

A professional headshot of a middle-aged man with short, graying hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a dark navy blue pinstriped suit jacket over a white dress shirt and a light blue patterned necktie. The background is a solid, dark gray.

Junior ROTC Leader
Nevada Supreme Court Justice
Student Body President **Civil Communicator**
Wolf Pack Fan Alumni Council President
District Judge

James Hardesty

The Honorable James Hardesty '70 (accounting)

My time at the University of Nevada, Reno was one of the most important experiences of my life. The University was a great laboratory, not only for learning, but for building a foundation for further life experiences. I met my wife of 40 years, Sandy Packer '85 (physical education), and we have two daughters. We are now blessed with five grandchildren.

I went out for freshman football, which grew into a long-term affection and support for the University's athletic department. I was in ROTC for a few years, having been brigadier general of the Washoe County Junior ROTC in high school. I was also involved in student government, first as junior men's senator, then as student body president in 1969-70.

That year was a unique period in history because the ongoing war in Vietnam brought with it increased student activism around the country, increased violence between activists and law enforcement, and increased attention to racial discrimination issues.

While many campuses around the United States were in turmoil—and ours wasn't much different—we took an entirely different approach as a student government.

Rather than being confrontational, we chose to work with the administration and the Board of Regents in a cooperative, communicative and proactive way. This taught me lessons for a lifetime about the value and productivity of civil communication.

During my term as president, I had the opportunity to work with one of the finest university presidents, N. Edd Miller. He was a man of great wisdom and compassion.

Student government sponsored N. Edd Miller Day on Oct. 17, 1969. Several thousand students met President Miller at 6:30 a.m. at the gates of the University to express—not our disdain for campus administration—but rather

our appreciation of him and his willingness to listen to student concerns. We greeted him with balloons.

This event resulted in national publicity for the University. Pictures of President Miller, Robyn Powers '70 (art), the student body vice president, and me appeared on the front pages of 134 newspapers across the country. The event set the stage for the promotion of issues that were important to students, many of which I suspect remain important now: academic freedom, students' rights, professor evaluations, the cost of tuition and job placement after graduation. It also laid the groundwork for the adoption by the Board of Regents, for the first time, of a student bill of rights. And, it allowed us to bring on campus a number of controversial figures.

For example, President S.I. Hayakawa of San Francisco State University, who at the time was engaging in very restrictive supervision of student activities, presented a very active speech. We also brought to campus Julian Bond, a civil rights activist, co-founder of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and the first black member of the Georgia State Assembly. He provided an insightful dialog on racial discrimination, black power and similar issues surrounding racial tensions.

Being in student government at Nevada taught me the value of civil communication, respecting another person's point of view, and working together to achieve important success for all of the parties involved.

Those controversies of the past are particularly relevant to today's controversies. Increasingly, we see what appears to be an inability of people to obtain compromise, respect others' points of view, or communicate effectively and in a civil way. I'm hoping that lessons of the past where effective civil communication has produced such great results can be revisited.

In my position as a justice on the Nevada Supreme Court, effective civil communication is critical. This court is the highest court in the state and has a number of important responsibilities concerning the law and the administration of justice. Civil communication by the Supreme Court is essential to demonstrate neutrality, impartiality, diligence toward hard work, and an unbiased approach to serving the law, not political agendas.

If our citizens lack confidence in the judicial branch—if they lack confidence in our institutions at all—it undermines our democracy.

Every year that I've been on the Supreme Court, we have had a number of very controversial disputes. Last year alone we had as many as 15 or 16 election disputes that involved disputes over initiative petitions, candidates for judgeship or for partisan political office, and all of those cases required prompt adjudication.

The court is regularly called upon to decide these kinds of controversies, and our job is to disregard the clamor, be dispassionate, and focus solely on the facts and the law.

On my desk is a plaque, which is emblematic of what I learned in college. President Ronald Reagan offers these words: "There's no limit to what a man can do or where he can go, if he doesn't mind who gets the credit."

I think it underscores the idea that everyone's ideas bring about success, not just one individual's.

From a July 21 conversation with Melanie Robbins '06M.A., senior editor of Nevada Silver & Blue. The Honorable James Hardesty was named outstanding senior graduate at Nevada in 1970. He earned a juris doctor degree from University of Pacific McGeorge School of Law in 1975. Following a career in private practice, James was elected district court judge in the Second Judicial District Court of Washoe County and was elected chief judge in 2001 and 2003. He was sworn in as a Nevada Supreme Court justice on Jan. 3, 2005, and was elected chief justice for the 2009 term. He has served on numerous Supreme Court commissions. He served four years on the Nevada Alumni Council, including a term as president in 1981.

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