Nevada Legislature Oral History Project

COE SWOBE

Republican

Assembly, 1962 – 1966
Senate, 1966 – 1974

MARCH 12, 2008
CARSON CITY, NEVADA

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The 2007 Nevada Legislature approved an appropriation for a project of conducting oral histories with former state legislators, and in the summer following the conclusion of the session, the Research Division of the Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB) conducted a competitive bid process to identify and obtain a contractor to carry out the project. A committee consisting of LCB and other state personnel with expertise in Nevada history and politics evaluated and ranked the proposals received. In January 2008, a contract was signed between LCB and Get Consensus, LLC, for an 18-month program.

Administered by Donald O. Williams, Research Director, and coordinated by Amber Joiner, Senior Research Analyst, the Nevada Legislature Oral History Project consists of video- and audio-taped interviews, which have been transcribed, edited for readability, and indexed. An initial list of suggested interview subjects had been presented to the Senate Committee on Finance when it considered Senate Bill 373, which proposed an appropriation for the creation of an oral history of the Nevada Legislature. Using that as the starting point, LCB staff considered several factors—such as age, length of legislative tenure, contributions to the State of Nevada, and whether a formal oral history of the individual had been published or was underway—when identifying the former legislators who would be interviewed. The final list provided to the contractor revealed a careful balance of legislative house, political party, and geographic distribution among the interviewees.

After LCB staff acquired the written permission of each subject, the contractor would proceed with scheduling the interview at a time and place convenient for the former legislator. Each interview was simultaneously filmed and audiotaped. The audio recording was transcribed verbatim and then edited by the contractor for readability. Each interviewed legislator was provided the opportunity to review his or her edited document, and any misstatements or errors in the videotape were corrected in the text. The contractor produced three copies of each final product, which includes the text and a DVD of the interview film. Copies were presented to LCB's Research Library and the State Library in Carson City; the subject legislator also received a copy of his or her interview. The repository of record for all digital film and audio files is LCB's Research Library.

Together, these interviews make a significant contribution to the annals of Nevada politics and provide incomparable context to the state's legislative history. The official legislative record outlines the chronology for actions taken by Nevada's lawmaking body; these oral histories vividly portray the background and circumstances in which such actions occurred. Invaluable for understanding Nevada's politics in the latter half of the twentieth century, these interviews present interesting explanations, entertaining stories, and thoughtful observations that might otherwise have been lost.

Coe Swobe
March 12, 2008

COE SWOBE

Chester Coe Swobe was first elected to the Nevada Assembly in 1962. The Reno native served until 1966 when he was elected to the Senate to fill a new seat created through reapportionment. His legislative tenure ended in 1974 when he did not seek re-election.

This interview was conducted in the Old Assembly Chambers with Mr. Swobe seated at a desk identical to the one he used 45 years ago. Having served most of his legislative tenure in the Capitol Building, Mr. Swobe fondly remembers sessions in the old Chambers, both Assembly and Senate, before the Legislature moved to its current facility. In this interview, he vividly illuminates people long-gone from the Nevada political scene, such as Judge Clark J. Guild who observed the Assembly from the back of the Chambers each day with a fresh daisy in his lapel, and recalls many interesting anecdotes about legislative process. Because the small size of the Capitol Building prevented any legislator from having a personal office, Mr. Swobe explains that his floor desk served as his office, so when he was not at his desk, he would take his bill books with him. Legislators would carry their bill books to after-hours events, including informal gatherings at Jack's Bar or Melody Lane. In this interview, he also describes the reason the Senate began its daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in 1967.

During his 12 years in the Nevada Legislature, Mr. Swobe was never in the majority party and, consequently, did not chair any committees. He was Assembly Minority Leader in 1965 and 1966 and Senate Minority Leader in 1971. He served on the Judiciary and Taxation Committees in both houses. Other committees included Assembly Public Health and Public Morals, Senate Commerce and Labor, and assignments in both houses dealing with state institutions and local governments. In this interview, Mr. Swobe explains many of his bills, including those that removed sales tax from prescription drugs, allowed people to be buried in plain coffins (dubbed the "cookie sheet bill"), and created the Lake Tahoe Regional Agency, which later became the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA). Mr. Swobe was instrumental in legislation to protect Lake Tahoe, which he discusses at some length in this interview. Subsequent to his legislative service, he served as a member of TRPA. He also mentions that, during his tenure, the University of Nevada's legislative internship program began and gaming taxes increased 20 percent. Counted among his other professional achievements, he lists legislation concerning the size of the Nevada Supreme Court and limiting the terms of Nevada's Governor.

Mr. Swobe's interview includes his discussion of many of the lobbyists, such as Wallie Warren, Paul Gemmell, and Maurice Sheppard, who were part of the process. During this time period, lobbyists sat with legislators on the floor; it was a grave situation if a legislator had a lobbyist expelled from the floor, which Mr. Swobe did once. He notes that the public often filled the second-floor galleries, too. Mr. Swobe also reminisces about legislative staff, particularly Russ McDonald for whom he worked as a bill drafter in 1958 and 1959.

In 1974, after 12 years in the Nevada Legislature, Mr. Swobe decided not to run for re-election. His family had not been particularly keen on politics, and his law practice needed his attention. He did not return to the Legislature as a lobbyist.

Mr. Swobe married Janet Quilici of Reno in 1959; they have two daughters. A graduate of the University of Nevada in Reno, he later obtained his law degree from the University of Denver, College of Law. He also served in the United States Air Force. For many years, he was a member of the Board of Governors of the State Bar of Nevada.

Dale Erquiaga
May 2009

Dana Bennett: Good morning, Senator Swobe.

Coe Swobe: Good morning, Dana. Thank you for inviting me.

Bennett: I'm glad you're here. Does this feel familiar to be sitting in the Old Assembly Chambers?

Swobe: Oh, boy. My desk was sitting over there, but same desk. [taps desk] Assemblyman Bill Swackhamer was the Speaker when I was here. So it's really nice.

William D. Swackhamer (D-Lander) served in the Assembly from 1946 to 1972. He was Speaker during Swobe's second term. In 1963, the Speaker was L.E. (Ty) Tyson (D-Clark) who served in the Assembly from 1960 until his death in September 1963.

Bennett: Let's think back to the first day of your first session. It was January 21, 1963, and it was a nice day, probably very similar to what today is like. Tell me about that first day.

Swobe: Since I was a freshman, there was only one desk empty in the Chambers, so that was mine, and it was right by the door there. [gestures to the back of the room] It was really exciting. Everybody's families were here, and they introduced everybody. Right behind me was a gate, and the Sergeant-At-Arms stood there. Right next to the gate was Judge Clark Guild, Sr. He was the District Judge, and he had a daisy in his lapel every day. He was at every day of the session. He sat back there with his coat and his daisy lapel and observed the session of the Legislature.

Clark Guild, Sr., was a District Court Judge from 1925 until 1953. His Dayton garden kept his lapel supplied with fresh flowers.

Bennett: Did your family sit with you on the floor that day?

Swobe: Yes. We introduced wives and family. Everybody's wives and family came for that day.

Bennett: What surprised you the most when you'd finished your campaign and you'd shown up in Carson City to be a legislator?

Swobe: I think it was the fact that we had a lot to do, but we didn't have too much physical stuff to do it with. We had a bill book that we kept with us. There was one for the Senate, and one for the Assembly. It had a history—another little folder with the history in it. We carried those with us all the time. We had no offices, and so if we went to a restaurant, we carried our books with us. If we went to a bar, which [chuckles] I frequented many times, then we took those with us. We discussed the legislation wherever we were because we had our little bill books with us. As I said, we didn't have offices, so we were either inside the building at our desks talking to people or outside the building eating or at other gatherings.

Bennett: The bars that you mentioned—I would imagine the Old Globe—

Swobe: Jack's Bar. Melody Lane was a bar that was where the Legislative Building is now, and it was run by a couple. They had hors d'oeuvres every night, and just about everybody, at least in the crowd that I ran around with, was there.

We had our little bill books with us, and we discussed legislation.

Bennett: Let's step back just a little bit and think about that first campaign. Why did you run for the Assembly in the first place?

Swobe: I've always been interested in politics and followed politics through college. In fact, between going from college to law school, I got a job taking Governor Russell around for his re-election bid, which he lost to Governor Grant Sawyer. I drove him around the state because they didn't have too much transportation in those days. I got involved. Then there was an opening in the Assembly in Reno, and this friend of mine suggested that I run. I thought it was terrific because it was an open seat. We worked very hard, and just to be part of the community was the reason I ran. I was very interested in activities and the budgets and the workings of the university.

Charles Russell (R) was Governor from 1951 to 1959.

Grant Sawyer (D) was Governor from 1959 to 1967.

In those days, the university didn't have a lobbyist. Jim Bailey—who was in the Assembly at the time I was and went to the Senate—was actually the representative for the university, and he carried the budget. He'd have the President come over once in a while and testify on the budget. I sponsored the bill to create the police force at the university, and I carried most of the bills for funding the library.

James C. Bailey (R-Washoe) served in the Assembly from 1956 to 1966 and in the Senate from 1966 to 1968.

Sponsored by Bailey and Swobe, A.B. 267 (1967) authorized the university police department.

They were minor amounts then—$25,000, $200,000. Jim Bailey would parcel out the university's budget to different people in Reno And so that's the reason I got involved.

Bennett: Why did you run as a member of the Republican Party?

Swobe: Because I had been a Republican [laughter] ever since I was a little kid. My family is all Republican. That's why I was a Republican.

Bennett: But that meant that you were in the minority most of the time.

Swobe: Oh, yeah, in my election, I was in the minority, and in both houses, I was in the minority all the time. When I was here, it was 12 to 25. There were 37 members in the Assembly—25 were Democrats and 12 were Republicans. They used to joke with us that we'd meet in a telephone booth. But we had a lot of fun.

Then I went to the Senate. At the time I was in the Assembly, the Senate was controlled by the Republicans, and this house was controlled by the Democrats. When I went to the Senate, it switched. The Democrats controlled the Senate, and the Republicans controlled the Assembly. So I was never a committee chairman or in the majority. I was Minority Leader in this house, and I was Minority Leader in the Senate, but never in the majority.

Bennett: As Minority Leader, what did you do? What did your duties consist of?

Swobe: I kept track of the votes on our side, which sometimes would make a difference, especially when we'd have a Republican governor like Governor Laxalt, when he was in. We'd keep track of our votes anyhow. There were very few partisan bills in those days, but on conservative versus liberal, you'd keep track of the votes. On the Democratic side, we'd have some people who were on our side, such as Assemblymen Jim Gibson and Swackhamer, who were fairly conservative. So it kind of evened up when you're going liberal against conservative instead of Republican against Democrat.

Paul Laxalt (R) was Governor from 1967 to 1971.

James I. Gibson (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1958 to 1966 and in the Senate from 1966 until his demise in 1988.

It was just a lot of fun in those days. Things were more congenial, and people were nicer to each other, I think, than they are now because we were all together all the time. In the new building, they have offices, and so people go to their own offices, and they have secretaries. We had a pool of probably half a dozen ladies from Carson who would come in and type your letters if you had one. But you'd have to wait on the pecking order. Since I was the low man on the totem pole and a Republican, I didn't get to use the typists very often. But it was fun.

Bennett: At your very first session, almost the first thing you did was to challenge the seniority system on committee assignments, and you led the GOP charge against that system. According to the newspaper reports, it didn't exactly pass. I'm just curious about that problem.

Swobe: Oh, it was just a lot of fun. You know, when a party gets in for a long time, they have their own rules. When you're fresh, you aren't used to these rules, and you can see the inequities in them. So you try to change them. Sometimes it's successful and sometimes not. Then when you become a majority, which I never was, then you fend off the people who are trying to change the rules. But it was a lot of fun.

Governor Sawyer was a great Governor when I first got in, and he was a friend of mine, but we used to go against each other on different bills. There was a bill called the "The Early Parole Bill." It was probably the most important bill when I was in the Legislature. They didn't want to increase the budget and build new prisons, so they decided they would—we're doing the same thing right now in government—let out the non-violent offenders or lessen their sentences and so free up more room. Governor Sawyer had it, and it was during an election. Our Senator now, Senator Bill Raggio, was the District Attorney in Washoe County, and he was against this

A Senator since 1972, William J. Raggio (R-Reno) was Washoe County District Attorney from 1958 to 1970. He strongly opposed the Early Parole Bill in 1965.

early parole bill. He would get people down here—mothers marching—and we'd say that the Governor was soft on crime. At that time, the funny thing is, we had a vote on this bill in the Assembly, and it was very tight in the Assembly. We had it this one morning, and this one fellow, who sat right over there by that window—there were no stairs there—but he sat over there. They called up the vote fast, and he couldn't make an exit here [gestures to door], so he jumped out the window on the fire escape and ran down the fire escape. So it delayed things for quite a while. He had to come back and vote.

Bennett: I was going to say the Sergeant-at-Arms probably went looking for him.

Swobe: Yes, he did. But it was kind of fun.

Bennett: What was a regular day like when you were here?

Swobe: A regular day started at ten o'clock in the morning; normally, that's when the session started. We'd gather here about nine, generally, and have coffee. Because everybody was sitting here, we'd have very informal discussions. You would have different groups around talking about different pieces of legislation, but we had no offices, so we were stuck. But it was great because I think it made people more friendly, and you knew what people were doing, and

things weren't so intense. Then at ten o'clock, we'd have the roll call, and then Ways and Means—the money committee in our house here; I wasn't on it—would go. There were two committee rooms that were down the hall. One was the Ways and Means room, and the other was Judiciary. I was on Judiciary. I was lucky enough to get on Judiciary because I was a lawyer. So we'd go to those. Then we'd have other lesser committees, and they would meet sometimes when these two rooms were available. Or there were two cloak rooms on either side here [gestures], and we would use those for smaller committees. At noon, everybody would go to lunch and come back at two o'clock. We were done, and I would be back home in Reno at three or four in the afternoon. At the end of my tenure, in 1974, I'd leave Reno when it was dark and go back when it was dark. So you can see that the business of the State had increased tremendously.

Bennett: Did all of the committees meet at a regular time?

Swobe: We met at different times throughout the morning—sometimes at noon—but there wasn't that much to do. The thing that was great was that these people would be discussing stuff for an hour before the session even began, informally, and so it did away with a lot of the formal discussions in the committee rooms.

Bennett: Did the public interact much with the Legislature?

Swobe: Oh, yeah. The public was over here. They didn't have formal lobbying so much as we have now. There were probably a dozen lobbyists. There was a fellow named Wallie Warren who represented the businesses and the power company and Paul Garwood for the telephone company. The mining companies were represented by Paul Gemmill. Then the lesser ones were just individual people who were around. The PTA was represented by PTA ladies, and they'd come over and talk about the teachers and those things. We didn't have a bunch of lobbyists, but the lobbyists we did have were very good, and they informed you about both sides of an issue. They would naturally favor one side, but they would tell you the pitfalls, so we were very fortunate to have the lobbyists we had.

The clock above the main elevator in the Legislative Building honors public relations executive and longtime lobbyist Wallace D. (Wallie) Warren.

In 1958, Paul Garwood with Bell of Nevada participated in the creation of the Nevada Telephone Association.

Paul Gemmill was the Executive Secretary of the Nevada Mining Association.

Bennett: What was the interaction like with the lobbyists? Were they just here during the formal floor session?

Swobe: Oh, they were around buying drinks all night long or buying you lunch, but it was really cordial. I didn't find anything offensive about any of it, and they were very helpful. Lots of times, you didn't agree with them. The gaming industry had their lobbyist; the livestock

industry had their lobbyist. But the majority of the influencing was done by just people coming in from downtown, and once in a while, people would come in from Las Vegas on an important piece of legislation.

Bennett: Do any of those stand out in your memory when there may have been a full gallery watching what was happening?

Swobe: Oh, yes.

Bennett: The gallery would have been above us.

Swobe: The gallery was right above us. During the remodeling, they capped it off, but it had three or four rows of chairs up there. In fact, for a long time, lobbyists could come on the floor and sit with some Assemblyman, and he would introduce him. No one thought much about it at all. But we'd have overflow crowds.

When I was in the Senate, we had a hearing for the TRPA [Tahoe Regional Planning Agency] that was my piece of legislation, Senate Bill 9. It was in a Special Session. In fact, it was just 40 years ago last month that we had the Special Session of the Legislature in this building for the TRPA. We had the Committee of the Whole in here. We had Senators and Assemblymen together, and we were having the joint hearing. I presided at this joint hearing, right up there. [points to Speakers' rostrum]

Governor Laxalt called the Legislature into special session on February 5, 1968. For 19 days, the Legislature addressed various issues, including the Lake Tahoe Regional Agency.

Bennett: There must have been quite a crowd.

Swobe: Oh, it was a big crowd. We didn't know exactly how this was going because it was being bitterly disputed at different points. I remember this friend of mine who has since passed away; his name was Maurice Sheppard, and he was from Harrah's Club. He had white hair, and he was just a neat guy. But we disagreed on this bill. I finished speaking—he was up in the gallery in the top row—and when I walked out, he came down the stairs. I said, "Well, Shep, how did I do?" He said seriously, "That was the best speech you ever made, but too bad it will be your last." [chuckles] So you could tell that, at times, things were kind of dicey. We were good friends before that and later very good friends, and he's since passed away. Until he died, he never admitted he'd told me that. [laughter] But it was kind of fun.

Maurice Sheppard was President of Harrah's when the 24-story hotel was opened in Reno in 1969.

Bennett: Did you have a lot of Committees of the Whole?

Swobe: No, we had very, very few. The only reason we had the Committee of the Whole on the TRPA was because it was a special session. We came in on the fifth of February, and we were finished by the twenty-fourth, the day the Governor signed the bill. So you'd try to cram everything into the short time available. But

normally, they didn't have Committees of the Whole.

Bennett: So on a regular day in this room, it was probably more crowded than what we're seeing today.

Swobe: Oh, yes. We had the desks in rows, and just about everybody had a guest every day. The windows would be open on a good day, and sometimes a bird would fly in. [laughter] But it was very nice. I have great, great memories of the Assembly days.

Bennett: Was it a difficult room in which to give a speech [**Swobe:** No.] if you wanted to remark on a bill? You didn't have microphones.

Swobe: No, we didn't have microphones. I forgot about that—we didn't have microphones. But I don't think anybody had any problem with the acoustics. You mentioned Don Mello—he sat over there, and Artie Valentine sat over there. [gestures] They had loud voices. In the Senate, the rules were that you didn't speak on each bill. But in the Assembly, the sponsors spoke on each bill, and so they spoke a lot.

Donald R. Mello (D-Sparks) served in the Assembly from 1963 to 1982 and in the Senate from 1982 to 1989.

Artie D. Valentine (D-Washoe) served in the Assembly from 1956 to 1958, 1960 to 1966, and 1970 to 1972.

Bennett: So there were more speeches here than—

Swobe: Yes. Than in the Senate.

Bennett: And it was a little smokier here, too?

Swobe: Oh, yeah. They could smoke in here. I didn't smoke, but just about everybody else did. There

was a lot of cigar smoking. I remember Senator Slattery used to give out cigars because he represented Harold's Club, and he gave out cigars to everybody from Harold's Club.

I'll tell you a funny story about Len Harris who was in the Assembly when I was in. He later became a Senator. We'd just gotten metal desks—they were tan metal desks—and we had these tan metal wastebaskets. Len Harris was sitting back, smoking his stogie. Then he threw the cigar in the wastebasket, and it caught fire! And he was dancing around with this wastebasket—naturally, because it was a metal wastebasket, it was hot—and he was going "ooh hoo hoo!" Finally, he got over by the wall where there were some fire extinguishers, and someone extinguished the fire. That was our big smoking problem. I guess now they would evacuate the building or something to get the smoke out, but we just opened the windows.

Leonard H. Harris (R-Reno) served in the Assembly from 1962 to1968 and in the Senate from 1968 to 1972.

Bennett: And watched the show?

Swobe: Oh, it was funny. My wife was here, and she was laughing, too.

Bennett: What was the interaction like with legislative staff? Actually, you started as a legislative staffer: you were a bill drafter.

Swobe: I was a bill drafter. The staff was great. These people worked hard. Russ McDonald was the

Swobe was a bill drafter in 1958-59 when Russell McDonald was the Revisor of Statutes. McDonald was Legal Counsel and Director of the Legislative Counsel Bureau from 1963 to 1971.

bill drafter. That's who I worked for before. Then when I was in the Senate, I started the intern program for university students—Bart Schouweiler and I did. They still have it going now, and it was a wonderful program. But we had a hard time getting it started. We had the Assemblymen signed up for it fast, but in the Senate, they were very reluctant to let students know what they were doing. Governor Laxalt was the one who talked Senator Floyd Lamb and Senator John Fransway into having interns, so we agreed and launched the intern program then.

Bart M. Schouweiler (R-Washoe) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1970.

Floyd R. Lamb (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1956 to 1983.

John Fransway (R-Humboldt) served in the Senate from 1960 to 1972.

Bennett: Was there a difference between serving in the Assembly and serving in the Senate in terms of process?

Swobe: Oh, yes. The Senate was more formal. When we went to the Senate, it was kind of a reform thing then, too. There were 17 Senators until we came in. That had been reapportionment, and that's how I got in. The Senate went from 17 to 20 members. Washoe County had one Senator before and ended up with four. So I was one of those new four. The Senate was kind of clubby. They had 17 committees, so that everybody in the Senate could be chairman. [laughter] They had committees like Civil Defense and a Branding Committee. Anyhow, we cut it down to about nine committees.

The old-timers didn't like it too well, but it streamlined the Senate.

Bennett: Reapportionment was done during a Special Session?

Swobe: Yes, in 1965.

Bennett: And it was court-ordered?

Swobe: It was court-ordered. We met over here and were figuring out reapportionment. They didn't have computers in those days. Senator Gibson—who was an Assemblyman at the time and later became a Senator—was an engineer, and he used a slide rule. People really had faith in Jim Gibson. He was a Democrat; he was from Henderson; he was just a wonderful man. He was in charge of Finance, too, at one time. He would sit there with his slide rule and do the budget. I'll never forget him. I was sitting next to him during reapportionment, and I asked, "How did my district go?" He slid his slide rule back and forth, and he said, "You're okay, Swobie." [laughter] So that's how reapportionment was the first time. It was pretty easy.

Bennett: So it wasn't a contentious session?

Swobe: It wasn't really that contentious if I remember. Well, I was in the minority, and Jim Gibson said my seat was okay, so— [laughter]

Bennett: That's all that mattered.

Swobe: That's all I cared.

Bennett: So you did two terms here in the Assembly [**Swobe**: Yes], and then you went down the hall to the Senate [**Swobe:** Yes] because a seat opened up. How was that campaign different, or was it different?

Swobe: The campaign was mainly in Reno. When I first ran, it was at-large in all of Washoe County except for Sparks. Sparks had a seat that was safe for the Democrats, but the county was Democrat at the time, too. The Republicans more or less got elected in Reno and the rest in the county. Then when we were divided up into the Senate, it was at-large, at first, the same way—one seat for Sparks and the rest of the seats were at-large. Later, they divided them up into the districts that they're in now. They were at-large, generally.

Bennett: What do you mean by "at-large"?

Swobe: When I first ran, there were six seats for Reno.

Bennett: In the Assembly?

Swobe: Yes. In the Assembly, there were six seats, and so six Republicans ran against six Democrats. If you got in one of those six, you were lucky. The Senate was the same way, after Washoe County went to four seats. That's how it ran.

Bennett: What are some of the issues that stick out in your mind?

Swobe: We had a gaming tax—imagine: we increased gaming taxes 20 percent! We had a study the first session. The legislative bodies usually have a study to delay an action. So we had this big study, and it suggested that we increase gaming taxes 25 percent. I was on the Taxation Committee in the Senate, and we agreed to 20 percent, and it passed. There was general agreement in the state to increase it. The problem was not the 20 percent, but how the tax was going to be allocated towards table games or slot machines. In those days, table games were very profitable and were probably the biggest income for the gamers. We had limited, as I recall, the classifications of slot machines to 15 slot machines or less for the small counties, mainly, and then the smaller clubs. Then in the bigger clubs, the argument was mainly whether the slot machine tax or the table tax was going to be the predominant tax.

Bennett: Was that a difficult one to resolve?

Swobe: We resolved it, but it was kind of comical because we did not name clubs—like Harrah's Club or Tropicana, Flamingo—by name as to who would be favored with one formula over the other. We had numbers for these people, and everybody knew what the numbers were—who the gamers were. But it worked out, and it seems to me that we didn't have the problems that they have now. The lobbying is so intense

now. We didn't have that intense lobbying. Just figured it out mostly ourselves, and then if we had something complicated or to explain the formulas, we'd ask the lobbyist. Or we'd have Russ McDonald come in. He was a bill drafter. Russ was very knowledgeable, and he would explain things.

Bennett: Did Russ draft all of the bills?

Swobe: He drafted all of his bills and most of the bills were up here [taps head]. He had a photographic memory. Brilliant fellow. He went to Stanford and then Harvard. He was a Rhodes Scholar, too. He was just a brilliant man. I was fortunate because he lived across the street from us when I was a little kid. He went to the Navy, and then he went to school. Then when he got the job here, and I was in law school, I went over and talked to him, and he gave me a job bill drafting. So I was really fortunate with Russ McDonald. Frank Daykin was equally as knowledgeable, and Frank drafted a lot of bills. We didn't have to limit the number because we didn't have that many bills to be put in. I probably had ten bills.

Frank Daykin became Legal Counsel in 1977, serving until his retirement in 1985. He continued to draft bills on a contract basis into the twenty-first century.

Bennett: I think in your very first session you introduced three.

Swobe was the primary sponsor of four bills in 1963; half of them passed.

Swobe: Three? Okay.

Bennett: Did you have a particular strategy for deciding which bills you would introduce?

Swobe: No. [laughter] Most people that wanted legislation went to a more powerful and more prominent legislator, and so I just got the scraps. But as you went along, you kind of got different ideas about things that you wanted to do.

For example, when I first became a legislator, the sales tax was on food and drugs. I went to Hales Drug Store on Virginia Street to get a prescription for my daughter and at the same time, I picked up a copy of *Playboy* magazine. I didn't have too much money in my pocket—I remember I was scrambling around—and the tax was on the drugs and not on the magazine. Newspapers and magazines were exempt from the sales tax, but drugs and food were not. So I started a campaign to get the sales tax off of drugs, and it had to go to the vote of the people because the sales tax had been adopted by a vote of the people. It took me two sessions, but I got it on, finally, to get drugs exempted from the sales tax. That was kind of fun.

S.B. 389 (1967) proposed removing the sales tax from prescription drugs and the exemption from periodicals. It died in Senate Taxation.

S.B. 198 (1969) made the same proposal. It passed the Legislature and was approved by the voters at the 1970 General Election.

Bennett: What did you do between the session that it failed and the session where it passed? What did you have to do in order to turn it around?

Swobe: I had pamphlets that I took around. I had a little flyer made up to give out at drugstores, and the druggists were all happy. There was also a campaign thing to vote both for Senator

Swobe's reelection and exempt drugs from the sales tax. The second time I got in, and it passed, so it was kind of fun.

Bennett: In your time here at the Legislature, you worked with some folks whose names are almost legendary in Nevada politics. You've mentioned a lot of them. Who stands out in your mind as an effective legislator?

Swobe: Oh, gosh. There were Senators like Carl Dodge. Senator Dodge from Fallon authored the School Distributive Fund, and they still use it today. Senator Gibson. Bill Swackhamer, who was the Assemblyman from Battle Mountain and later became the Secretary of State, was outstanding. When I was in the last session or two, Senator Raggio was in, and he made an immediate impact upon the State Senate when he came in. Cliff Young was good—an outstanding Senator. Mel Close was excellent. He was in the Assembly, and then he went to the Senate. I'm probably skipping some, but those are people who were very important. Mike O'Callaghan was Governor when I was in the Senate, and he was very helpful, especially at Lake Tahoe. Paul Laxalt was a great Governor. Both Senator Laxalt—we call him Senator Laxalt now—and Governor O'Callaghan were very, very supportive on Lake Tahoe's matters.

Carl F. Dodge (R-Churchill) served in the Senate from 1958 to 1980.

Clarence Clifton (Cliff) Young (R-Reno) served in the Senate from 1966 to 1980.

Melvin D. Close, Jr., (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1964 to 1970 and in the Senate from 1970 to 1982.

Bennett: How about the most colorful?

Swobe: A colorful Senator was Senator Slattery. Senator Slattery was from Storey County, when each county had a Senator, so he represented Virginia City. He was just a colorful guy. He ran the legislative golf tournament. He collected a whole bunch of money and had this big golf tournament. If you played golf, you would get an alpaca sweater, and they were really neat in those days. I didn't play golf, but he would give me a sweater, and he'd make a big to-do of it—that he was doing it just because he liked me. But I would talk to different lobbyists, and they'd tell me that they'd given Slats the money for my sweater. I should have ended up with three sweaters! As I say, he worked at Harold's Club. The desks over in the Senate had a drawer on the side, and he would have it filled with cigars. He'd give everybody a cigar. He played golf here and in Vegas, and he was probably the most colorful.

James M. (Slats) Slattery (R-Virginia City) served in the Assembly from 1950 to 1952 and in the Senate from 1954 to 1970.

Bennett: When you were Assembly Minority Leader in 1965, Vernon Bunker was Assembly Majority Leader. [**Swobe:** Yes.] How did you two leaders interact?

Swobe: Oh, we got along. Vernon was from the Bunker family, which is a very important political family in Las Vegas. Vernon was a feisty little guy, and we used to go at it sometimes. We'd have an argument one day, but the next day, we'd get along just fine. He was very dedi-

Vernon E. Bunker (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1958 to 1966 and in the Senate from 1966 to 1970. He was the Senate Sergeant-at-Arms from 1979 to 1991 and was inducted into the Senate Hall of Fame.

cated. Most of the legislators in those days were very, very dedicated, especially the rural legislators. They seemed to stay in the Legislature longer, and they knew the history of different institutions.

Senator Jacobsen is an example. Senator Jacobsen and I started in the Assembly together in 1963. He was in the Assembly much longer than I was, and then he went over to the Senate. We used to call Marlette Lake "Jake's Lake" because he knew everything about it. He knew all the intricacies about the roads and the pumps up there because at that time, it supplied the water to Virginia City and a lot of the water in Carson City. Later, we were on opposite sides on the Lake Tahoe bill, but I don't think a legislator did more for Lake Tahoe than Lawrence Jacobsen. He knew all the problems and the different aspects of Lake Tahoe and Marlette Lake because they were entwined together. The rural legislators were very, very, very learned because they were here longer, and they were kind of lobbyists themselves.

Lawrence E. (Jake) Jacobsen (R-Douglas) served in the Assembly from 1962 to 1978 and in the Senate from 1978 to 2002. The longest-serving legislator in Nevada history passed away in 2006.

Bennett: When you were a brand-new legislator and learning the process, who would you turn to for advice?

Swobe: It was kind of funny because the Republican legislators weren't too excited that I ran.

Bennett: Why was that?

Swobe: Well, they had their own little establishment, and I beat one of their establishment's people. So when I came here, as I said, there was only one chair left, and that was because everybody else picked theirs out. [chuckles] But anyhow, I found that Cyril Bastian from Ely—he was Chairman of the Taxation Committee; he sat across from me—was very, very helpful. Assemblyman Ray Knisley was helpful. Jim Bailey, after a while, became a very good friend. Swackhamer was great.

Cyril O. Bastian (D-Lincoln) served in the Assembly 1942-44, 1948-56, and 1958-66.

Raymond L. Knisley (D-Pershing) served in the Assembly from 1958 to 1966.

I remember one time [chuckles] I was upset with this one lobbyist because he accused me of voting a certain way for getting a free oil bill or something. In those days, as I said, the lobbyists could be and were on the Assembly floor. I'd read my little rule book a lot, and I found that I could kick anybody out I wanted to. I was really indignant, so I stood up, and I asked the Speaker to have this fellow expelled from the Chambers. It was just something that people didn't do those days. But they did. They expelled him, and then Swackhamer and Cyril Bastian called me in one of those little rooms there [gestures to the back] and asked me why. I told them, and they said, "We'll back you up, but think about it tonight." So I thought about it. I'd made the point, and I could feel that they thought that I should ask that it be nullified, so

I did, and the fellow came back. But it was kind of funny.

But those things didn't happen too often. Everyone seemed to get along much better, and I think a lot of it was because we were here all the time together. When I was Minority Floor Leader, I could predict on just about every bill how everybody was going to vote because I knew them so well. Once in a while, somebody would give a different vote, but most of them, I knew. I knew what their ideas or their thoughts on government were. Very seldom did they surprise me.

Bennett: What was some of the best advice you were given as a new legislator?

Swobe: Just to sit down and shut up. [laughter] I remember one of my bills, which I had put in for these people, and it had a second meaning, which would have had an affect on taxation. I didn't realize that; I thought it was just a two- or three-sentence bill. I kept asking why it wasn't reported out—it was in the Taxation Committee—because these people would call me all the time. Cyril Bastian was the Chair-man, and so finally one day, he said, "I'm going to let that bill out, and we'll pass it on the floor on one condition." [chuckles] I said, "What's the condition?" He said, "You aren't supposed to speak on it. Just let it pass." In

those days, everybody spoke. Here I was just a one-term Assemblyman, and I wanted to show these people I could get a bill passed. So they passed it, and I didn't say anything. It went over to the Senate and was killed fast. They called me into this little room [chuckles] and told me what I had done wrong. They thought that I was getting some money for putting this bill in, but I didn't. I was completely unaware. I learned then that you've got to be very sure about what legislation you put in and know all the ramifications of it. So I learned. I learned the hard way.

Bennett: We were talking a little bit about what a regular day was like here, and I would imagine that at some point, it had to have been fairly dull. What did you do to pass the time when you were here?

Swobe: We drank coffee an awful lot. I was on the Institutions Committee, so we'd go see the prison or the state hospital. Or we'd do some things like that. We'd go up to Lake Tahoe. Lake Tahoe wasn't that important in those days, but we'd do that. That's about it. We'd have lots of times when the press wasn't looking, and even when the press was looking. A lot of the people in the Assembly and Senate liked to follow baseball in San Francisco, and so every once in a while, we'd sneak down on Friday and go to a baseball game. The press

would say that we weren't working, and they'd try to catch pictures of people getting on an airplane or something. So we'd do that. There would be some weekends when the Las Vegas people would want to go home, so they'd take a long weekend so they could go home and talk to their constituents because not too many people from Clark County would come up here to lobby. You'd have some of the Chamber of Commerce people and some of the gamers, but most of the time, the ordinary people of Las Vegas wouldn't come up in those days.

Bennett: So there was no air-conditioning in this room when you were here?

Swobe: No. They'd leave the windows open in the spring. We came in in January, and we left 60 days later. But there'd be days like today where it would be nice out, and the windows would be open. Lots of times, you'd watch the buds on the trees get green, and then every once in a while, as I said, a bird would fly in. But you'd kind of stare out the window a lot and see how things were going.

Bennett: Did the windows push out, or did they roll up? Do you remember?

Swobe: The lower part pushed up.

Bennett: They don't look like they move now.

Swobe: Oh, they don't move now at all. But the lower part pulled up, and I don't know how many times I went over and pushed up the windows. Our Assemblyman [chuckles] pushed up the window to get out on the fire escape one time.

Bennett: You mentioned the press a little while ago. What was the interaction like with the press? Were they here on a daily basis?

Swobe: The press, like Frank Johnson, was here on a daily basis, yes. Cy Ryan is still here, and he was here then. They were just wonderful. You know, they did their job, and they worked hard. I think the press covered the Legislature much better then than they do now. There was one TV station, and Bob Carroll would interview us. The press was very good. The newspapers covered the Legislature very well.

Bennett: Wasn't there a political commentator in the Reno paper that would talk a little bit about political gossip?

Swobe: Let's see. Frank Johnson did, and he had a column. I'm trying to think who the political columnist was. There was a column in the newspaper. Paul Leonard from the *Journal* was very good, and Ty Cobb, Sr., was the sports editor, but he followed everything. In fact, when we passed the TRPA—the Tahoe legislation—we had a proclamation. It was in March 1970, and it was to be signed by Governor

Laxalt and Governor Ronald Reagan. At that time, the State had an airplane for the Agricultural Department. It was a little old plane, and I had this proclamation. It was really exciting. I was to go down to Sacramento in the morning and have Governor Reagan sign the proclamation, and then fly back. I'd come down to Carson City on the same day and have Governor Laxalt sign it. Then the TRPA would become effective that March 18 of 1970. So I got on the airplane, and Ty Cobb, Sr., was my press corps. [chuckles] He was just wonderful. He had followed the legislation so much that he knew as much about it or more as I did. So we flew down there and saw Governor Reagan and then flew back and went to Laxalt. That's how involved the press was at that time.

Bennett: Did they have a special area in each of the Chambers where they sat—that was assigned to them?

Swobe: Gosh, I don't know. They had a press room someplace.

Bennett: But they weren't off to the corner here?

Swobe: Oh, no, they were just around. Maybe they were upstairs. I don't know, they were around, and they'd ask you different questions. They were very good. The small counties had people here, too. Of course, Snowy Monroe owned a newspaper in Elko. At that time, they had two

newspapers in Elko, the *Free Press* and the *Independent.* He was a Senator, and he drove like heck. He was arrested so many times driving from Elko to here that it was getting embarrassing because he'd come back and want to do away with the Highway Patrol when he'd get a ticket. Walter Cox from Yerington was here. So we had a lot of coverage from rural Nevada, too.

Warren L. (Snowy) Monroe (D-Elko) served in the Senate from 1958 to 1976.

Bennett: Did the Senate have a gallery on the second floor as well?

Swobe: Yes. The same setup as in the Assembly.

Bennett: You mentioned that the Senate was a little bit more closed. Did they keep people from sitting in the gallery?

Swobe: Oh, no, they didn't. No, I meant that the procedure was a little more formal. The only reason we didn't have many people come into committee meetings was that, in these rooms, we'd barely get the committee and Russ McDonald and his secretary, Dan Rollins, in.

Bennett: And the room was full then.

Swobe: Yeah, the room would be full.

Bennett: When you moved from the Assembly and down the hall to the Senate, had you been thinking about running for the Senate before reapportionment, or were you responding to that open seat?

Swobe: No. I was against reapportionment. See, the Assembly was apportioned on population, just like the United States House of Representatives, and the Senate was apportioned on counties, and so they counter-balanced. I felt that the county people contributed so much to state government, just through their institutional memories, that it wouldn't be good to change. I went on different committees around the country, but we lost. So at that time, when a Senate seat came open, then I thought, "Well, I'll try it."

Bennett: How did your experience change going from this end of the hall to the other end of the hall?

Swobe: Really not too much. I was one of 20 instead of one of 37. And the minority wasn't that bad. We were only one or two short of the Democrats. We had kind of a coalition over there of old-timers and new people. I was with the new people.

I'll tell you a funny story. When we went over there, as I say, we changed the rules to go from 17 committees to nine. You could get Senator Lamb upset pretty easily, and I loved to do so. He didn't want to change the old rules. He was from the old school, and there were several of them. I was the secretary to our little group when we'd meet for the different rule changes. I was the one who would write

them down, take them to Russ McDonald, and have them put in form so that we could vote on them on the floor. So Senator Lamb came by my desk one day, and he says, "Swobie! No more changes! [pounds desk] No more rule changes!" I was joking with him, and he said, "I'm telling you. [pounds desk] No more rule changes!" He left, and I thought, "What could I possibly do to make a rule change?" Then it dawned on me that each morning we said the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag in the Assembly, but we never did in the Senate. So I polled my little crew and asked if it would be good to have the Pledge of Allegiance in the Senate like we did in the Assembly. Most of them were from the Assembly, so they said, "Sure." So I had it drawn up and, by gosh, that next morning, the Secretary, Leola Armstrong, read this resolution to have this rule change. Luckily, Lamb was sitting at one end of the Senate chambers, and I was at the other end. She read that off, and he got up and swore at me, and he started coming towards me. He was going to make mincemeat out of me! He crossed the aisle, and Senator Slattery stopped him. Otherwise, I probably wouldn't be here today. [laughter] But we changed the rule, and then Senator Lamb and I got to be friends again. Anyhow, it was kind of funny.

Leola H. Armstrong was Secretary of the Senate from 1958 to 1981.

Bennett: That's great. I didn't realize that the Pledge wasn't part of the Senate process.

Swobe: It wasn't until then. I don't know why.

Bennett: Was there much interaction between the two houses?

Swobe: Oh, yes. George Vargas was a lobbyist, and he was a very colorful lobbyist. He was the head of a law firm, and he had what was called the "Red Carpet Party." The Red Carpet Party was right out here [gestures toward main hallway], and he would set up tables. There'd be all different kinds of cold cuts, and there'd be a big keg of beer on each end of the table. It was the Red Carpet Party. George Vargas represented the insurance companies and, I think, the oil companies. Anyhow, he'd put on that big party for us. Then Grant Sawyer came in and decided that alcohol was not a good thing in the Statehouse, so then we had the Red Carpet Party here without liquor. Then the next year, they moved the Red Carpet Party up to the hot springs, and they had a dinner.

Bennett: Were there many other parties like that?

Swobe: Not too many. Once a year, we'd go up to Harrah's and see a floor show. That's about it. Different organizations would have different cocktail parties, but no one thought too much about it. Now if a lobbyist buys you a drink or a meal or something, you have to write it down,

but we never thought too much about it at all. We never figured a drink was worth a vote or something like that.

Bennett: Did Third House exist then?

Purported to have been started by Mark Twain when he was a reporter covering Nevada's Territorial Legislature, Third House has typically been written and performed by members of the press near the end of the regular legislative session to poke fun at the people and issues of that session. It was a traditional part of Nevada's twentieth century legislative process and usually consisted of a series of skits, although in one session (1923), it consisted of an epic poem written by staff.

Swobe: Yes. It was very comical. I usually didn't go to it because it was at the end of the session, and I was tired, so I'd stay home. I didn't participate too much in the Third House.

Bennett: Was Third House then a press-associated thing?

Swobe: Yes. The press ran it.

Bennett: Which is very similar to what they do now?

Swobe: I haven't been to one for years and years and years.

Bennett: When you were in the Senate, the Legislature agreed to build a new building across the mall. [**Swobe:** Yes.] How was that decision reached?

Swobe: That was very traumatic. I remember Senator Gibson was involved. They wanted to have this new building. I wasn't involved in it much at all. But Senator Archie Pozzi who was the Senator from this county—he had the Ford Agency in Carson City—wanted to have the building made of sandstone, like the Capitol Building, from the prison. I guess the quarry was located out by the state prison. The Las Vegas crew wanted it a little more splashy, and so they got a combination of the two. That's the

Archie Pozzi, Jr., (R-Ormsby/Carson City) served in the Assembly from 1954 to 1966 and in the Senate from 1966 to 1974.

way they got the difference in the stone: they kind of compromised.

Bennett: How did the Legislature change when it started to meet over in that building?

Swobe: It was quite a change. Well, I was out of there in 1974, and I didn't come back. But it was a shell. Most of the second floor in the new building—or whatever they call it now—wasn't there. So the second floor was a shell. We still didn't have offices among ourselves. We had committee rooms, which were great. So that helped. I was Minority Floor Leader, so I had an office. But in the summertime, my office was the clothes closet. Then next to it was the Lieutenant Governor; Harry Reid. His office was about twice as big as mine, and I think they used his in the summertime for something else, too, but mine was the clothes closet in the summertime in the off-days. Senator Raggio has all those offices now. But it was quite a difference.

The funny thing was they had a contractor from Las Vegas who did the land-scaping. You know how there are berms there? Well, this landscaper from Las Vegas didn't realize it froze up here in the north, so they put this lawn in, and they had little swales before they had the big berms. We had one of these spells, and the pipes just broke all over the

place. It was just like a swamp all around there. [chuckles] So they fixed it all, but it was kind of funny.

Bennett: So you were there just the one session, then, in the new building?

Swobe: I think two sessions.

Bennett: 1971 was the first session and then 1973.

Swobe: 1973, yes.

As Lt. Governor, Harry Reid (D) was President of the Senate from 1971 to 1975.

Bennett: Harry Reid was Lieutenant Governor?

Swobe: Yes.

Bennett: You were Minority Leader?

Swobe: Yes.

Bennett: With Leola Armstrong as Secretary of the Senate?

Swobe: Yeah!

Bennett: How did the Senate run with that particular leadership combination?

Swobe: It really ran well. Harry and Governor O'Callaghan were very close, and so that ran well. Leola Armstrong was a staunch Democrat, so everything ran well. I really enjoyed it. I was trying to think of some comical events, but I can't think of any.

Bennett: What sorts of things did you do between the sessions in the interim period?

Swobe: I was a lawyer. I practiced law. I didn't do too much legislation. I did that little bit with the drugs bill. I think they had just started the Interim Finance Committee, and I wasn't on that. They didn't trust me with money—I was never on any money committees. [chuckles] But they didn't have too many interim committees. Once in a while, I went to some of the Uniform Laws Commission meetings around the country. And we went around the country trying to fight reapportionment, but that was about all that I did outside of the legislative sessions.

The Interim Finance Committee was created in 1969.

Bennett: Did you hear much from your constituents during the off-time?

Swobe: Oh, not so much. People would talk to me on the street and write letters or telephone me, but nothing really organized.

Bennett: How did your legislative service affect your family? Were they involved in campaigning?

Swobe: My wife, Janet, isn't too excited about politics, but she worked very, very, very hard. She was very supportive. My daughter Caryn had a sign—"Vote for My Daddy"—that the newspaper very nicely put on the front page one day just before the election, which helped out an awful lot. Janet's uncle was Forest Lovelock, and he had been in the Senate here. So they were supportive. Her father was very suppor-

Forest B. Lovelock (R-Washoe) served in the Senate from 1950 to 1958. His reported campaign expenses totaled $366.30.

tive, and of course, my family was. In fact, my first campaign cost $6,000, and Senator Lovelock gave me a check for $2,500, [chuckles] so one-fourth of my campaign financing was solved with his check. So it was nice. I had a real close friend, Paul Argeres, who did everything for me. He helped me and was very, very politically savvy, and a lot of people liked him. So he was very, very helpful. A lot of my friends and my fraternity, Sigma Nu, helped an awful lot. I belonged to the Rotary Club, and so they all helped some. It was a lot of fun. Campaigning was fun then.

Bennett: Did it change much over the ten years from 1962 to 1972?

Swobe: It just got more expensive. You'd pay $1,000 for a spot on the television, and then you'd wait for it, and it wouldn't come on. It would come on a half-hour later, but you weren't watching it then. I remember I had a billboard—one billboard—on South Virginia, and I'd go by it all the time. [laughter] I had a lot of university support, and I campaigned at the football games and the basketball games.

Bennett: When you look back on your whole legislative career, what are the bills that are most important to you? You talked a little bit about TRPA.

Swobe: Tahoe, yes. I also had a bill to expand the Supreme Court from three seats to five seats, and Senator Pozzi and I introduced legislation that limited the Governor to two terms.

There was another thing that was really important to me. When I went to the Korean War, I just quit school. I was going to the University of Nevada. We all went in the National Guard together, and we just quit school. Three years later, I came back, and I was down grade points tremendously. They let me back in—they let all the veterans back in that were down in grade points—and they let me take regular courses instead of non-credited courses, and they helped to get jobs. The university had certain jobs up in food service and different things, and they would hire the veterans. The returning veterans were rewarded—so to speak—for serving.

But then came the Vietnam War, and the university turned on the veterans. The guys who were coming back—if they were down in grade points—were given a bad time. They had to go back and take non-credits. The faculty at the university—the Faculty Senate—did not like the Vietnam War, and they took it out on the veterans. They would not help them re-register in school, but they were discriminated against on jobs and in classes. It was just a terrible situation. Edd Miller was the President

of the university at the time. I went up to the campus and talked to the Faculty Senate, and those people just felt that if you were connected with the Vietnam War, you're a bad guy, whether you went in voluntarily or were drafted or whatever the devil. So I introduced some legislation to try to force the university to change. Of course, since the university's independent, we had those little hurdles. But it was scheduled to go to a committee meeting, and Edd Miller called me and told me that the university was going to change its rules. So I think that legislation probably benefited more people who needed help than anything else that I did. It was just a bad situation with the faculty up there; they just discriminated against veterans. I think that's the best one I did.

S.C.R. 16 (1973) directs the Board of Regents of the University of Nevada System to extend certain privileges to Vietnam veterans.

Bennett: When you think back on your legislation, are there any bills that you wish you hadn't introduced?

Swobe: [laughter] I've probably hidden those back in my mind. Well, there was that first one that I erroneously introduced. They were very nice and passed it, so I wouldn't look bad, and then killed it over in the Senate. I told that fellow I'd never do another one again, and I never did. But generally, I was pretty happy with the legislation that I introduced and passed. I'm sure I lost some that made me sick at the time, but I can't remember. [chuckles]

Bennett: Can you remember any issues that the Legislature took action on that you really wish they hadn't?

Swobe: Gee whiz. I can't think of anything. When I first came in, gaming was done on a personal basis. A corporation could not be involved in casinos. I remember that, the first time, I voted against that. The second time it came up, we felt that corporate gambling was okay, and they had the safeguards for it. That could have been speeded up sooner. Governor Sawyer and Governor Laxalt did a lot to clean up gambling in the state of Nevada during their terms.

Bennett: It changed quite a bit during the time you were in the Legislature.

Swobe: Yes, it did. I'm trying to think of anything else. The ship of state sailed smoothly. [laughter] No, I don't know of anything. We had excellent leadership in both the Assembly—when I was in the Assembly—and in the Senate. We had leadership like we have now with Senator Raggio and Senator Dina Titus, and it just was wonderful. It seems the people seemed to be there when we needed them. All during my time in the Assembly, it seemed to be that the people we needed were there when the certain issues came up.

Alice Costandina (Dina) Titus (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1988 to 2008. She was the first female Senate Minority Leader.

Bennett: You mentioned that there was fairly thorough press coverage of the Legislature. Do you think

most Nevadans understood how their Legislature worked?

Swobe: I think the people understood more then than they do now. I'll tell you kind of a funny story. A lot of these things start with just something that you do every day. I had a client who died, and he had no family. He was an old railroader with no close family. I was probating this estate—he died in Sparks, and he went to this mortuary—and I had suggested, as the executor, that the body be cremated. I got this bill, and it was for this fancy coffin. They had found the only way they could identify this poor man was by his teeth, and they had a bill for cosmetology and all of this stuff. Most mortuaries were very honest during those days, and they're honest now, I'm sure. But this one just did it, and then told me, in effect, to go to hell. They had to have a coffin to cremate him in—the statute did say that you had to have a coffin—so they used a nice one. So I put in a bill to allow a cardboard carton—or a container that was disposable—and also that you had to itemize the bill. In the first session, I didn't get anywhere. Gee, every mortician in the state came to town, and they had a big meeting, [chuckles] and they got ahold of their legislators, and it was gone. So I brought it up the next time, and it was a night floor session. I'll never forget it. Cy Ryan and Frank Johnson

Swobe's first funeral-related bill, S.B. 541, was introduced in 1969.

were there before the hearing, and one of the press guys says, "Swobe, what are you going to do if you're doing away with coffins?" And I said, "Hell, put them on a cookie sheet." The next morning, I picked up the paper, and they called it the "cookie sheet bill." And it just went all over. By gosh, by the end of the day—I'll never forget—Senator Dodge called me and said, "Swobe, what the devil did you do?" I said, "What do you mean?" So he told me that people had been calling him, and they want that bill. Several people had bought nice wooden coffins and were cremated in them. Because of the newspaper coverage of that thing, it passed, and today you don't have to buy a wooden coffin to have a cremation.

Bennett: You can use a cookie sheet.

Swobe: They called it the "cookie sheet bill"!

Bennett: Why did you decide not to run again in 1974?

Swobe: I was just getting tired of it. My practice was important, and, as I say, my family wasn't too hot about politics.

Bennett: Did you endorse anyone to run for your seat?

Swobe: No, I don't think so. There were a whole bunch of people running.

Bennett: So when you think back now from your first day here in 1963 to sine die in 1973, how had the Nevada Legislature changed?

Swobe: Oh, the business had increased tremendously. In the beginning, I could drive down here in the morning when the sun was shining and drive home in the afternoon when the sun was shining. At the end, I remember that in that new building, there were no glass windows, so you couldn't tell whether it was day or night. Then I'd get there when it was dark, and I'd leave in the dark. One of the things I missed most was gazing out the window over here. Probably got more work done, but the business was increased tremendously. The number of lobbyists increased. You worked harder and longer. Now they work really long. We would cover up the clock.

Bennett: Did you actually physically cover the clock?

Swobe: I think they did.

Bennett: They'd put a cloth over it?

Swobe: Yeah, put a cloth over it. It was more symbolism than anything else, but they'd cover the clock.

Bennett: Every session then went well beyond 60 days?

Swobe: Yes. Days beyond—not months like now. But our pay quit, too, in those days. In the first session, we got $60 for stamps, stationery, and secretarial work for the whole session.

Bennett: Do you remember what your salary was?

Swobe: I don't remember, but it wasn't too much.

Bennett: Were legislators still being paid mileage at that time?

Swobe: Yes. We'd get expenses. That went on after the 60 days were over. We had just gotten a new yard at home, and there was a nursery in Carson City. They'd give me a check for expenses, and I would buy plants and trees for my yard on my way home. [laughter] That's where the money went.

Bennett: Oh, that's great! Well, thank you very much for spending time with us today.

Swobe: Thank you.

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Get Consensus
GROUP FACILITATION
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ABOUT THE PROJECT TEAM

Get Consensus, LLC, is owned by Dale Erquiaga who serves as the project's manager and conducted some of the interviews. Dale is a native Nevadan with an extensive background in Nevada politics, having served as Director of the Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs and Chief Deputy Secretary of State. With both Nevada and Arizona clients, Get Consensus is based in Phoenix.

Dana Bennett is the project's leader and has conducted most of the interviews. Currently a PhD candidate in public history at Arizona State University with a particular interest in the women who served in the Nevada Legislature between 1919 and 1960, she has also conducted oral histories with former Arizona legislators. Prior to returning to school, she was part of the Nevada legislative process for many years.

Gwen Clancy is the project's award-winning videographer. Based in Reno, she hosts and produces the documentary series, "Exploring Nevada," which is seen on local TV throughout the state.

Jean Stoess transcribed and indexed the interviews. A long-time Reno resident, Jean is familiar with Nevada politics in both elected and appointed capacities and has indexed several Nevada history works.