

Gas-hog heaven: It's time to let those hogs go and buy something that sips, writes columnist Arianna Huffington, who did just that.

Page F5

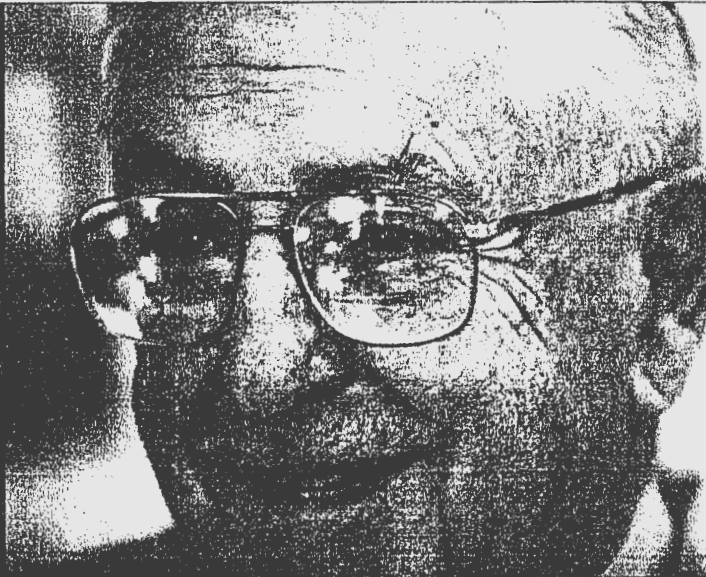


THIS SECTION  
◆ CHOICE CUTS, F2  
◆ LETTERS, F3  
◆ EDITORIALS, F4

## An American, an Arab

**"And our new friends over there – how sure are we that they're our friends?"**

**VIC ATIYEH  
REFERRING TO  
ANTI-TALIBAN FORCES  
IN AFGHANISTAN**



**Vic Atiyeh, the nation's first Arab American governor, recalls when Arabs had great affection for this country.**

ROGER JENSEN/THE OREGONIAN

By DOUG BATES  
THE OREGONIAN

Last week's rout of the Taliban had no stronger supporter on the home front than Vic Atiyeh, the former governor of Oregon. He firmly backed the U.S. bombing campaign in Afghanistan and fervently hopes Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaida terrorist network are soon crushed forever.

In other words, he's no different from the great majority of U.S. citizens.

But 78-year-old Atiyeh is different. In one key respect. The son of Syrian immigrants, he was the nation's first Arab American governor. And though he has always been low-key about his roots and calls himself "a devout American," he has been more outspoken since Sept. 11 about U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

"I'm not saying be pro-Arab and anti-Israel," he says. "What I'm really pleading for is evenhandedness. That's what I believe my country should be—

Former Gov. Vic Atiyeh sees the war from two prisms – as a "devout American" and a child of Syria

evenhanded."

In weighing Atiyeh's comments, it's best to throw out all the tired stereotypes about Arab Americans. You'd never guess his ancestry if you sat by him on an airplane and didn't know who he was. You'd size him up as a successful, distinguished-looking CEO type, probably Republican, pro-business and possibly moderate on social issues, and you'd be right on every count.

Among his accomplishments in two terms as governor, 1979-1987, Atiyeh looks back most proudly at his work to maintain state services and pull Oregon out of a deep recession, his contributions to help protect the scenic Columbia River Gorge, and his successful push to make racial harassment a crime in Oregon.

Atiyeh never hid his Arab identity, but preserving ethnic culture was not a priority in his hard-working immigrant family, striving so hard to assimilate and succeed in America. His father and uncle, George and Aziz Atiyeh, came to Portland at the turn of the century and founded Atiyeh Brothers Inc., the oldest Oriental rug business in the Northwest. In the past century, Oregonians came to know the Atiyehs not as Syrian transplants but as successful business people and elvish-minded workhorses who helped shape their state and community.

Vic Atiyeh's personal story has almost eerie echoes of the Frank Capra movie, "It's a Wonderful Life." In World War II, for instance, Vic's father died and his twin brothers went off to war, leaving 21-year-old Vic at home with a physical impairment and an obligation to keep the family business going, although he wanted to fight for his country, too.

In a pair of interviews in his office in downtown Portland, Atiyeh told his family's story and shared his insights about the United States' war against terrorism. Following are excerpts from those conversations.

### O & A

degrees from what's going on these days.

**Q. What's your reaction to events of the past week in Afghanistan?**

**A.** As we've watched the Taliban be pretty well beat up, I say to myself, "You know, the Taliban are folks that we supported and who knows how many were killed by them with our weapons and our bullets and our tanks?" And our new friends over there — how sure are we that they're our friends? Yes, they've liberated their country and the men can now shave and the women can take off their face covers, but I have a sense that our president is a little worried about these friends.

**Q. How are President Bush and his administration doing in this war, in your opinion?**

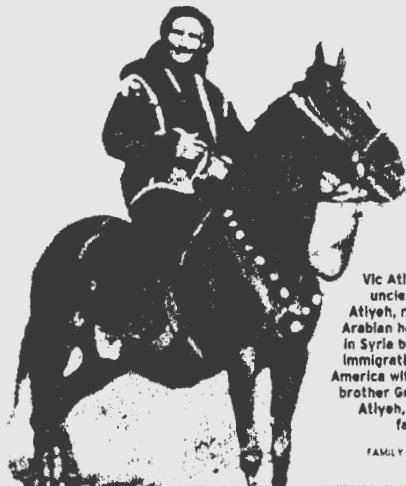
**A.** I think they're doing fine. Some people are complaining about the bombing, but obviously there's a real reason for it. The only concern I have is who's going to take over after the Taliban.

**Q. The Atiyehs appear to be the quintessential story of immigrants coming to America and making it big. Why is your family so successful?**

**A.** I don't know what it is. But I've used this illustration many times before: When my dad died, there was an editorial in The Oregonian about him. And I thought, man, now isn't that great? What a great country. Here's a man from a dinky little village in Syria, he comes to America, and when he passes away, it's a matter of major note, that a man like that made it big.

**Q. Many might think part of the reason for the Atiyehs' success was the family's willingness to assimilate and embrace their new homeland. What do you think of that assertion?**

**A.** I think you're probably correct. And I can prove it. I suppose, in a very short way. People ask, "Can you speak Arabic?" I say, "No." My dad said, "You don't need to learn the language. It's of no use to you at all. You're an American." And that's about 180



**Vic Atiyeh's uncle, Aziz Atiyeh, raised Arabian horses in Syria before immigrating to America with his brother George Atiyeh, Vic's father.**

FAMILY PHOTO

Please see **ATIYEH**, Page F2

CHOICE CUTS

"Choice Cuts" is a forum for political and societal commentary in short form, compiled from news services, staff reports and reader contributions.

SHORT AND SWEET

Dear Mr. President: I accept your advice on leading a normal life, including a trip by air whenever the need or desire should arise. So, when will there be a space for me on Air Force One?

— Gene M. McIntyre, Kelso

A message from the U.S. military to Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida terrorists: You want to die for your God, and we're here to help as many of you as we can.

— Dewey R. Hamilton, Tigard

"Media recount finds Florida result is the same" (Nov. 12, 2001) is a large headline. May I suggest a more accurate one: "Core's President"

— Brian L. Woodward, Astoria

Charles Krauthammer claims Alaskan oil helps ease our reliance on the Middle East. So why do we sell it to the Japanese?

— Lisa Meyer, Northwest Portland

It's difficult to write exactly. That's why letters selected for "Short and Sweet," 35 words or fewer, are honored in this space each week. See submission instructions at the end of "Choice Cuts."

TALIBAN TALKING

"The Taliban is on the run and don't know where to go. Pakistan doesn't want them. Iran doesn't want them. Of course, they'll have no problem getting into this country."

— David Letterman, on the "Late Show" (politicalhumor.about.com)

PORK AND POTATOES

"From killing aquatic weeds, breeding potatoes and renovating a statue of Vulcan, the Roman god of fire, to lavishing millions on earmarked grants on well-off universities... the road in Washington remains, as always, paved with gold."

— Sen. John McCain, on the "transient spending going on in Congress at a time when business is anything but normal" (The Washington Post)

LOOKING INWARD

"We Muslims cannot keep blaming the West for all our ills... Without a reformation in the practice of Islam that makes it more forward and not backward, there is no hope for us Muslims anywhere."

— A Pakistani, in an open letter to Osama bin Laden published in a Pakistani daily. The Nation (Thomas Friedman's column in The New York Times)



TAYLOR JONES

MERCILESS

"Nation's priorities: terror, terror, terror. AG's Mercy docs in Oregon and medical pot in CA."

— "Constitutional Wisdom," an Attorney General John Ashcroft's meeting with Oregon's assisted suicide and California's medical marijuana laws. Ashcroft earned a disubletidy down. (Newsweek)

NOT HIM!

"Geraldo Rivera is headed for Afghanistan. Boy, you thought those people hated us before."

— Jay Leno, on "The Tonight Show" (politicalhumor.about.com)

To contribute to "Choice Cuts," phone 503-294-5125 or write to Commentary Editor, The Oregonian, 1320 S.W. Broadway, Portland, OR 97201, or send e-mail to commentary@news.oregonian.com. (Please include your phone number and address, for verification only.)



Vic Atiyeh's father, George, who founded the Atiyeh Brothers rug business in Portland with his brother, Aziz, was photographed in front of their first store, between 10th and 15th avenues on Washington Street, shortly before their move to new quarters in 1906.

# Atiyeh: 'Constantly survey our freedoms'

Continued from Page 1

**Q:** But as far as going in militarily to shut down Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaida terrorist network, you have no objection to that?

**A:** No. The bombing has proven to be effective. However, bin Laden still has not surfaced anywhere. You'd think by now the Taliban would be saying, "God, is bin Laden worth this much?"

**Q:** Some people worry that we've crossed the line and are giving up too many civil liberties in this war. How do you feel about that?

**A:** We really have to begin to face the facts. We're in a terrorist situation. So we need to constantly survey our freedoms as we try to protect ourselves. It's a delicate situation. I'm one of those people in the middle who say, "Yeah, I'm willing to do that, for a while." Most of us are willing to give up some of our freedom until this thing is resolved.

But we should keep the discussion going, keep asking the question, poke and prod but make sure there isn't this wild movement to strip civil liberties. At some point, I'm sure Americans will say, "OK, that's enough, let's take our stuff back again." I hope it won't be that far in the future.

**Q:** Here on the home front, do you feel there's been any overreaction toward Arab Americans?

**A:** It's been pretty well restrained. The president and others from the national level have said, "Now, look, this has been these bad guys but that doesn't mean everybody's a bad guy, all Arabs or all Muslims." And they've kind of put a damper on it. But that doesn't mean overreaction doesn't happen. There are brave citizens out there. And they don't represent either Oregonians or Americans, they're just guys out there.

So I wouldn't want to get involved in saying all Americans are jumping on Muslims, because they're not. I personally haven't felt anything, but Oregonians have always been very kind to me. You know, they're surprised to find out I'm Arab-American.

**Q:** What kind of feelings did the Sept. 11 attacks leave you with?

**A:** There's a reluctance to talk about why there's such anger against the United States. Every time the question arises, with great indignity the people in here say that's a terrible thing to say. I can tell you, from my own personal knowledge, that very early on, the Arab countries had genuine affection for the United States. Affection is a real good word.

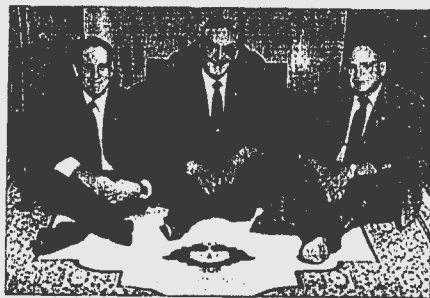
Right after World War II, we were trying to buy European countries so they wouldn't go in behind the Iron Curtain. So we were in kind of an auctioning between Russia and ourselves to buy the loyalty of European countries. And all the time we were doing that, here we had this huge army of Arab-speaking people who truly loved us and weren't receiving even treatment.

And then we supported the country of Israel and given them weapons. It was a shock and a terrible blow to our Arab friends. I say to them, "Israel's there, it's going to stay there, don't ever talk about it going anywhere." But I want to see overhanded treatment, and I don't see overhanded treatment.

When I was governor, I treated everybody the same. For instance, when the Baganwan Street Rajneesh was here in Oregon, people would say, "Governor, you've got to do something about the folks in this cult." And I'd say, "We live in a democracy. If they violate the law, we'll kick 'em just as hard as anybody else, but in the meantime, what do you want me to do?"

**Q:** You have traveled extensively in the Middle East and some will recall your meeting with former President Hosni Mubarak and stressing that you were trying to convey to him?

**A:** Well, not just to Mubarak. On that same trip in '84, when we went to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria and Israel, I met with Mubarak and Syrian President Hafez al-Assad and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak



The second generation of Atiyeh brothers (from left) Edward, Victor and Richard.

Shamir. And I knew how they viewed me, you know, as an Arab. So I started out with a statement: "I want you to understand I'm a devout American, so that our position, on whatever we talk about — it's not in terms of my having an Arabic background, but in terms of being an American."

**Q:** When Assad died, didn't the Clinton administration snub you? You should have been on the U.S. delegation to that funeral.

**A:** I was on the list. And the list was sent to the White House. And there it was scratched, by Clinton or whomever, I don't know. But it was scratched, and that's too bad. Again, I come at it as an American, but I would have been kind of really neat to have the first Arab American governor coming from this little country of Syria over there.

**Q:** Some would say that story is a tiny reflection of a bigger problem in our foreign policy toward the Middle East.

**A:** Yeah, my feeling's that politics had too much to do with some of the things we do. And politics should not have anything to do with our foreign policy. It should be what is the right thing for America. After I left office, I decided I was going to go to Syria and propose to President Assad that there be an intermediary — not high-profile, not a shuttle diplomacy thing, just somebody — an ambassador — in this discussion between the U.S. and Syria. And when it looks like we really got somewhere in our language, then you'd turn it over to the professionals.

So I went to Washington, on my way to Syria, and went to the White House and spent two hours and 45 minutes talking with President Bush and his chief of staff, John Sununu, who by the way was the second Arab American to become governor of a U.S. state (Now Hampshire). I said, "You know, this is like chicken soup when you're sick; it may not help but it isn't going to hurt, because what we're doing now is not working." They agreed, but later I got word back through Sununu that they didn't want to do that.

I don't understand this. Why? Why do we have to formalize it? Palestinians are dying, and Jewish people are dying, and lots of them are living in fear every day. How can you not be sensitive to that? I'm thinking about any way to try to stem the flow of blood, and my country says, "No, we don't want to do that." It was a major disappointment.

**Q:** You've been referred to as the family historian. Tell us the story of your father and his brother.

**A:** Let me start with Portland and Oregon. When I was 6 years old, my mother and my brothers went on a business trip with my Uncle Aziz to Beirut, which was where Mother came from but was still part of Syria then. In 1929, during that visit we went to my dad's village, called Amat el Husn, and I got to thinking, my god, why did my dad come from this little little village in Syria to Oregon in 1900? I could imagine New York or Boston or Philadelphia, but Portland, Oregon, in 1900?

So that's the question I asked when I got back home, and my father said he

and my uncle had had a small business in Pennsylvania, and some fellow came through and told them Portland would be a good place to sell Oriental rugs. "You put up half, I'll put up half, and I'll go sell them," he said. And apparently he didn't put up his half, so my uncle came out West to check the investment, which is how he got to Oregon.

Now the one question I wished I'd asked was "Dad, when did you and Uncle come to the United States?" I didn't ask that, but it had to be prior to 1900.

**Q:** So they emigrated from Syria to Pennsylvania and then came out to Portland?

**A:** Aziz began the business, Atiyeh Brothers Inc., which had its 100th anniversary last year.

**Q:** Your mother's obviously part of the story. How did she and your father meet, and how did she get to this country?

**A:** After moving to Portland, my father married my mother — or I think, if you will — and met her, married her and brought her back to Portland.

**Q:** And you were born in Portland?

**A:** Yeah, I and my twin older brothers, Ed and Richard.

**Q:** Where did the family live?

**A:** Right near the Lloyd Center, Seventh and Holladay. It's a parking lot now, but it was a nice neighborhood, a nice house. We went to Holladay School, which is not there any more. And I kind of kid about this a little because I went to Washington High School, my brothers and I, and that's closed now. So I say now my grade school is gone, Washington High is closed, but I think the University of Oregon's safe for a while.

**Q:** You attended the U of O for a couple of years during World War II, didn't you?

**A:** Yeah. My brothers and I and a whole lot of us at the university joined the Enlisted Reserve Corps. That meant you could enlist in the armed services and stay 'til June to finish the school year, which we thought was a pretty nice thing. At the time I had an injury — a bone infection in my ankle.

So I had an operation and had a cast up to almost my hip. I kept going to physicals and one thing and another, but when the order came I was discharged, so I never got in a uniform.

**Q:** And your brothers?

**A:** They went off to training, then came home the latter part of June of '44 on leave before being shipped overseas. About three weeks later, my father passed away, from a brain attack, at age 61.

My brothers were put into the 106th Infantry Division and were in the same platoon. In the Battle of the Bulge, when the Germans broke through their division, they were captured separately and sent to two different prison camps.

**Q:** You and your mother obviously went through a very hard time.

**A:** I can remember so well coming back to the store and here was one of these olive drab Plymouths parked in front, so I go inside and they said an officer wants

FORMER GOV. VIC ATIYEH

Born Feb. 20, 1923, in Portland. Education: Graduated from Portland's Washington High School in 1941, attended University of Oregon, leaving after two years to join Atiyeh Brothers, his father's rug and carpet company in Portland. Political affiliations: Republican. Legislative careers: 1959-1964, Oregon House, 1965-1978, Oregon Senate. Subnational careers: Two terms, 1979-1987. Re-elected in 1982 by Oregon's largest subnational margin in the preceding 32 years. Currently: Founded Victor Atiyeh & Co., which offers consulting services in international trade; serves on board of directors of Atiyeh Brothers. Web sites: www.atiyeh.com

to talk to you, and there was an army captain. I received the note: Pvt. Edward Atiyeh and Pvt. Richard Atiyeh had been listed missing in action. Then we had to get in the car and go out and tell my mother about that. So that was tough on her, yeah.

We finally had word through the Red Cross, first Edward and then Richard, that they were alive.

**Q:** And they made it home after the war?

**A:** They were liberated separately. Ed came home first, then Richard. And as soon as Richard had the status be called home, and Ed answered the phone and says, "Where you live?"

**Q:** Growing up, did you ever experience discrimination personally, or the sting of being made to feel different?

**A:** No, I never did. I'm pausing a little bit because I'm thinking, well, maybe I didn't notice it. But no, we were accepted at school — again, I'm including my brothers. We were in Holy Cross and all the clubs in high school. When we went down to Oregon, we were Phi Gamma Delta fraternity brothers, all three of us. There was no bias there. So when I'm asked if I have been discriminated against, I like to say, "Yes, but it's because I'm Republican, not because I'm Arab."

**Q:** Is your family religious?

**A:** My brothers and I will be active in the St. Barnabas Episcopal Church. I remember just vaguely as a young child going to the Catholic Church, and it may very well be that Mother may have been Orthodox or Catholic. My father's village has three or four churches. It's in what's known as the Christian area of Syria.

**Q:** If you were asked to give advice to newer immigrant families in this country, particularly from the Middle East, based on the experience of the Atiyeh family, what would you tell people?

**A:** It would be the same advice that I have given to a lot of high schoolers being introduced into our system of government. They have not yet voted, and they're going to vote, and these immigrants would be the same. Too many people have lost sight of what a democracy is all about, and this is one of my soapboxes.

People can run a government. And the point basically is that there are too many people not paying any attention to it. Too many people that really understand, they talk about "power to the people" and I say, "What are you doing? You have the power. You don't have to demand it. It's yours. Don't say your one vote doesn't count."

So when you're asking me what do I tell a new citizen, I'm just trying to tell them you now are part of a grand and great government, and you can be an important part of what this is all about. "We the people" suggests a representative form of government, meaning money. I can't go to government but you go to government for me. That's the nut of it.

Associate Editor Doug Bates can be reached at 503-221-8174 or by e-mail at dougbates@news.oregonian.com.