

The U.S. Supreme Court agreed Friday to hear arguments in an appeal filed by the Nevada Ethics Commission over its decision to censure Sparks City Councilman Mike Carrigan for his votes on the controversial Lazy 8 casino project.

The nation's highest court accepts only a

portion of the appeals it receives, said Commission chairman John Moran, and a review of this case will "place Nevada in the forefront of ethics laws." "This opinion is sure to provide guidance to the entire nation as the public trust becomes more and more important to our governance," he said in a statement.

Carrigan said he thought the case was over when the Nevada Supreme Court ruled in his favor in July. But he said he was excited that his case will be used to clarify First Amendment issues. "I'd much rather be (known) for something else," he said. "But I felt I couldn't let this lie at the Ethics Commission. I thought they were wrong, and the Supreme Court agreed with us."

The Nevada Ethics Commission ruled in 2007 that Carrigan should have abstained from voting on the Lazy 8 casino development in 2005 because his campaign manager and friend was a consultant for the project.

Carrigan challenged the ruling, but lost, so he appealed to the Nevada Supreme Court, which agreed with his challenge.

The Nevada ethics law requires elected officials to disclose any conflicts of interest they might have in matters before them, and in certain instances, abstain from voting, said Caren Jenkins, the commission's executive director.

In their ruling, the Nevada justices struck down part of the state's ethics law, saying it infringed on First Amendment free speech protections, and said the Nevada law was "unconstitutionally overbroad," Jenkins said.

She said the U.S. Supreme Court will consider whether the U.S. Constitution "prohibits the commission from placing restrictions on the free speech rights of elected officials, and what level of constitutional review must be applied."

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