

Tape 60, Side 2  
September 10, 1993

CH This is an interview with Governor Atiyeh. This is Tape 60, Side 2.

VA On the Frohnmayer-Roberts race, I was telling them, I don't understand you guys. Yeah, Frohnmayer is not where you are, but at least he's closer to where you are than Roberts is. And I said, If Frohnmayer is elected, at least the door is going to be open. That doesn't mean you're going to get an agreement, but at least the door is open. With Roberts the door is closed. I don't understand what you're trying to achieve.

CH Do you think they understand that now?

VA Well, maybe they understand it now; then, they didn't. They were going to win. I don't know whether it's naivete or ignorance, but the fact is that they just didn't quite see that.

CH Or is it that they would rather go down abiding by their principles than...?

VA There was some of that too, sure. And so what do they do? You know, they elected the governor that was so far away from them, it was incredible. And yet - I think they've seen that, so as they keep intimidating I just cannot believe that they're going to relive that Frohnmayer-Roberts thing again. It didn't really help them, it certainly didn't help the OCA as an organization. They lost

memberships as a result of that. I don't think they want to relive that. So, yes, they could do something like that.

And, yet - you know, I'm going back to Vic Atiyeh, Tom McCall, Roger Martin. I won. What I'm saying to you is I think in a better campaign Dave might have won anyway.

CH What political activities have you had since leaving - you've been involved with other than what we've already talked about in terms of ballot measures, initiatives, and things like that?

VA Well, I was against the last OCA gay-lesbian. I'm trying to remember the number

CH Ballot Measure 9.

VA I was visibly against that measure. I didn't think we should write discrimination into the constitution. That's basically what I was thinking about. And, you know, they kept telling me that "the Bible says," and my glib answer was, "I'll tell you, I'm just going to let God decide that. I'm not going to make that decision here, let God make that decision." And, yet, you know, I was going through the Bible, and the first and greatest commandment is love thy neighbor like thyself. That's the first one. Now, how in the world can you - if they say the Bible, they go read it somewhere else, but what's the Lord saying? This is the first and greatest commandment. How does that match up? If they're really - if they're telling me they're [several words unclear] the Bible says, how does that match up? It doesn't match up. I've never had a chance to use that in an argument with them, but I'm looking forward to that

opportunity [laughs].

I've been involved with candidates, indicating to them that I'm willing to do what they would like. I use the joke, you know, I'll be for you or against you, whichever helps the most [laughs].

CH Who have you helped?

VA Well, none of them really have used me as much as I would have liked to have been used.

CH Dave Frohnmayer?

VA No, not Frohnmayer, not George Bush. I was willing to do a lot more, and I think I could have done a pretty good job at it, but - the thing is that I'm not looking at polls and they are. I still believe, though, polls would show my favorability as being pretty good, and as time moves on it gets even better. So I think I could help. But I sure do give a lot of free advice. They come and see me. I've already talked to Denny, and I've talked - Denny Smith, that is, Craig Berkman, Greg Walden. You know, they come and see me. But once I give them advice, they don't always take it. There's not much you can do about it. It's their campaign, not mine.

CH Were you involved in the property tax limitation Measure Number 5 in 1990 at all?

VA No. Well, yes, I was opposed to it. Again, not as much on the stump as I would have liked to have been.

CH Maybe that was '92, actually.

VA No, 1990, you're right. The '91 legislature faced it for the first time, only the effect was rather small, knowing full well that it was going to be bigger in '93 and bigger in '95. And, of course, we've now gone through '93.

CH Anything else in terms of sales taxes or any other measures?

VA Oh, I was involved in the - it was smaller issues. The triple-trailer deal. I was opposed to that, and they used my comments in that regard.

I'll pick and choose. You know, if I believe in something, I'll do it, if I don't, I won't.

CH What about some of your other activities that you've been involved in, civic activities, and principally I'm thinking in terms of the Boy Scouts.

VA Well, the Boy Scouts came to me before I left office, and they wanted me to be the chairman of the endowment for the Boy Scouts. I said, "Well, sure, I'll do that, but give me six months after I leave office," which they were nice enough to do, so I got cranked up into that. Scouting has been the most consistent, long-term volunteer thing that I've done. It runs for many, many years.

I've been involved with the Japan-America Society, as you know. I finally became president for two years. I believe that's good work.

CH What did you do for them?

VA Oh, it's hard to tell you. You keep it going, you keep it exciting, you keep the people interested. We were involved in USA-Japan - it's a major event - the society directly was. We had Kabuki[?], which was a major event. Actually, the whole idea behind the society is to broaden understanding between Japan and the U.S. Japan and Oregon actually is our responsibility. It's a major country, it's a major ally of ours, it's an important ally of ours, and there is a lot of misunderstanding on both sides, and so that's what the role of the society does. And so you do things that aren't directly on target, but you still try to get people to - just by display of things.

World Affairs Council wanted me on their board. You know, I got to - I overdid. I was on the Oregon Historical Society board, which is something I always wanted to do. Washington County Historical Society board. I'm on the Warm Springs Museum board. But, you know, I overdid it. I finally - I told Charlotte Kennedy in the World Affairs Council, I said, "Look, I really don't want to go to meetings anymore." And when it came time, I said, "I'd just as soon leave the board." And she said no, she wanted to keep me on the board. Well, I said, "As long as the board members know that I'm not going to come to meetings. I don't want to be on the board and have them think that I'm a slacker, because I don't think that's a fair thing to do." Oh, she'd take care of it.

Finally, it was - it was handled very nicely. The fellow said, We really appreciate - I've forgotten who it was who called me - and we would like to have you on the board of overseers, or whatever they call it.

CH Advisory board?

VA Advisory board. He was very nice about that. I said, "Oh, that's fine. Thank you very much," which is where I wanted to be initially. I said to Charlotte, "Hey, don't you have something that's advisory, you don't expect too much?" I help them. They call, and we've got foreign visitors, and I meet with them, and I'm happy to do it, but I just don't want to go to meetings.

I left the Washington County Historical Society; I regretfully left the Oregon Historical Society. I mean, I just had too to do. I'm on the board of trustees of Pacific University. They finally came to me a couple of years ago and wanted me to be the chairman of the Pacific Intercultural - well, it was then Institute. We changed it to Foundation. And I said to Bob Duval[?], the president of the college, I said, "Okay, I'll do that, but you take me off all these other committees I'm on," and so we made a deal.

I'm thinking I'm just - these are all good causes, I believe in them, but I've gone through that. I didn't think I'd be president of anything, let alone the Japan-America Society. I've done all of that. And this is not a matter of any kind of egotism. You get kind of tired of doing it. I came back one time from some meeting, and I told Roseanne[?], my secretary, "I'm getting tired of going to meetings I don't run."

Now, another thing I keep thinking, I'm chairman of the board of governors of the Oregon Golf Club. I'm on the board of governors and I'm chairman of that. Well, I'm running the meetings, and I've got some very bright adults, but, nonetheless, I finally say, "Okay, we've talked enough about that. Let's move on." I worry about the fact that I'm on that board of governors for - well, it'll be two more

years, and I have a three-year term, but you can only be chairman for one year. Well, I worry about who's the next chairman is going to be. But I can solve that. I can always go home, I don't have to stick around. If it gets to be nine or ten o'clock, I'm going home. I mean, that's all there is to it. So I can solve that part of it.

CH What about your business, Atiyeh International? Maybe you can tell me a little bit about what you're doing there.

VA Well, we have to make the separation. Atiyeh International is actually my son's business, and mine is Victor Atiyeh and Company, and we office together. He asked if I'd be on his board, but this is all family kind of thing. He has rugs made in China to his design, that is, the People's Republic of China. He's doing very well at it. He's a hard-working young man, and I'm very proud of him.

I decided that when I left office - first of all, I told my brothers before I left Salem that I wasn't going to come back to the rug business. I just didn't want to do that. I'd been my own boss, and although my brothers and I really got along very well, although we argued, sometimes rather vociferously, but the fact is I think the success of our business was that we each brought something to the table, and that we continue as a good business. But I didn't want to do that anymore, I didn't want to have anything to do with it. And because of my travels and the fact that I'd met people overseas and already knew it, knew how to go there and come back from there and I didn't have to relearn something, that's what I thought I would do, so I started my own business.

It's interesting, when I was talking with some of the

Japanese, Well, how large is your business? And I said, "Well, it's just big enough to take care of the business that I have," which I thought was a pretty clever answer, because there's just Roseanne and me. That's my company. I don't think they would like that, to realize that it's just two of us. But that's the other part of me, as a former retail merchant. I've seen others that leave office and they get fancy downtown office space and over hire and get electronic equipment of all kinds. I'm pretty cheap about the whole thing. I pay low rent, and - you know, I'm not fascinated by fancy quarters.

But I've enjoyed it. It's been an interesting business. It's kind of frustrating, particularly the trade part of it. You just - those things that, I say, defy gravity. You've got all the balls in the air, but they don't come down. But it's interesting. I mean, I've dealt with a whole lot of different things.

CH Who are your clients or who have been your clients?

VA On the consulting side - there's two parts. One is consulting, one is trade. I use trade, and people think that's import-export, so I picked the wrong word. Broker is a better name for what I do. But on the trade side I've been on retainer with Fujitsu and Epson, Seiko-Epson. Recently Fujitsu has been really cutting back all over the place, and they've sent me a letter saying they wish to discontinue, but that's only been very recently. So for all the years up to two or three months ago it was those two.

I have done some work, gosh, all over the place. Products like electronic - what do they call it, emergency signals from airplanes, a manufacturer here in Oregon.

Vacuum delivery of babies. Well, I have to go through the - there's some property that Knute Cavally[?] had, the Disney[?]. That's a nice piece of property. They haven't sold it. Most recently, pantyhose - a friend of mine called me - some pantyhose from Czechoslovakia.

CH Pantyhose?

VA I'm not an expert on some of these things I'm talking about [laughs].

CH [laughing] I hope not.

VA Well, it was just a matter of finding somebody. You know, I knew somebody at Costco and - see, that's really the niche that I can fill. He calls; well, I know somebody at Costco. So that's how it all happens.

CH What about for governments that need a liaison to other governments or other businesses, say like the city of Portland or the state of Oregon or the county or whatever?

VA Well, I can do something like that, but if it constitutes lobbying, then that's not what I'm interested in. It's something that if I can do it - you know, I've suggested that I could serve very well as a consultant to government. When I say that, not necessarily this government. Japanese government, the Saudi government, Chinese government.

CH What's the difference between a consultant and a lobbyist?

VA A lobbyist actually goes somewhere and constantly makes - runs what I call the trapline. Go to Salem and get to meet all the folks, and if a bill comes up and goes in - he's constantly there.

In my consulting I actually did go back to Washington, D.C., for Fujitsu, and that was in countervailing trade where there was some dumping provisions and they thought they were going to charge extra duty, and Fujitsu was in the middle of all of that. I did go back, I did testify before the committee, but I really didn't have to. That was cosmetic. I actually took care of it all by telephone right here in Portland, because I knew people and I kept - I knew what the decision was before it was public and informed Fujitsu of it, and it happened to be favorable.

But, you know, I don't go back to Congress and walk the halls or - when something comes up, I may call somebody or several somebodies.

CH How much time do you feel you put in on your business a week, do you know?

VA Well, in terms of business - I was going to mention when we were talking about the volunteer effort - I came in and I told Roseanne, I said, "There is nothing on this week that has anything to do with business, and I'm busy. I'm going to this meeting, that meeting, this charity or that charity or whatever." The business part of it doesn't consume an awful lot of time if I measure it in sense of time. You don't have to spend a lot of time at it if you know what it is you want to do. Let's go back to pantyhose for just a second. You know, if I didn't know, then I would have to call somebody that maybe did know and then see if I

could get an introduction. You know, you go through that, so you spend a lot of time doing all of that before you make the contact. In my case, I didn't have to do all of that, I just made the contact. If somebody wants to do business in Japan, for example, they could spend three or four weeks there trying to find out who to talk to. If they would work with me, we'd get that done in maybe an hour or less.

So the volume of time is not that significant, but that's because I've built my business on political contacts that I've been able to make, not just as a governor, as a retail merchant, as someone that's been involved in the community for a long period of time.

CH Does it ever connect with the rug business at all at any place?

VA No.

CH So it's just pure coincidence that you happen to be above where the rug company is?

VA Well, actually, more than coincidence, because my brothers and I own this building [laughs].

CH Is that also connected to the Woodmark Building next door, or is that separate?

VA The building next door?

CH Yes.

VA No, that's a separate building. We own this building

right here.

CH Down to Rich's Cigar Store?

VA No, not that far. There's a florist in there that's not in our building.

CH So it's like a quarter of a block on the northeast corner of - this is Park, isn't it?

VA Yes, Park and Washington Street. Southwest corner, we're on the southwest corner.

CH But you're on the northeast corner of this block, aren't you?

VA Oh, the northeast corner of the block, yes, but the building is on the southwest corner of the block itself.

CH Maybe you could tell me a little bit about some of the travels that you've done on behalf of groups and concerns and then also personal travels that you might have done since leaving office.

VA I did quite a bit of travel to Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, and to - well, quite a bit to those three places and Hong Kong, and a couple of trips to the Middle East. But I finally got to point, because it's pretty expensive to do all of that - of course, I knew people and I was friendly enough to be a little more frank than normal, but I can recall, I think the last trips I said to them, "You know, I can't keep coming here just to see my friends. I've got to

do some business."

It's interesting. One would think, okay, he's governor, he's been known as a governor in, say, the Far East, and so it's easy. You know, they're going to give him something just because he's formerly a big shot, and that's not true at all. Actually, it took me a while to realize it, but, you know, a former governor, which is a very distinguished post in their eyes, shouldn't be out groveling for money. You ought to have a surrogate out there groveling for you. You just stand above the crowd. Well [laughs] - so basically, for a historical note, it just doesn't happen. You see things like that in Washington, D.C. They leave - you know Johnson leaves chief of staff, and the next thing you know he's - I heard he was getting forty thousand a month from some company. A month. And they go on boards and all the rest of that stuff.

You know, I thought, I'm young enough, I've run the biggest business in the state, I could be on a board. Well, I'm on Reidel board, but I've known Art Reidel for a long time, and, of course, I know something about environmental work. And I'm on [unclear] board, but that relates to the Middle East.

CH Have you gone back to the Middle East, particularly for your - for pleasure or business or both?

VA I'm trying for business, and then I'd slip over to Syria in the sense of going to my home again. I've visited, as I mentioned before, President Assad each visit I've gone.

CH Since you've left office?

VA Well, I met him twice as governor and once since I left governor.

CH Were you received any differently after you were...?

VA No. They're pretty proud of what a Syrian has done.

But it's not as easy, you know, for a former governor as one would think it would be easy. The position that you - people get kind of warped by the national picture that they get exposed to quite a bit, so they just overlay that into the governor, the former governor. Like, for example, while I was governor I had a staff, I had a mansion, I had all those things. And as, of course, you know, and I've said on the tape, I had nothing. I rented from the state, we brought our own furniture down, our own silver down, our own dishes down, and Dolores did the cooking. But that's not the perception that they have. They have a perception that once you leave office, everybody is ready to give you money, and you've got all kinds of perks, and you don't have anything like that. Nothing. When it's over, it's over.

So it might be an interesting perspective that I have to work at what I want to do, and it doesn't come easy. It doesn't come any easier for me than it does anybody else.

CH Do you do anymore fishing now?

VA No - well, more, yes, than when I was governor, but still not as much as I'd like. And golfing, I'd like to do that; not as much as I would like, either. But I guess it's just - it's my fault, much of it. I worked all my life, and it's very hard for me to say, Oh, I'm going to take off this afternoon, or, I won't come down today. I can't get quite

that frivolous about it. And, yet, I can do whatever I want. I'm my own boss. Whenever I have a meeting, I'm the only one there.

CH Do you feel driven?

VA No, I don't. I don't, really. It's just my personal makeup doesn't allow me - I just had an invitation to play golf at what they call the Capitol Club, which is the lobbyists down in Salem. They have a golf tournament. So Al Thompson, who is Jerry Thompson's[?] husband, called and said, "Do you want to play again?" I'm looking at the calendar. That's next week. Monday I'm going to be at Kanne-ta and Warm Springs with Fuji Television, the president of Fuji Television. Tuesday I'm going to play golf with him. And Wednesday - what's on Wednesday? But I've got something on Wednesday. It's going to keep me out of the office quite a bit. Thursday, which is the day he wanted me to play, is wide open. Nothing. But then Friday I'm going out to play golf at the new golf course built by some Japanese out by Gresham. And this has been long-standing. I say that to you. Maybe I will - probably I will - because I'm going to have a grandchild also next Friday.

CH You are? Really? Who is this, Suzette?

VA Suzanne.

So I'm looking at it. Now, there's no reason in the world why I can't go golfing down in Salem Thursday. It's wide open. But I'm saying, you know, I'm going to be gone a good chunk of the week. I shouldn't really do this. So I said no. It's just that - it's not unlike when I was

governor that, I told you earlier, I'd go overseas, and they'd ask me to play golf or do something, and I said, "No. I'm here as a governor. I'm going to work while I'm here." And that's just my nature. So I can't blame anybody. I mean, I'm not crying about it, I'm not blaming anything, it's just sort of the nature of who I am.

CH Can you relax, though?

VA Oh, yeah. I relax, and I sleep each night. I don't carry any burdens, I don't lay awake at night and think about things.

CH How do you relax?

VA I don't know.

CH Look at TV?

VA Oh, yes, I watch TV, and I like the quiz shows. I don't go for the heavy stuff on television. I'll watch, you know, "Jeopardy" and "Wheel of Fortune," and, of course, I watch the news.

CH Which news do you watch?

VA Channel 6.

CH That's CBS.

VA That's CBS. I watch that, Dan Rather. A lot of Republicans don't like him, but I think he's real good.

CH What about McNeil Lehrer?

VA I don't watch that.

CH Why not?

VA I don't know. It just doesn't interest me. I mean I get enough of that sort of stuff. I've had all that I want. And then, if there's nothing I do like, like Monday nights, that's "Evening Shade" and "Major Dad," and I do like "Murphy Brown."

CH Do you like "Murphy Brown?"

VA Oh, I think "Murphy Brown" is great. I think it's wonderful.

CH [laughing] Are you really a Republican, after all the comments by Dan Quayle?

VA Well, he deserves it. He really does. I just can't imagine why he'd pick on "Murphy Brown," but I think we covered that.

CH Yes, we did.

VA Why he picks on "Murphy Brown," I don't understand. But, then, if there's something and I'm still awake, I'll switch over to the Discovery Channel. There's some great stuff on there. Just the other night they were talking about how the world was made and how plates shifted and - I like it. So I'll watch that. But I've long since skipped

all this heavy stuff. They start getting into mothers that are abused and children are this, and all the rest. I don't watch it. It's not that I'm not sympathetic, I just - that's heavy stuff, and I don't need it anymore. So light - when you say TV, yes, I watch it, but it's got to be light.

Incidentally, I am a real Republican because I don't watch Roseanne [laughs].

CH "Murphy Brown" is as far as...

VA "Murphy Brown" I like.

CH What about your family? Tom...

[End of Tape 60, Side 2]