



The Anointed One

An Inside Look At Nevada Politics

Kenny Guinn was elected the governor of Nevada in a 1998 landslide. But the outcome was determined long before a single voter stepped into a polling booth. In *The Anointed One*, Nevada's foremost political reporter, Jon Ralston, argues that the power and money of the casino industry, combined with the behind-the-scenes string-pulling of a powerful and ruthless cabal of political insiders, render important Nevada elections a mere formality.

Guinn had never before been on a ballot. But he'd cultivated the right friends, served on the right boards, and paid decades worth of political dues. Thus, when he decided to call in his markers, the powers that anoint paid off. Except for moments of unexpected drama, including the eleventh-hour entrance of dynamic Las Vegas Mayor Jan Jones, the anointment proved impregnable.

The Anointed One isn't just the story of how an inexperienced and shaky candidate waltzed away with the highest office in the state. It's a biting commentary on the inner workings of the Nevada political machine.

About the Author

Jon Ralston has covered politics in Nevada for 14 years. He writes columns for the *Las Vegas Sun* and the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, produces a daily political briefing and a biweekly newsletter, and hosts a weekly television show. He lives in Las Vegas with his wife, and daughter.



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EXCERPTS

“ You’ve heard of company towns. Nevada is a company state.

Here politics is much like any table game offered by the casinos. But nowhere is the deck more stacked; and, in the long run, the house always wins.

This state of affairs has remained relatively unchanged for decades. The mob may have lost its grip, but the corporate titans who run the Las Vegas Strip maintain a stranglehold over the political system that the capos of La Cosa Nostra would envy. Despite the state’s phenomenal growth, power continues to repose in a handful of men, who, through their access to the Strip and its economic and political might, are able to anoint—and un-anoint—candidates for public office.

Never was their exercise of power as blatant as it was with the anointment of Kenny Guinn. ”

“ Ten years ago, a study conducted after one primary election revealed that the gaming industry had contributed \$1.65 million to candidates—about half the money disclosed on all the campaign reports.

The debate back then was the same as it is today: How much of this is expected because gaming is Nevada’s largest industry and drives the economy? And how much is a blatant purchase of political influence, subverting the democratic process? ”

“ Sig Rogich was certain Las Vegas Mayor Jan Jones would not run against Kenny Guinn for governor. Still, Rogich didn’t want to leave anything to chance. He sat down with Jones at Keuken Dutch, a restaurant not far from Rogich’s house in the affluent Spanish Trail development in southwest Las Vegas. Rogich had a pitch to make to the mayor: Jones was so talented that Guinn would want her to be a part of his administration. She could, if she so desired, have the chairmanship of the state Gaming Commission. It was a clear quid pro quo—stay out and we’ll take care of you. ”

“ [Jones] was pulling into the MGM shortly after 7 when she called Susan McCue to hear the Clark County early-voting numbers. “You’re down by seven,” McCue told her. Jones remembered that McCue was “trying to be upbeat, but that was it for me. I knew I was going to lose. I knew it was over.”

Tears flowed that night in that room at the MGM. Jones’ precocious, pre-teen daughter, Katie, couldn’t stop crying. She told her mother she was just so angry, angry that she lost because she was a woman. ”