

Testimony to the Nevada State Assembly  
Committee on Taxation  
In Support of SB 281  
May 7, 2013 1PM, Room 4100  
Irene Bustamante-Adams, Chair

Chairman Bustamante-Adams and members of the Committee:

Thunderbird Lodge Preservation Society appreciates this opportunity to present written testimony on SB 281. Our position is in favor of the legislation. We fully support the Nevada Legislature's efforts to make additional funds available for the Preservation Society's charitable work.

The non-profit Thunderbird Lodge Preservation Society was formed in 2001 in collaboration with the American Land Conservancy, the University of Nevada Reno, the U.S. Forest Service, and Del Webb Corporation back when Lake Tahoe's George Whittell mansion and surrounding lands came into the public trust. The Society's mission is to preserve cultural resources, conduct educational programs, and support the region's environmental efforts to protect Lake Tahoe. Whittell's Thunderbird Lodge estate was designated a National Historic District shortly thereafter. Following a complex land swap transaction and the University of Nevada's subsequent withdrawal in 2002, title to the land rested with the U.S. Forest Service and the Preservation Society received the buildings along with a \$10-million note payable to Del Webb.

In 2009, thanks to tireless efforts by dedicated Nevadans including past Governor Kenny Guinn, former Director of Cultural Affairs Dr. Mike Fischer, Philanthropist Joan Gibb, Donald W. Reynolds Foundation Chairman Fred Smith, and hundreds of community volunteers, the Preservation Society settled its notes payable and obtained clear title to the 9 buildings and artifacts comprising the historic site. Shortly thereafter, the Society acquired the famous *Thunderbird* Yacht and returned her home to Thunderbird Lodge.

Today, Thunderbird Lodge is Nevada's only cultural heritage tourism venue at Lake Tahoe. Each year the Lodge hosts more than 10,000 visitors including hundreds of schoolchildren participating in the Society's Hands-on-History educational programs for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders.

As the Society's programs expanded, it became increasingly difficult to conduct certain activities at Thunderbird Lodge without causing damage to the historic buildings. These undertakings include artifact restoration, classroom education, exhibit preparation, and archival activities. (Thunderbird Lodge is Nevada's largest repository of Lake Tahoe land records, maps, water surveys, photographs, and films.) With a generous gift from a donor, the Society took title to warehouse space in the Lake Tahoe basin located at Incline Village. However, fulfilling the annual property tax obligation on this property used for charitable purposes is burdensome.

Because Thunderbird Lodge Preservation Society is not listed as an exempt charity in NRS 361.110, the Society must pay the tax on the Incline Village property when due and prove again its exempt status to Washoe County. Each year, at great expense, staff, accountants, and auditors will assemble the Society's records into the format required by Washoe County. When the inevitable determination is made that the Society *is* tax exempt, the laborious process of obtaining a refund begins.

Throughout this process, the staffs of the Washoe County Treasurer and Assessor's offices are always superb. Yet when SB 281 amends NRS 361.110 to list the Preservation Society alongside other Nevada charities, the County will save the expense of a lengthy determination process and ultimately having to refund tax payments made. The Preservation Society will then have full use of its charitable funds to continue its beneficial work for the citizens of Nevada.

The Board of Directors of the Thunderbird Lodge Preservation Society and I urge you to vote favorably on SB 281.

Respectfully submitted,

Thunderbird Lodge Preservation Society  
Bill Watson  
Chief Executive and Curator