

Tape 6, Side 2

CH This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland, Oregon. The interviewer, for the Oregon Historical Society, is Clark Hansen. The date is 12/11/92, and this is Tape 6, Side 2.

In our last discussion, you had - you finished by discussing a little bit about the Astoria bridge and the funds that were approved for that. You had said that it was a project by Bill Holmstrom, is that right?

VA Holmstrom, right. And my vote, of course, was opposed to it. We were talking about why would I do that, and I had indicated that I didn't think we ought to be telling the Department of Transportation where to put bridges and roads and things of that kind, and to the extent that that could get to be a pork barrel. As a matter of fact, it was followed by Ben Musa - we spoke of Ben Musa - who wanted some kind of improvement on Highway 97, and so he said, okay - I've forgotten what it was he wanted, but he got something on Highway 97. Fortunately, that didn't take hold, that idea of telling them where to put things.

But as I reflect on the question, it's part of the easing
? [?] that I was dealing with when I dealt with legislation. Now, it's easy to talk about should I put a bridge there, or should we put a bridge there, and then, of course, the heat builds and all the excitement comes, and, yeah, we really need a bridge, and so you talk about a bridge, but you don't talk about the philosophy of government and should we be doing things like that and would there be pork-barreling and that kind of thing. So my decision was not a hard decision, my decision was no, that's not good, it's not good government. And I've said to people - they say to me, Are you an attorney? I said, No, I'm not an attorney. Well, don't you have to be an attorney to be in the legislature? And I said no. There's plenty of attorneys. All you need is a set of principles and common sense. I've said that I don't know how

many hundreds of times, and I believe it. Okay, a set of principles. You don't open up, in this case, to pork barrel. That was an easy decision. I had no problem with it. Others that don't have those principles to deal with have an awful time.

CH What were your set of principles, or could you remember them?

VA Well, it's hard to define. It's sort of evolving. But first of all, as a Republican, and I think most Republicans would agree, I'm less inclined to get government involved in the lives of people, and so that's one principle. The concept of government closest to the people being the best, I believe in, and I also believe that a democracy is not an efficient form of government. Everybody's trying to make government efficient, and we have regional government and all the rest of it, and so the expense, the cost, is an inefficient government, but I think that's good, although I'm a fiscal conservative. So I'm saying okay, I understand all of this, but where you are, you do it as efficiently as you can, as inefficient as the system is, because I believe the government closest to the people is the best.

A good example, I just cannot understand why the voters, in this last election, gave home rule rights to metro government. It just absolutely blows my mind. Who knows who their metro representative is? Very few people. Government is more remote. But now this government can pass taxes, they can do all kinds of things. Well, you see, now, government is getting more remote. This is offensive to me. Jerry Tippens ~~(S/P)~~ of the Oregonian never liked me. He says I didn't care about metropolitan problems. He never understood me. He's saying, basically - he thought regional government was great stuff, and so he's coming from the efficiency side, and I can't disagree with him in that respect, but now government is getting further away from the people. They have less control over it. These are people that are going to tax us, and they ought to be close. That's why I

admire school board members and city councilmen and county commissioners. They're right there, they're there. They don't go to Salem, they're right there. You see them on the street every day. But that's good, that's not bad. Anyway, you asked me about principles. That's another one.

CH Were there other principles that you consciously tried to pursue or maintain or used as standards for conduct or when you had questions in mind that you referred to?

VA Oh, there's personal principles, and I, incidentally, believe that - you know, I keep hearing this, well, what you do in the privacy of your home, that's okay, that's your business, you have a private life and a public life. I say no way. You can't be two people. You're one person. If you've got a private life that is slippery, there's no way you can prevent yourself from being slippery in the public. You may think you can live two lives, but one can't. So I don't buy that.

But most of my feelings relate to a democracy, what's a democracy all about. I made speeches on the subject, I - you can see some of the stuff. I talk about the people. First of all, it says "We the People." Jefferson - and again, these are things I've said in speeches. When all these folks got together, Washington and Franklin and Jefferson and Adams, all these folks, they were trying to figure out what kind of government we were going to have after our Declaration of Independence and the Revolutionary War, and then they sat down to - Okay, now, we've got our country. What kind of government are we going to have? And you've probably read about the debates that went on and how they were - but they were trying to figure out what kind of government. But to me it was very simple. I've said, to - kind of paraphrasing it, they said, Gosh, I wonder if people can run a government. That's what this is all about. Jefferson said, you know, now the people have the kind of government to which they're entitled, meaning it's up to you, folks. It's yours. That's why

I get all upset because someone isn't going to vote because it's bowling night or it's raining outside or, you know, a whole lot of specious reasons. Hey, you don't understand how important you are in this process. If you don't do it, somebody else is going to do it.

CH Well, currently, right now, there's this problem within the Republican Party of certain interest groups controlling the party by as few as, according to what the paper was saying, three votes for a precinct person. And, yet, what the party says and does in relationship to potential candidates that will be put up to the people could have a big impact on the democracy of that given situation. How do you feel about a situation like that where it can be so easily swayed?

VA Well, the system works. I say the system. The system is that you get precinct committeeman and woman, and they're now entitled to go the county central committee, and these precinct men and women vote on the chairman and the vice chairman and all the other things, and, then, those folks vote at the state, for the state chairman. So those that have done it, like even Walter Huss back in 1974, I said to my moderate and somewhat liberal friends they just showed us the system works. They went out and got people that feel like they do to run for precinct committeeman and woman, those folks went to the state and county central committee and elected Walter Huss - or, not Walter, but whoever. The people who went to the state convention went to elect Walter Huss. It just shows us that the system works. So if you feel that bad about it, run for precinct committeeman and woman, go to the central committee - you know, it works. However, having said all of that, this is all theoretical, but the important point is that they've done it. But it injures all Republicans because - it was interesting. I had a conversation with the conservative folks - nonconfrontational, which is what I wanted to do - very recently, and I'm trying to tell them, look,

this is what's going on. I didn't use these words, but the idea was, if you want to continue to elect Democrats, just keep doing what you're doing. And they had - I was listening to them...

CH If you wanted to continue to lick Democrats?

VA If you wanted to elect Democrats, just keep doing what you're doing. I didn't use those words, but that's where I was coming from. And they had some interesting viewpoints. As I say, it was nonconfrontational. I said, this is how I feel, this is what I believe in, this is what I - after all these years of being involved. And I said, the job of a central committee is to elect Republicans. That's the job. Our job is not to promote any particular cause. One fellow said, Well, gosh, you've got to stand for something. And this comes from the against homosexuals and against abortion, from that side of the issue. I said, Well, I can't really disagree with you. You've got to stand for something. But if these two issues were among the issues, Republicans are against abortion, Republicans are against homosexuals, Republicans are fiscal conservatives, you know, it's all in a pot, I could live with that. But it's not coming down that way. Republicans are against homosexuals and Republicans are against abortion. That's the way it's coming down." And so all the other things that supposedly Republicans are for, that's not coming out. It's interesting.

I also discovered, which I didn't know, they work very hard on a platform because they've got an idea that once the platform is locked in, this now becomes the bible and anyone that doesn't hew to that is not a Republican. And I say to them, who knows what's in a platform? Members of the media don't know what's in a platform, the members who are Democrats or Republicans, they don't know what's in the platform. As a matter of fact, I've got a copy of it just so I could read it. You know, who knows what's in a platform. It makes news at the moment, but certain things make news. At the convention we didn't change the position on

abortion, so that's all anybody knows in regard to what the platform is. The platform, in many instances, is not too bad. As a matter of fact, it's quite good. I actually got it because I wanted to read through it, and, then, having a general idea where the conservatives are, I'd say, Now, do you believe in this? I really couldn't find anything too good except when I got to a sales tax, and I said, How many of you oppose a sales tax here? - and that's in this relatively small meeting - and a couple said they were against a sales tax. Oh, wait a minute. It's in the platform, the Republican platform. Just trying to - you know, you just don't hew to it precisely. But that aside, these folks, they believe in that. They don't understand that if you don't like the platform, you just turn your back on it, and most people do.

CH They feel that a long-established Republican who's been in office for a while should make his views conform to the...

VA Whatever that platform is. We as Republicans have spoken in convention, and now that's your new bible.

CH And would they have conformed themselves to the previous platforms of the Republican party, having been Republicans?

VA Oh no. They changed it to conform to what they think Republicans should be like.

So anyway, we were talking about principles, and it somewhat relates. You know, I mentioned earlier about the lottery funds, that that should not be a pork barrel kind of thing, there should be a formula for dealing with it. There should be - these are refinements on philosophy. It should not be for continuing, it should be a one-project thing. Okay, we will fund that, and there's no more money coming from it, so you don't get yourself involved in continually funding. So those things I suppose also relate to a philosophy of mine which I carried out as governor,

here's the problem, and she agreed.

CH If they don't vote by - in alphabetical order, what order do they go in?

VA Well, Jason finally changed this, at least in the senate. The senate still does roll call. The house has a machine to do it. But, then, Jason would, what you call, roll the roll call. The first vote would be A, the next one would start with B, and the next one would start with C, and then they'd finally get back to A again. I didn't like that. I got accustomed to voting first shot out of the box. I make up my mind what I'm going to do, I vote - I hated to wait around to vote. But right now they've - I don't know what they're doing now. I presume they're still rolling roll call. I have no idea. But for a good, long period of my career it was alphabetical. First it was Anderson and Annala and Atiyeh, then it got to be Annala and Atiyeh, then pretty soon it was just Atiyeh.

CH Wasn't there Ahrens in there too, or was that before?

VA Eddie Ahrens was before me. A nice guy.

CH But with the voting machine, it would just be instantaneous, everybody?

VA No, they would have a period of time to vote, and everybody's name would appear, how they voted. And, then, there's a tabulation. So if I wanted to wait and find out how you voted, I'd just wait till you voted. You know, they can still do the same thing in the house. I'd just wait until your light went on, yes or no. Oh; yes. Okay. So they can still do that.

CH Did you ever find yourself in any kind of embarrassing

situations where you were called to vote or speak on a specific piece of legislation that you had not prepared for?

VA No. Usually - you know when you would go in to, what they say, carry a bill. When it leaves the committee they say, okay, you carry the bill, meaning you open the debate and close the debate, so you know that ahead of time. Now, I'm not in the committee, it's not my bill, but I'm reading the bill, and I'll get up and debate. So no, not in that sense. There was one senator who had a particularly bad night, and he wasn't feeling very good in the morning, [and] he was supposed to carry a bill, so they finally said, Senator, and it was his bill to carry. So he got up and made a motion to move the bill to the end of the calendar. All in favor, aye. So they moved it to the end of the calendar, and he's moving back now to go sit down, and then they called the bill. It was the last bill on the calendar [laughter]. It was the end of the calendar.

CH I heard of another case - maybe you remember this - of a member who really didn't take a lot of initiative, really never had any issues, any bills that he was carrying, but he did have one that I think he was either carrying or had a strong feeling about and wanted to speak on, and during the session fell asleep, and they just went right through the whole proceedings and called him, and he didn't wake up, and they went right past him.

VA Oh, there were funny things that happened like that. You might ask Betty - I can't remember. I do remember the instance, I don't remember the bill, but Betty Roberts - I guess, she came to the session, and she was dressed in a - well, I'm going to say overalls, but that would - it obviously wasn't overalls, it was a nice looking - I say dress. It wasn't a dress, it was pants. But anyway, straps and that sort of thing. And she had to go to the bathroom. Now, in the - I know even in the women's room because of this instance, but in the men and women's room the

speaker is still on. You could hear what's going on. Well, they called - I guess she must have thought the debate was going to go longer. This was a very important bill, although I can't remember what it was, and it was very important to Betty. And all of a sudden the vote came quicker than she had expected. Here she is in the ladies' room. She's trying to get her clothes back on again, desperately trying to get her clothes back on again, but the vote was carried before she got on the floor, and it lost by one vote. And this was a bill very important to her. Now, I don't remember what it was, and you may make a note and tell her you had heard about this and see what she can remember, because this would be kind of interesting.

CH You don't happen to know which session that was?

VA No, I don't know, so you have to really - you just bring it up and ask her.

CH Well, it's funny that you mention this, because Betty and I have talked about some situations regarding the lavatory, and apparently there wasn't a women's restroom on the same - for a while, at least - on the same floor, that they had converted what had been the women's restroom into the nurse's room, and the women, the few that there were, had to go up to the second floor, and that she eventually did start using the nurse's room, the lavatory there, but it wasn't until more women were elected that they were able to change that.

VA That's interesting. But you might bring this up, and she may remember it. I remember the instance, I don't remember what the bill was. But it was just because of that particular outfit she had on that day that she ran into a problem. I guess whatever she had to do, she was having trouble doing it.

CH I had heard of a situation where the speaker of the house -

oh, prior to his being speaker, Bob Duncan was sort of taught a lesson in terms of - everybody voted against his bill. Do you remember that situation?

VA Well, not just Bob. It happened to other legislators.

CH And then turned around and passed it, but it was...

VA Oh yeah. They just decide to gang up on some freshman, and they get up there carrying a bill, and usually one that really doesn't - is not that significant, and they sit down, and all of a sudden, no, no, no, no, no. You know, they get worried with no, no, everybody voting no. Then they reconsider it and vote to pass it. So that was just sort of to spook them a little bit. But that's not just Bob. That happened to many of them.

CH So that was a rite of initiation?

VA That's right.

CH Did you encounter any kind of rites of initiation coming in?

VA I don't recall any, I don't recall they did that to me. I do recall that at the very beginning - you know, I was just nervous as a cat, and it took quite a long time before I could get up and say anything. You know, I just wouldn't get up, and there were things I wanted to say, but I was just too nervous about the whole process. And Duncan can - you know, if you've got something to say, get up and say it. He encouraged me to do that. Later on, he said, "Gosh, I wish I hadn't done that" [laughter]. "Now you're talking too much. There's got to be something in between."

CH So there was a process when it was difficult for you to speak publicly, then?

VA No, I never had any problem doing that. You know, after all, I was campaigning. Although it is kind of interesting, in campaigning it's difficult to start saying what a neat guy you are. You know, stand up and tell people, gosh, I'm a good guy and you ought to vote for me. That's very difficult to get over that hurdle. But I didn't have any problem with public speaking. That was never really a hangup with me. It was just that, you know, I'm in this body of people and we're talking about laws, and I just had that kind of a reluctance to get up and talk. But once I moved through the barrier, it was easy from then on.

CH Well, going on to some of the other issues, I notice that in that '61 session of the legislature, that they also approved the startup of community colleges.

VA Yeah.

CH That must have been a major turning point for education in the state of Oregon.

VA Actually, that was - was it '61? I'm trying to think '59. In any event, yes, you're right.

CH Maybe this was additional funds.

VA Well, it could be, and to that point it was interesting. I think it was '59. It actually was Pat Metke from Bend, one of the Turks. They had a community college up there, and so he comes to the legislature and says, in effect, we'd like to have some official recognition. You know, part of the educational process. This is a community college, we like it as a community college, but we want some state recognition. Aye, aye, aye, aye, you know, it passed fine. So it must have been '61 they come back, and so they were asking for money, and I voted no. The guy said, "I didn't know you were against community colleges." I

said, "I'm not, but in '59 you didn't say anything about money, you just said you wanted some ^{RECOGNITION} - I'm glad to do that for you. You didn't say anything about money. I'm not against community colleges." Yeah, it was the beginning of that whole process.

CH There was also the money approved for the startup of the Boardman Industrial Park.

VA That was Mark Hatfield's deal.

CH Yeah. That was - now, that was the space-age park that was being...?

VA That's right.

CH And did you have problems with that?

VA Yeah. I don't remember how I voted. I may have voted no, because this is all desert land out there, you know. Why in the world are you going to do something out there? I can't remember, but I do remember that. That was Mark Hatfield's deal, and he was going to get Boeing in and test ^{NOTES} voters, and do all kinds of - he had something in mind. It took a long while to get that finally going. Incidentally, Jake Bennett was on that, I think maybe in '63, with photographs of this desert land where we're spending all this money. But that was a Mark Hatfield deal. And that was really - actually, that finally came up again - oh, gosh. As a matter of fact, I remember debating Ed Fadeley somewhere on this subject. But it came up again that we really had - and it was, it was a pretty sweet deal for Boeing, that Boeing really had smarter lawyers than the state did in terms of tying up all that land.

CH Well, it all backfired on the state eventually, didn't it?

VA Yeah, and I think Boeing still has control over that land.

CH And didn't they sublease it, then, for agricultural purposes?

VA Yeah. They were making money on it and we weren't making anything on it.

[End of Tape 6, Side 2]