

Regents District 11 – Sparks, north Reno, northern Washoe County, Pershing County, Humboldt County (Jason Geddes, incumbent, termed out)

Question	Jeffrey Downs	Steve Laden
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City address	Reno	Reno
Educational background	Downs: BS Mathematics CSU San Bernardino, MA Applied Math CSU Fullerton, PhD Education- Instructional Design and Technology Liberty University	Laden: University of California, Santa Barbara, BA Business Economics
RDQQCurrent profession/employment	Downs: Community College Professor, Western Nevada College	Laden: Retired
Professional/employment background	Downs: 18 years- Western Nevada College, 2.5 years as an Interim Vice President of Student Success and Support Services 3 year Visiting Lecturer UNR 1 year Emergency Hire Lake Tahoe Community College Math Instructor 5 years High School instructor	Laden: Financial Advisor, 32+ years. My last position was Senior Vice President – Investment Officer. I retired January 1, 2021. Prior to commencing my financial services career, I held two different positions centered on higher education: The Grand Chapter of Phi Sigma Kappa Fraternity, Director of Expansion (1982-83) and Cogswell Polytechnical College, Assistant Director of Admissions (1986-87). Today, Cogswell is University of Silicon Valley.
Past elected offices or other public service	Downs: WNC NFA Chapter President Scoutmaster and Assistant Scoutmaster, Scouts BSA Ward 5 Old Northwest NAB member/chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past Board Member and Past President, Education Alliance of Washoe County/Education Collaborative. (11 years). The Ed Alliance brings together the entire spectrum of Pre-K through university educators, Reno/Sparks business leaders, elected officials, and parents to address issues facing all levels of public education in our community. It was the first organization in Northern Nevada to bring all of these stakeholders together at the same table for a common purpose. During my time on the Board and as President, we managed the Partner in Education (PiE) program, the Teachers’ Warehouse and founded the Run for Education. We published the WCS D Data Profile, and advocated locally and in Carson City for issues impacting pre-K to higher

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		<p>education. We were deeply involved in discussions focused on graduation rates, high school to college articulation, remediation, Read by 3, public education budgets and more.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past Board Member, State of Nevada Council to Establish Academic Standards. (8 years). The Council’s role is to establish rigorous, measurable standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, computer and technology education, health and physical education, and the arts. The goal is to improve the academic achievement of Nevada’s students. During my tenure on the Board, we dealt with No Child Left Behind, Race to The Top and Common Core, plus a recession with its accompanying budget cuts. Through it all, we successfully raised the bar of expectations in our public schools. • Past Mentor/Reader/Soccer Coach, Partners in Education at Roger Corbett Elementary School. Through my Lions club, we teamed with Roger Corbett Elementary School as a Partner in Education. I mentored three different K-6 students, read to classes and, for 9 seasons, coached their Great Basin soccer team. • Past Task Force Member, Nevada Department of Education. Through the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education, the task force studied and reported on developing standards for workplace readiness. This work led to a set of well-defined standards aimed at guiding the preparedness of students for any career. • Current Trustee of Lions Eye Foundation of California-Nevada, Inc. (27 years) and Past President. We provide free eye surgery to uninsured, low-income residents of Northern California and Nevada. Each year the retail value of our services is approximately \$10 million. • Current member of Reno Host Lions Club (34 years), and Past President. Our role is to provide service to our community with a focus on youth and the visually impaired.
<p>Briefly, why are you running for the Board of Regents at this time?</p>	<p>Downs: Now, more than ever, it is important that we have a more diverse representation on the Board of Regents. The last time a faculty member was on the BoR was over a decade ago. The lack of representation of faculty concerns has impacted board policy to the detriment of faculty. While this is one seat on the board, it is a start to changing the composition of this governing body. My hope is to remind the other members about Academic Freedom and the</p>	<p>Laden: I’m running for the University Board of Regents because I believe all of our young people have the right to dream big. One of the greatest pathways to achieving dreams in America is being able to pursue a quality, public higher education. Our colleges and universities must be accessible, affordable, shining stars that breathe life into those dreams.</p>

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	<p>struggles faculty face trying to afford the cost of living in Nevada.</p>	<p>I am also running because I will bring an over 30 years of business experience to the position. I am not a professional educator. I am an education advocate. I am also a team builder, goal setter, communicator, budgeter and community networker. Further, as a Northern Nevada businessman and community leader, I believe our educational institutions owe our community well-educated citizens and a high-quality workforce.</p>
<p>What are your three highest priorities for the Board of Regents and the Nevada System of Higher Education?</p>	<p>Downs:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Create and encourage policies that enable institutions to create programs to better serve the needs of students and industry. 2) Represent the people of District 11, and Nevada as a whole, and their values to the Board of Regents on upcoming policies taken by NSHE. 3) Represent the values of the people of District 11, again and Nevada as a whole, as we search for a new chancellor, one whose values reflect that of the people of Nevada. 	<p>Laden: 1) Education. At its very core, the Nevada System of Higher Education is there to educate students. We must honor this mission. This means providing safe, accessible, diversified, affordable, enlightened campuses where our students can learn. It also means honoring the faculty and staff who make learning on our campuses engaging and fruitful.</p> <p>2) Leadership. I wish I didn't have to cite leadership as a top priority. However, with the recent departure of the Chancellor, the Board clearly needs to focus on finding the right leader to take the Nevada System of Higher Education forward. Before moving forward, however, leadership must first emerge within the Board itself. The Board will experience significant turn-over after the election. The new Board must coalesce quickly, in order to build a strategic plan, engage with the Legislature and hire the right Chancellor. Fumbling the leadership challenge is not an option.</p> <p>3) Money. To provide the education our students want and our economy requires; to offer forth the best and brightest faculty and staff; to build and nurture great campuses takes money. Unfortunately, the recent turmoil in the state's revenue stream, lower systemwide enrollments due to COVID, student indebtedness and legislative priorities that usurp spending on higher education have all conspired to make appropriate levels of state funding of the higher education system a necessary priority.</p>
<p>The NSHE state budget was cut in 2020 and 2021 versus pre-pandemic levels. As a regent, how would you address budget shortfalls?</p>	<p>Downs: I will work to restore funding to pre-pandemic levels. This may require utilizing the reserves NSHE holds. As an alternative, I would focus on the programs and faculty impacted by the cuts and work to redirect funding from administrative services to these areas. The primary mission of NSHE is to offer instruction and research.</p>	<p>Laden: In its proposal to the Governor for the next budget, the current Board will recommend replacing part of the reductions, \$11.6 million, from funds available within the governor's stated spending limit for the forthcoming biennium. Further, the Board is aiming to recapture the balance of the cuts by making the restoration of those funds their number one priority on the list of</p>

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		<p>“Items for Special Consideration” that will be presented to the Legislature. I fully support these actions.</p> <p>To capably pursue dollars above the Governor’s spending limits (i.e., Items for Special Consideration) the Board must have a foundational strategic plan, and be able to clearly articulate the value of higher education to all stakeholders. This work must be done quickly, efficiently and cooperatively so NSHE’s message can be powerfully presented to the next Legislature.</p> <p>If, in the future, the expense side of the balance sheet needs to be addressed, having a clear strategic plan for the system, and each institution, will be pivotal for determining how to best fulfill the core mission of each NSHE institution.</p>
<p>In the face of declining state support for higher education, should student fees and tuition be increased to maintain programs? If not, what alternatives would you advocate?</p>	<p>Downs: This is the big question, and I would like to address the premise. I think we should look at changing that level of support we have been getting from the state. We offer high quality programs in Nevada and the legislature needs to be made aware of it. As with all things, yes, tuition can go up. However, I would like to see more effort be made to educate the legislature about the opportunities we have to give to Nevada.</p> <p>Another funding alternative that I would support is to work with industry to form public-private partnerships in which the industry contributes to the cost given the benefits they will receive.</p>	<p>Laden: One of my goals is to control the costs borne by students in our higher education system. While I firmly believe students should meaningfully participate in financing their educations, we cannot ignore the emerging national debate about student debt and the impact of that debt on families, communities and our economy in general. Moreover, student fees in our system have nearly tripled since 2002. The question becomes, how hard can we push on that string?</p> <p>That said, I recognize the reality of the waning support offered by the state. As a businessman, I also know all options need to be on the table.</p> <p>Annual student fee increases are already tied to HEPI. If any discussion of raising tuition and fees beyond HEPI were pursued, I would want to do it cooperatively with student and administration leaders. This has been done in the past, and I would want to use those experiences as a framework for discussing such hikes again in the future.</p>

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<p>The Board of Regents oversees two universities, a state college, four community colleges, and a research institute. Given limited resources, how would you balance the needs and allocate resources for the various institutions of NSHE?</p>	<p>Downs: This is a challenging balancing act. NSHE needs to serve the needs of Nevada as a provider of workforce training, a critical element in overcoming unemployment in the state. NSHE also needs to grow its brand as a research region with UNR, UNLV, and DRI. So, funding must be available to make all of this happen. Does the current funding formula work, some say no. This should be reexamined to determine how to best serve Nevada. Working with the legislature will also help to alleviate this struggle.</p>	<p>Laden: From a fiscal perspective, most of the system’s heavy lifting occurs during the budgeting process prior to the creation of the Governor’s Biennial Executive Budget. This process must begin with and flow from the clear expression of vision, goals and priorities set by the Board and reflected in each unique institution within the system. The Chancellor’s office must work closely with the leadership of each institution to identify and address their particular needs, and communicate these needs to the Board. Our universities have attained Tier 1 status and we need a clear understanding of the costs associated with maintaining this recognition. At the same time, I believe the funding of our community colleges today calls for some extra attention by the Board. Many community college programs are specialized and expensive, and the funding formula may not equitably recognize their unique needs. In this context, I believe the findings of the AB 450/Community College Workforce Training and Programs Committee are relevant, forward-thinking and warrant aggressive follow-up by the Board of Regents.</p>
<p>The Board of Regents and Nevada System of Higher Education have been in the news lately and over many years for conflicts among regents and administrators and between NSHE and the Legislature. How would you address those issues?</p>	<p>Downs: First, we need to bring in a Chancellor who will be able to work within the framework we have, while bringing NSHE into the national stage. Next, we need to improve and strengthen the relationship between the regents and the legislature. We also need to improve morale of employees by creating better working conditions for the employees. All these together will create a system that can grow and not be playing defense.</p>	<p>Laden: As I mentioned [above], we must have a strong focus on Board leadership. Strong leadership does not mean domineering, unilateral leadership. Strong leadership means building a cohesive, cooperative, informed team. The team must build consensus around common goals and create a supportive, education-centric culture. It’s only from this platform that conflicts can be resolved and open, constructive lines of communications established with all stakeholders. Further, I believe the Chancellor position needs to be reexamined, with likely updates to the job description, and even title, so the Board and the new Chancellor have a clear understanding of the duties and expectations of that office.</p>
<p>As a Regent, how would you address issues with the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff?</p>	<p>Downs: This is a crucial issue for us at WNC. NSHE needs to fund its faculty and staff better. Living in Nevada is great, but it is becoming more and more challenging to afford this life. NSHE needs to make it a priority to increase all faculty and staff (below executive level) salaries to retain our current employees and consequently attract new faculty and staff to our institutions. A new faculty member in Carson City cannot live on \$52,000 a year.</p>	<p>Laden: Regents should not be involved directly with the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff beyond the hiring of key NSHE personnel and campus presidents. The Board, however, must be intimately concerned with establishing the vision and culture in which all faculty and staff work. This must start with upholding the core mission of our institutions, which is to advance knowledge and learning. We must 1) be competitive nationally with salary and benefits; 2) promote a culture that values education and respects those that dedicate their careers to that</p>

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		mission; 3) offer safe, welcoming environments within each institution; 4) have a strong, stable and predictable fiscal foundation; 5) continue to enhance the reputation of our institutions in order to attract the best candidates for open positions; 6) promote the hiring, retaining and advancing of faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds, cultures, races and ethnicities.
What are your thoughts about collective bargaining for NSHE professional employees? Specifically, would you support or oppose legislation for collective bargaining rights for NSHE professional employees in statute?	<p>Downs: I support legislation to have collective bargaining rights for NSHE professional employees in statute. Those who know me know that I am an avid supporter of collective bargaining. I am, in fact, the lead negotiator for the WNC chapter of the NFA and we are currently in negotiations for a new contract. Having a collective bargaining agreement helps create a work environment in which the employees have some input. This can result in increased morale and more committed employees. My hope is that more institutions within NSHE seek this relationship to have more say in their working conditions. I also would like to see NSHE become more supportive of collective bargaining.</p>	<p>Laden: I believe in the right of our professional employees to earn competitive wages and benefits. I believe merit should be rewarded. I prefer promoting qualified, proven candidates from within, rather than hiring from outside. I believe in a safe, welcoming, professional work environment. I do not have enough knowledge at this time to pass judgment on <i>legislation</i> pertaining to collective bargaining for professional employees. I do support the precepts of the NSHE Handbook, Title 4, Chapter 4.</p>
If Nevada is faced with another pandemic, what considerations do you believe regents should apply to decisions associated with public health mandates for employee and students?	<p>Downs: If it is warranted to return to remote learning, I support doing so. However, this should only be done in extreme circumstances. As we have seen with the Omicron variant, cases have dropped significantly and many people have been vaccinated or have natural immunity, or both. The Board of Regents will need to weigh the diminished level of education that has occurred in the past (and that we faculty have experienced with students coming to us now), with the actual threat and likelihood of on campus transmissions. At WNC, we could never point to an on-campus transmission vector throughout the pandemic. Procedures on campus were in place to minimize this possibility.</p> <p>If we need to return to remote learning due to pandemic or other concerns, the system will need to be prepared to support faculty and students to ensure quality education with academic integrity is being provided and maintained.</p>	<p>Laden: In a pandemic situation, the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff must be the first priority. While I am a proponent of in-person learning, I do believe our institutions are better equipped to shift to online learning temporarily, if necessary. If what you really want to know is my stand on mask and vaccine mandates, during COVID I have been a supporter of those directives. Any future pandemics may not look the same as the coronavirus and may require different actions by the Board and campuses. In these situations, I put science above politics and emotions.</p>

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Do you support or oppose allowing the concealed or open carry of firearms on NSHE campuses?	Downs: I see this as an issue that the state legislature would need to consider if changes were to be made, not the Board of Regents. The Board of Regents does not have the authority to change Nevada Revised Statutes which governs this issue. I am open to having an academic conversation about this issue, but I do not see it being in the purview of the regents to determine.	Laden: Oppose.
Would you support or oppose a policy to regulate discussion of or teaching about divisive topics such as Critical Race Theory on NSHE campuses?	Downs: As a proponent of Academic Freedom, I do not support the regulating of topics taught. However, Academic Freedom has limits. In a math class, I cannot teach English topics, unless there is a unit on the language of math in literature. From my understanding, though, most courses already contain content that needs to be covered. If a department chooses to offer a course on Critical Race Theory, I support making the syllabus available for students prior to enrollment, if possible, so they can know what to expect.	Laden: Oppose. These are university and college campuses. They are places meant for the free exchange of knowledge and ideas. We must allow for new and different areas of human thought and experience. Our students want and need to think for themselves and arrive at their own conclusions. Stifling opinion and regulating the dissemination of information is not what our system should be about.
What is your view of NSHE governance? Should the Board of Regents concern itself with the internal operations of the eight NSHE institutions, or else should the Board simply hire the Presidents and let them run the institutions?	Downs: The Board of Regents needs to hire an effective Chancellor who will take charge of the leadership of the eight institutions. College and University presidents do not need to worry about pleasing one Chancellor and 13 Regents. Instead, they should work with the Chancellor who will manage the presidents. The key here is, though, that the Chancellor show leadership in this area.	Laden: On a micro level, the Board should NOT “concern itself” with day-to-day operations or micromanagement of the institutions. Presidents and their campus administrators must clearly be in charge of the internal operations of their respective institutions. On a macro level, the Board must “concern itself” with the operations of the institutions. The Board must be aware of each institution’s uniqueness and needs in order to fulfill its function as a steward of the state’s higher education system. The Board must “concern itself” in issues of state funding, capital improvement projects and other issues involving the future vision of an institution. The Board must also know enough to judge the performance of current campus leadership, or measure the suitability of a new leadership hire. But, micromanagement...No.
What are your top criteria for choosing a Chancellor?	Downs: A Chancellor serving in Nevada needs to be able to represent the system well. During the legislative session, the Chancellor should have some visibility with the legislature. The Chancellor should also take control of the leadership	Laden: 1) A strong personal adherence to the system’s primary function of educating our students, and supporting those who enable that process. 2) Strong leadership, team building and communications skills. 3) A demonstrated high-level work ethic.

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	<p>within NSHE and be sure the presidents of the respective institutions have a positive relationship with their faculty and staff. Too many chancellors that I have seen focus on maintain the campus leadership despite issues that are ongoing. The Chancellor should also be innovative and forward thinking. It is important to seize opportunities when they become available and help bring Nevada Higher Education to the forefront. Instead of playing catch-up, Nevada can be seen as the leader.</p>	<p>4) Vision. 5) An expressed commitment to NSHE, rather than using us as a stepping stone.</p>
<p>A proposed constitutional amendment to remove the Board of Regents from the Nevada Constitution is under consideration by the Legislature and may go to the voters in 2024. What is your position on the proposed amendment?</p>	<p>Downs: I am opposed to removing the Board of Regents from the Nevada State Constitution. The existence of the Board of Regents allows the people of Nevada better access to the direction that NSHE takes. Removing this governing body will negatively impact Nevadans and create an even more insulated body. We have the opportunity to affect the board makeup every two years, we need to retain this level of impact.</p>	<p>Laden: I have had many discussions and read several op-ed pieces about Question1 or SJR 7. Even after all of the input I’ve received, I am still not convinced that removing the Board from the Nevada Constitution will benefit the people of the state.</p> <p>Proponents of the measures are making the case that passage will bring more transparency and accountability to NSHE. I do not see it that way. The Legislature is accountable directly to the voters. The Board of Regents is also accountable directly to the voters. I don’t see how inserting the Legislature in between the voters and the Board of Regents will enhance accountability and transparency. The Board already falls in line with all open meeting laws, audit requirements and the Nevada Revised Statutes. The argument can be made, moreover, that NSHE today is likely more transparent than the Legislature itself.</p> <p>Further, the subtext of those measures appears to include the notions that if the Board were removed from the constitution 1) some or all of the Board might be appointed rather than elected in the future and 2) that the way would be paved for possibly breaking the system into two separate entities, one for the 4-year institutions and one for the traditional two-year institutions. If these avenues were pursued, I only envision higher administrative costs, more conflict when it comes to securing state funding and an escalation of partisan politics.</p> <p>After all of that is said, I am still a businessman at heart. I am always open to hearing about good ideas that will move a business or institution forward. Therefore, I am not closed to the ideas presented in Q1 or SJR7. I just need to be convinced, still, that</p>

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		they offer the best solutions for improving our system of higher education.
If elected to the Board of Regents, do you pledge to uphold the principles of academic freedom and tenure as expressed in the AAUP/AACU 1940 Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure?	Downs: Yes. This is a core issue for me. I have verified it is in the current contract that I am negotiating with NSHE on behalf of NFA for WNC.	Laden: Yes. I have always believed in academic freedom and have openly expressed my support. I have also learned a tremendous amount about tenure. I support it as a clear benefit to our students, faculty and institutions.
Why are you the better qualified candidate for Regent District 11?	Downs: Having experienced being a faculty member with a 2.5-year period as an administrator, I see the important role faculty serve in creating an academic system that best serves the students and industry of Nevada. The current board of regents has lost touch with the needs of the faculty of NSHE and the students of Nevada. The only people who have a solid understanding of the needs of the students in Nevada are the faculty who work with them every day. Electing me will allow the voice of faculty to be heard on the board, sounding a warning against the infringement on Academic Freedom that cannot be ignored as it has been in the past. Electing me will also allow the needs of students to be expressed.	Laden: My overriding goal is to promote and enhance the core mission of our institutions of higher education: to advance knowledge and learning. My over 30 years as a business and community leader in Northern Nevada has given me the skills and insights to bring sound business judgment to the governing of a system that oversees an annual operating budget in excess of \$1 billion, serves over 100,000 student per year and employs approximately 15,000 people. In other words, NSHE is a major business, using a significant number of taxpayer dollars and contributing in innumerable ways to our citizens, communities and economy. It needs to be run professionally. I have also been directly immersed in workforce development, both as a businessman and through my involvement with local and statewide boards, and bring practical experience to the table. Further, I am extremely focused on first-generation, low-income students having access to our institutions. This issue has touched my family personally and profoundly, and is a core reason for my candidacy. Finally, I am the one candidate for Regent, District 11 with no preexisting conflicts of interest. I think it's extremely important to note that if my opponent, an NSHE employee, wins this race, he will very likely have to be vetted by the Nevada Commission on Ethics and would possibly be limited in his ability to vote on issues before the Board.

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<p>Is there anything else you would like to communicate to NFA members?</p>	<p>Downs: I appreciate that the NFA has maintained an open mind and supported a broad and diverse set of ideas in its membership. My commitment to faculty issues is paramount such that I worked with the 2012 Board of Regents to bring collective bargaining to WNC. I continue to serve both the NFA and the faculty of WNC to represent their interests and improve working conditions.</p>	<p>Laden: Please consider who has endorsed me in this campaign. In this non-partisan race and I have secured the endorsement and support of individuals – including educators, elected officials, businesspersons and citizens - spanning the entire spectrum of political thought. Their common ground is that they all know and care about our system of higher education and feel I would be the best candidate to serve as Regent.</p>