

# Never Bet Against Las Vegas

An Interview with The Honorable Carolyn G. Goodman, Mayor of Las Vegas

**EDITORS' NOTE** Carolyn Goodman became the mayor of the city of Las Vegas in 2011 and was reelected in 2015 and 2019. She has been an advocate of Las Vegas' \$44.9 billion tourism industry and is a board member on the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. She also serves on the Las Vegas Global Economic Alliance (LVGEA), Las Vegas Events, the Southern Nevada Tourism Infrastructure Committee, the Regional Transportation



The Hon. Carolyn G. Goodman

Commission, the Transportation Safety Commission and the Clark County Regional Flood Control District. She is chair of the Las Vegas Redevelopment Agency and serves on the UNLV Medicine Community Advisory Board; the Governor's Technical Advisory Committee for Clark County School District Reorganization; the Governor's Commission on Tourism; and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Local Government Advisory Committee. She is a founding member of the UNLV School of Medicine Community Engagement Board. Goodman also serves on the Blue Ribbon Committee for Clark County Child Welfare Services. She holds national leadership roles as a member of the United States Conference of Mayors (USCM), and is a member of its Advisory Board, Vice-Chair of its Jobs, Education and Workforce Committee, and serves as the Chair of the Mayors' Business Council. In June 2013, she hosted the 81st annual gathering of the National Conference of Mayors in Las Vegas. The USCM honored her with the Mayors' 2014 Large City Climate Protection Award. Goodman founded Las Vegas' The Meadows School in 1984, Nevada's first nonprofit, college preparatory school for pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. Recognized nationally by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) and the National Association of Independent Schools with the Seymour Preston Trustee Award for Leadership, she additionally devoted much of her life to volunteerism in Las Vegas. In 1989, the University of Nevada recognized Goodman with the prestigious "Distinguished Nevadan" award and in 2006 bestowed upon her an Honorary Doctor of Laus degree (PhD). In 2010, UNLV announced her as Alumni of the Year in Education. She is also the recipient of the Frances Riker Davis Award for public service from her high school alma mater, Brearley. Early in her career, Goodman worked in the hotel industry. Prior to that, she worked as

a vocational counselor in West Las Vegas for the Department of Labor training and building employment opportunities for African Americans in a then-segregated city. Born and raised in New York City, she graduated from Bryn Mawr College where she served as Student Government President and earned a degree in Sociology and Anthropology. She earned a master's degree in counseling at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

**Did you always have an interest in public service and what excited you about the opportunity to become the Mayor of Las Vegas?**

Yes, I always was active in social service but never had an interest in political service. When we moved to Las Vegas in 1964 from the East Coast, I worked in the hotel industry in public relations and marketing, thereafter becoming a stay-at-home mother busy raising our four little children. As they were only 38 months apart, in fear of my brain atrophying I pursued a master's degree at night to keep my brain cells alive and active. As the children aged into preschool, my spare time was spent evaluating the community's public education programs and by the time all my children were in elementary school, I realized a need for another educational option in Las Vegas and worked to develop what would become Nevada's first and only independent – but nonprofit, nonreligious, independent – pre-K through 12th grade college prep school. After managing that school daily for 26 years, I planned to retire as my husband, Oscar, was finishing his third and final term as Mayor of Las Vegas. While I had held elected offices in high school and had been president of the student government of my college, I had never given thought to running for any political office, ever. However, our then grown children were about changing that by pointing out that there were so many projects and plans that their father had started in his 12 years which needed to be finished and they pushed, and I ran. Being elected in 2011, it was the first record in the nation of a spouse swearing in a spouse sequentially into the same public office, and I am now serving in my third and final term completing what will be a quarter of a century of Goodman banner waving for Las Vegas.

What has excited me for all of these years has been what a unique and surprisingly wonderful place this is to live, raise a family, enjoy life, and invest. We take great pride in the fact that our city is as diverse

and rich in population, nationalities, religions, races, cultures and talents as there is in the world. Everyone works and is important to building this world-class community. All are welcome to become meaningful parts of pursuing their dreams in Las Vegas, a city where those dreams still can come true and which propelled me to run for mayor.

**Where does Las Vegas stand in regard to recovery and rebuilding from the pandemic?**

Las Vegas is well on its way to returning to pre-pandemic visitation and activity levels. As more and more people are vaccinated and as we see the country and the world reopen, there is enormous, intense visitation and a surging, growing investment interest in Las Vegas. The energy that is building is beyond palpable. People want to travel and have a good time after the pandemic confinement and, of course, Las Vegas is on their radar as a top destination. Total recovery for a year's loss is just out there to grab.

**Las Vegas was deeply impacted by the global pandemic. Will you discuss how Las Vegas adapted to address the challenges caused by the pandemic and how the City is focusing on health and safety going forward?**

Las Vegas has always been a destination committed to and maintaining the highest standards in safety and good health practices. How and why else would the city have flourished, expanded and excelled so remarkably over the many decades had it not been for already being a safe and healthy place? We were not broken when the pandemic shutdown constraints were put upon the city, and as we return to full reopening, we remain committed to being at the forefront in all new ways of sustaining our attractive appeal to tourists, businesses, investors and residents alike. Knowing that Las Vegas has always been chameleon-like, at this time once again we are looking toward being on the cutting edge of the "new." This means innovation, creativity and surely technology. We continue to move forward advancing new technology trends with IT roles in health and safety interactivity at the forefront. Our International Innovation District downtown has become an incubator and testing ground not only for those in IT in the nation, but also for those in the world at large. Keeping in mind that Las Vegas has always made safety its priority, our focus remains on adapting to the changing world, its challenges, regulations and requests. We will continue to remain at the forefront of implementing responses in areas of safety and health as needed.

**How do you define the Las Vegas advantage and what makes Las Vegas a leading destination for business and tourism?**

Never bet against Las Vegas for there is always the Las Vegas advantage. We are the world's top destination for travel and fun and for business gatherings, meetings and conventions. Our stellar reputation for hospitality in our world-class resorts, our five-star dining opportunities, incredible and varied boutique shopping offerings, star-studded entertainment, and now our major league sports are all irresistible and part of the Las Vegas advantage. Realize, too, that some 150,000-hotel rooms are just 20 minutes from our international airport, not an hour travel, and not spread over many miles.

Our future is as bright as the sun that shines nearly 365 days a year. With measured intensity to addressing all challenges with fervor that our resident population shares, we continue bonding to face tough times together, whether in the recent recession or this past year's pandemic. Remember, never bet against Las Vegas. We handle it all, a huge diverse welcoming family of people adapting to change so that we may remain the world's favorite travel destination and a beautiful, thriving community.

**You have championed downtown development for Las Vegas. Will you discuss this focus and how critical this is to the growth and success of the city?**

Downtown is where the city began and it has remained the core of southern Nevada. It is a thriving center of business, commerce, government, culture and excitement. The downtown was a focal point and priority of my husband's 12-year term beginning in 1999, and has continued to be for me as well thus far during my 10 years in office. As all major interstate roads converge into downtown, growth and new development have been a natural. We have seen neighborhoods like the 18B Las Vegas Arts District come into its own. New businesses have joined existing favorites and the city has done its part by improving the infrastructure on many streets including Main and Fremont Streets, and now a full concentration is on Las Vegas Boulevard.

Improvements and additions to many of the hotel-casinos downtown in recent years have included the Plaza, the D, Binion's, the California and the El Cortez to name a few. Transformational to the downtown has been the opening of the 777-room Circa boasting the world's largest sportsbook and its Stadium Swim complex. The VivaVision refresh of the Fremont Street canopy has drawn millions to the core of the city under which bands entertain for free on weekends and during holidays. Downtown is also where you will find the Las Vegas Medical District, Symphony Park (theater district), the World Market Center (international wholesale furniture, accessories, and clothing marketplace), and the most popular outdoor shopping mall, Las Vegas North Premium Outlets, thrive.

Each of us who lives here believes we are beyond fortunate to live in an exciting, multi-dimensional community like Las Vegas. All the

amenities that people travel to for enjoyment, relaxation, business, sports, and conventions are here to enjoy and experience to the fullest.

**Will you highlight your efforts on improving inner-city schools in Las Vegas and your commitment and investment in education?**

At the onset of my tenure, I committed that the city of Las Vegas would focus on early learning and preparing our children in readiness for kindergarten and reading matriculation. The school system and all public education have always been beyond the purview and control of the city. We thus chose to intervene through the preschool and after-school programs. Our Strong Start Program includes programming in traditional brick and mortar facilities, as well as in mobile units. The latter provide developmental and learning opportunities directed into some of our most challenged communities.

Our ReInvent Schools are physical school community hubs that we have established to provide assistance to students and their families by providing wraparound services at the school itself. The concept is to reinforce the schools as the centers of the community.



*Mayor Carolyn Goodman prepares to present a proclamation at a local event in Las Vegas*

Most recently, the city has approved moving forward with a charter school to continue the efforts initiated in our Strong Start Program. These are just a few of the ways that the city is working to create strong futures through education. Our goal is to get children reading in kindergarten, learning to love learning, taught by state-licensed and better-paid faculty, ultimately keeping all children engaged in learning and increasing our high school graduation rates.

**How has your administration expanded homeless resources and what more can be done to address the challenge of homelessness in Las Vegas?**

On a daily/hourly basis we work to connect those facing homelessness with services that can assist them in becoming healthy, housed and productive citizens. We do this through our MORE Teams that bring our outreach efforts to the streets, into the encampments, and into our Courtyard Homeless Resource Center. The Courtyard is a low-barrier, 24/7 safe shelter that is open to anyone who needs help. Unfortunately, mental health and chronic drug/alcohol addiction are fundamental

issues that oftentimes prove to be roadblocks to individuals accepting the help and services that are offered. Despite these challenges, the city is committed to breaking the cycle of homelessness by every means available.

**Will you discuss the creation of the medical district in Las Vegas?**

When my husband, former Mayor Oscar Goodman, took office in 1999, he espoused that certain criteria needed to be met to qualify for becoming a world-class city. Of primary concern was always safety, but a close second was providing the finest quality of medicine, medical education and research, and excellence in health-care. Coupling into these basic mandates included providing classic culture and the arts, professional sports and opportunities for open space recreation. We have seen the city religiously address accomplishing all of these goals, including the creation of the Las Vegas Medical District. The vision of the District is to establish the core of medicine in Southern Nevada. Home to the Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine at UNLV, multiple hospitals and ancillary medical support facilities, the District is centrally located within the Las Vegas valley and positioned to catalyze economic development and growth in the heart of the city. Home to the State's only Level 1 Trauma Center and the finest, accredited burn unit, the City is moving forward in its firm commitment to the District and overall healthcare.

Via a thoughtful master plan, the District will help attract new, high-paying employers to the region, attract new professionals, as well as advance a higher quality of life. Further development of the District will provide jobs, bolster the health of Southern Nevadans, and stimulate new development adjacent to the City's attractive assets in the downtown, at Symphony Park, in the government and business amenities, and in the Arts District. Ultimately, the District is poised to become a true center of academic medicine in Southern Nevada with its partners working collaboratively in the areas of education, research and treatment.

**What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and the ability to drive action and impact in government?**

I'm non-partisan, and I believe that it is important to remember that I was elected to represent all Las Vegas. Partisan bickering and political gridlock do not move the ball forward and do nothing to improve the quality of life. As a leader, one has to inspect what is expected to be certain that plans are being followed without shortcuts and change. Substantive factual data must be fundamental for consideration in the decision-making process. Being a good listener and helping to find compromise are essential to finding any and all success. When there is conflict, no one gains, no one wins – everyone loses, so fair and just compromise means a middle ground must be reached, a place where everyone can agree to give a little to get some of what they want. ●