"A public office is a public trust and shall be held for the sole benefit of the people."

What Kind of Background Do I Need? Are There Special Requirements?

In Nevada, county commissioners come from a variety of backgrounds. No specific job experience or education is required to run for county commissioner, however, familiarity with some aspects of county government including budgeting, personnel management, public infrastructure, communications, and Nevada state law could be very helpful. There are, however, some essential requirements necessary to build a solid foundation for your success. They are *knowledge of your county* and *ethical behavior*.

Some Misconceptions About the Job of County Commissioner

One of the largest misconceptions individuals may have when they decide to run for county commissioner is that they will independently be able to change the face of county government. As an individual, your decision-making power is limited. If elected to county commissioner you will be part of a team, and your successes will come through the support of your teammates—the other county commissioners on your board. As part of that team, you can make a difference. But remember, any decisions made by the county commission must be approved by a majority of the members. This means that any initiative you sponsor will require forming alliances with others on the board who also support the goals you are working towards on behalf of your constituents.

What are the Powers and Responsibilities of the County Commission?

Being an effective county commissioner is not an easy job. There are many general and implied powers and duties of county commissioners and every decision you make will find its basis in law. Review Chapter 244 of the Nevada Revised Statutes for a good overview of your powers and responsibilities.

How Much Time Does It Take to Be a Commissioner?

This is a question many people wish they had asked themselves before they ran. Even in rural counties, where the salary is commensurate with only a part-time job, the time spent on commission duties may actually be more than a full-time job. Additional assigned liaison duties may require that you're frequently away from home during the evening or overnight. This may vary by county, but not by much. One thing is certain: during your first six months in office you'll be getting acquainted with your colleagues and staff, learning about county issues as well as day-to-day processes, learning how to juggle all your county responsibilities with your demands at home, and coming to the realization that YOU are now the individual who citizens call in both good times and bad. Being a county commissioner is a lot of hard work, but, hopefully you will find that working on behalf of your community and constituents to tackle the many challenges that county governments face is a true public service and could be the most rewarding job you will ever accept.

Any Other Questions?

The Nevada Association of Counties is the state association for county government officials and staff. You can access our website at nvnaco.org, or call us at 775-883-7863.

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NACO Workshop Series

UNDERSTANDING MEDICAID



Learn about the county role in the Medicaid program, including how Medicaid impacts your county budget and potential opportunities. Experts from the State of Nevada Department of Health and Human Services will provide an overview of the Medicaid program and representatives from the County Human Services Association will explain the various ways that counties interact with Medicaid.

INVITED: County Officials and County Staff

WHEN: Friday, December 1st from 10:00a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

WHERE: NACO Conference Room, Carson City

RSVP to Amanda at aevans@nvnaco.org or by calling 775-883-7863 and for details on participating via video and/or teleconference. This workshop is eligible for .75 CPO credit in Leadership & Governance.

NACO Committee of the Emeritus