

Tape 18, Side 1

CH This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland. The interviewer, for the Oregon Historical Society, is Clark Hansen. The date is January 25, 1993, and this is Tape 18, Side 1.

So when you called up Bob Ingalls again, you - just to get the last line of that, because it might not have been on the last tape.

VA Oh. I called Bob, and I said, "This question you asked me, 'Was it worth it,' the answer is yes, it was worth it." It was a grand experience, really, traveling Oregon, meeting people. And you don't run to lose, but it was a worthwhile experience. The other thing is that I had seen other candidates lose, and they were devastated. I wasn't devastated. I was tired, but I said to myself, and I really believed it, that I know that I was where Oregonians were. Now I've traveled the state and talked to them, and I knew that I was where they were. They just didn't know it yet. I hadn't done a good enough job of portraying it. But I was very comfortable, even in my loss. I do believe that - and, again, this system of government, this is a representative form, and the people just didn't want a Vic Atiyeh at that point in time, for whatever reason. Okay, fine. I'll go back to the rug business. But I just felt very comfortable that I was not out of step with Oregonians. So that was my comfort. I finally adjusted, got used to not being up early and late and, you know, all the things you go through. It took a while to get - you get sort of disoriented, and it was kind of hard to get back into the routine of being in the rug business and going to work and selling rugs and things of that kind. It took a while to adjust back again.

CH Was that hard on your business?

VA No, I don't think so. There was - oh, that's an interesting question because, you know, a lot of people stay out of politics because they say, well, people - you know, I don't want them to know whether I'm a Republican or Democrat or I'm supporting anybody because it's going to be bad for business. I suppose it may be a little bit snobbish, but I said to myself, you know, if people are going to decide whether they're going to buy our rugs or not dependent on what position I take in public life, I'd just as soon not have them as a customer. But no, I don't think it hurt the business. The name was out there, and I didn't do injustice to the name, and...

CH No, I'm thinking more, not in terms of your running for office, but the actual time you had to spend running for office and being away from the business that much. You had reflected earlier about the difficulties it was sometimes going down to the legislature, but what about spending basically a year running for the primary and the general election. That must have been quite a...

VA Well, it was tough on everybody that was left. And remember I told you in the legislature I'd come back and work Friday nights and Saturdays, and there wasn't anybody to work those Friday nights and Saturdays, so somebody else had to, and it was difficult in that sense. I do think that, back to what I said before, a lot of people came and bought rugs from us that - maybe people that I'd met and people that I knew, and they came and bought rugs, and so in a different sense it helped the business. I wasn't out there trying to get business for Atiyeh Brothers, but I don't think it hurt that much, and, certainly, it helped when I came back and could deal with my own customers, follow-up

my own leads, work my Friday nights and Saturdays. I don't know as if there - well, Governor Meier was a retailer, but he was a big guy. I don't know if there ever has been a small-businessman elected as a governor. I haven't gone back to look at it, but that's pretty unique, to have a small-businessman be elected governor of the state of Oregon. Anyway, that wraps up my two points.

CH Okay. Well, let's move on, then, to the 1975 session of the legislature, and that was the fifty-eighth assembly. It ran from January 13 to June 14, and the - I don't know whether actually the Republicans gained or not. I noticed that there were twenty-two Republicans to thirty-eight Democrats in the house, and in the senate there were twenty-two Democrats, seven Republicans and one Independent.

VA Yeah. That was Chuck Hanlon, from Astoria.

CH What can you tell me about him?

VA Oh, he was a nice fellow. [He] ran as an Independent to serve, but he was considered more Democrat than Republican in terms of his functioning in the legislative body.

CH Do you know why he wanted to run as an Independent?

VA No, I don't. He may have said so, but I don't recall what it was all about.

CH What did they do in regards to caucuses and things like that? Is he just left out of all of that?

VA Yeah. It was kind of a waste of time, most caucuses. There

are key caucuses on special issues, but in the broadest sense - now is a good time to bring it out - in all the years that I was involved in the legislature, there were very, very few partisan votes; I mean genuinely partisan votes. Most often, if you look at the record, you see votes scattered all over the place. And so there were rare instances in which it was truly a division, choose up sides, these are who - how we're going to vote. The fact that there were seven - [laughing] we moved up from six to seven. I may have told you this, I can't remember, but I kind of kid, when I was elected in '73 when there were six of us, that I went on the fifth ballot, but I'm only kidding about that one. I had a tie tack made, incidentally - there are only six of them - and it's a little tie tack, and it's got a Roman numeral six, and each one of us has one of those. I mean, those are those six. Again, I don't remember, but let me recount it if I - again. Out of that six, Bob Smith became a congressman, Tony Meeker became state treasurer, I became governor, and Wally Carson became, now, chief justice of the supreme court. That's not too bad. The only remainders out of that group was Ken Jernstedt and George Wingard.

CH The house elected as speaker Phil Lang, and the minority leader was Roger Martin. What was your impression of their leadership? I know we'll be talking a little bit about both of them later on because they intersected with your own career in various ways.

VA Phil, I think, did a very good job. He was not a really very adept arm-twister. Jason Boe was quite adept.

CH He was elected senate president that term.

VA Yeah, and he was good at twisting arms. Phil was not.

Roger played the role of Republican leader very well. He did a very good job.

CH And, of course, you were elected minority leader then, too.

VA We call it Republican leader [laughter].

CH [Laughing] Do you take offense at the...?

VA No, we'd just as soon not say minority. We just call ourselves Republican leader. The other thing that we did was, we decided the thing to do is to give every one of us a title, so everyone in the caucus had a title. It would be a liaison this or vice chair or district - I've forgotten what titles we came up with, but they all had titles. We all sent press releases back and had been elected out of the Republican caucus as whatever title they had.

CH Was this humorously done, or was there some serious intent?

VA Well no, there wasn't - well, it didn't hurt at home, and we noticed there was a lot of titles of the Democrats, so we said heck, we'll just give ourselves titles. So we did that too.

CH You had a number of committee assignments. What were you asking for? I don't notice that you were on Revenue this time.

VA I was.

CH Oh yes, of course. Cook was the chair of that, and George Wingard, Phil Lang, and Jack Ripper, Frank Roberts, and Whipple?

VA Blaine Whipple?

CH Blaine Whipple. What was that session like in terms of either the composition of that committee or...?

VA Well, we had a fallout from Senate Bill 100, and there we adopted statutorily the goals. In '73 we said, Go out and - we passed it - go out and form statewide goals, which the commission did do, and then we adopted them formally, and that was quite important, and with some degree of argument.

CH What was Vern Cook like as a chair for that committee?

VA Oh, he was pretty good. He was a fairly typical chairman. He would make the agenda, and sometimes there might be some bills we'd like to have out he wouldn't bring out. I don't think it was that session, I think it was the session before, there was a bill that related - he was quite put out about that - a bill related to some tax exemption for fraternal organizations. The tax exemption was taken away, and it was a matter of restoring it. I won't get into it. There were some legitimate arguments. But Vern Cook didn't like it at all. He just didn't have - he wouldn't bring it up, he wouldn't - and there was votes on the committee to get it out. It might have been '75, I don't recall. But anyway, he wasn't at a meeting one day; he came in late. Was George Wingard the vice chair?

CH Yes.

VA Anyway, George brought it up. He's from the University of Oregon, or Eugene, that is. He brought it up, we passed it out of committee, and by the time Vern Cook had come, the bill was gone, and he was really put out. Remember I told you earlier committees usually didn't do these things. In fact, it's one of the few times we ever did it. He was quite put out about that.

And I don't recall if that was the session - I'm trying to remember the situation where Jason Boe actually took Vern Cook off as chairman during the course of the session.

CH Why would he have done that?

VA It had to do with the tax bill, and Vern was not doing what Jason Boe wanted done. Now is the time I wish my memory was better. That was quite rare. But whether it was that session or not, I don't recall.

CH So do all chairmen sit at the pleasure of the president?

VA Um-hmm.

CH Their appointments are in no way permanent during that session?

VA Once they're made, it's still not out of the president's hands. That which I just mentioned just hardly ever happens. That's the only time I recall it happened in my twenty years I was in the legislature. But he did it.

CH And how did - were they able to repair their relationship?

VA Oh, I don't think it was all that great to begin with. I don't think they ever - I'm sure they were never buddy-buddy; just positive of that. You get into a relationship - actually, I think I had better relations, much better with relations, with Jason, and respectful, that is, on both counts, his and mine, than Vern Cook ever enjoyed with - but he was a Democrat, and he'd been on tax committees, and he was the chair. It may have been a deal they cut at the time that he was - got going for

votes for - Jason, that is, for senate president. I don't know.

CH In this case where Jason Boe removed Cook, was there - how is that done? Is it just by...?

VA He just said he was going to do it and took him off.

CH He doesn't have a meeting or anything like that, he just does it?

VA He just does it.

CH And is it a temporary thing just for...?

VA Yeah, he put him back later on. He just wanted to get a bill out of committee, and Vern wasn't going to do it.

CH I imagine when you're dealing with a strong president like Jason Boe that people have to move carefully if they're going to - so they won't alienate him.

VA Yeah, but I think they all get pushed. You know, it just depends on how far you want to push. And in this case, this was important to Jason, and Vern was in the way, and he just pushed him too far, that is, Jason too far.

CH Was this the first time you were on a committee with Frank Roberts? Because he had been in the house, hadn't he?

VA Yeah. I think so.

CH What was your impression of him?



VA Well...

CH Had he been secretary or clerk - he had been clerk to the senate, hadn't he?

VA Yeah. He was reading clerk in the house. He's the one - actually, it was Frank that said - because they would do it by roll call and call your name and note the nays and yeas, and he said to me, oh, late one session, he said, "Vic, why don't you make this easier. Just tell me when you're going to vote yes."

I don't recall the discussion, but I do recall Frank - he was really a - what's the word I want to use. I can't think of it right now. But I do recall we were debating a bill in the Tax Committee, and he, with a great deal of self-righteousness, was talking about all these rich people in their yachts and fancy cars, or something like that. And I was really - I got quite upset about that. "Frank," I said, "name me one. I don't want a whole bunch, just give me one." This generic, you know, this taking a swipe at - and I guess it was because I understood that it was people that had money that created jobs. They're the ones that make capital investments. That's why I hear all of this stuff going on, we're going to tax the rich, and I kind of gag a little bit because I know what creates jobs, and it's people who are willing to put money up, to take risks to make capital investment. That's what creates jobs. Anyway, I can recall that statement and my angered reaction to it. Frank seemed - you know, made out to know a lot more than he really knows. A nice enough fellow, but...

CH You were also on the Environment and Energy Committee, and...

VA Was this the session - we went through - I'm trying to

recall the sessions when we went through bills that had a moratorium on nuclear power plants.

CH Well yes, and I can't remember whether we've already talked about that or not, but you did have a bill...

VA Is this the year I was chairman of the Trade and Economic Development Committee?

CH Yes.

VA Okay.

CH And in this case Ted Hallock was the chair of the Environment Committee, Environment and Energy.

VA Well, the year before, then, in '73, the Environment Committee, Don Willner was chair?

CH In '73?

VA Yeah, because I want to tell you a story.

CH In '73 - on Environment, did you say?

VA Yeah.

CH I have Hallock down as being chair then.

VA Well, was I on the Economic Development Committee? Was I chair - I think I was only chair once, though.

CH You were on the committee.

VA Okay. Well, whether I'm wrong about Don Willner being chair, we had a bill on a moratorium in nuclear power plants, and I can recall that as being the most tense, most tedious, longest - I used the word tense - intense of any bill that I've been involved with, ~~and~~ I had no real feelings about nuclear power plants one way or the other. In other words, I had no prejudgment in regard to it. We listened at great length to degreed experts on both sides, Ph.D. doctors on both sides with the whole - you know, contradictory. I listened very carefully. The strong feelings was not as strong as later on, but, you know, generally anti nuke. I came out of this whole thing after that not really being that concerned about nuclear power plants to produce power, not concerned about the transportation of the waste - and it would eventually be transported to go to a depository somewhere, which it hasn't been even yet today - I was concerned about the long life of the rods that were being stored. Anyway, I voted against a moratorium. As a matter of fact, the committee did too. It didn't get out of committee. But these were long, continuous hearings on this subject. And we had a lot of, I use the word, organic people there, which really weren't my kind of folks, and they were there and testifying on all the horrors and all the rest. Anyway, that was in '73. So in '75 - and I think that's the right sequence. I want to get back to the '75 session; that's why I asked you the question - the bill was in again - yes, Ted Hallock was the chairman - but this time it had a subsequent referral to the Trade and Economic Development Committee, of which I was chair. So I said to myself, okay, when that bill comes to me, I'll hold a hearing on it - I'd already gone through it. I was sitting on the Environment Committee now the second session around. It didn't get quite the intensity that the - two years before because it had a subsequent referral to my committee. I called a meeting for eight o'clock in the morning.

CH Why did this go to your committee, again, and not to Hallock?

VA It did go to Ted Hallock's committee, but it had a subsequent referral. They passed it out, and it goes to my committee. That's not unknown.

CH Why would that be? Why wouldn't it just go directly to the floor?

VA Because the president - that's the way the president referred the bill. He referred it to the Environment and Land-use Committee with subsequent to Trade and Economic Development.

CH And why did he route it that way?

VA Probably to put it to sleep.

CH Probably or definitely?

VA Well, as it turned out, it was definitely [laughter].

So I said to myself, after watching these organic people in the afternoon, I'm going to take care of them. I'm going to have a meeting at eight o'clock in the morning. Now, these folks don't get up at eight o'clock in the morning [laughter]. Anyway, we had a very nice, very thoughtful discussion on a moratorium in nuclear power plants, and it was tabled.

CH Were people upset with that process?

VA I don't think so. They probably figured, well, Vic's got it. It isn't going to go anywhere.

But, you know, again I have to tell you this. It sounds

awful cynical, but I gave it very, very careful thought, not prejudging, and during the course of all of this, with these great minds on both sides of this issue - and I've always said to myself that's where lobbyists, incidentally, are good. You have Associated Oregon Industry on one side of the issue and AFL-CIO on the other side of the issue, and you know they're both not right, so maybe the answer is somewhere in the middle there, and so that's the value. The same thing, I listened and I listened. I consciously, very strongly listened to what was going on, and then finally, after all of that, came to a conclusion. So the whole matter was, you know, why are we spending so much time on all of this. I'm talking just about myself. You know, I listened to it carefully, and I finally came to a decision, and there was no prejudgment; none whatsoever. And during the course of all these tense and tedious hearings, I finally made up my mind about it. So it was, why are we doing all over again. It's just a waste of everybody's time. It was, actually, not as tense this next session. They'd really kind of shot their bolt, if you will, on that in '73. We went through it, but more pro forma, and in my committee it was even more pro forma, so there was just no sense in revisiting that whole thing. You went through it once. Which is an interesting thing: When the legislature takes up an issue that's very controversial, and they make - and it goes to the floor and the decision is made one way or another, they really don't want to face that issue again. They finally made the hard decision, they voted whatever it is they're going to vote for, and they really don't want to face it again.

CH In following sessions?

VA Well, following session okay, but that same session. They just don't want to go through that anymore. They've done it, they finished it, they concluded it, and it's done. Where you

really have to - to cascade back to the '65 session, because I - remember we talked about the three-way workers' comp bill. I don't recall - maybe we did talk about it, that - yes, I think so - that Don Willner was carrying the minority report - yeah, I do recall now, we did covered - and I carried the majority report and just the two of us spoke. Yeah, I remember we covered that. But they just - you know, once that body goes through it once, the chances of bringing it up again are just very slim. They just don't want to do that anymore. They've done it.

CH Even if it's revisited in another manner from another direction?

VA They just don't want to. It's very hard to come back at you again.

CH Is that also true from session to session?

VA Yeah. That's just a normal - that's why I bring it up. Regardless of which session you're talking about, they just - let's go way back when we had the timber tax bill in my very early session, and the bill failed, and it was highly lobbied. The idea of pulling the bill back to committee and making some changes and bringing it back again, which, of course, you can do, just wasn't going to work. They'd gone through it, they'd lived it, they'd been lobbied, they made their decision, and they just don't want to go through that again.

CH But when I was referring from session to session, I mean from - the same issue brought, say like on nuclear moratoriums, brought from the '73 session to the '75 session.

VA No, between sessions, no. I mean, if there's an interceding

- no, the subject obviously comes up again. As a matter of fact, most bills are repeats of bills that had been in before. No, that's not what I mean. I mean the same session.

CH You were also on Per Diem again, and the Legislative Administration Joint Committee. What does that handle? You were on there with Keith Burbidge - is it Keith Burbidge?

VA Um-hmm.

CH And Wally Carson, Heard, Ripper, and Boe.

VA Those are, again, just perfunctory kind of committees. The Per Diem, all they do is function on the very first day of the session, and that's it, that's the end of it. There are no more meetings. The Legislative Administration - to be honest with you, I don't remember much of anything about that. Those weren't what you'd call substantive committees.

CH Well, you had a number of bills that you sponsored in that committee. One was on land use, and it was left in committee. It was Senate Bill 346. And, then, there was another one at the request of the secretary of state regarding employees of the secretary of state, which was left in committee. Do you have recollection of those?

VA No.

CH And another one at the request of the secretary of state that the governor signed. There was also another one at the request of the Oregon Landowners Association regarding minor land boundary changes.

VA That's all those - I can't remember that specifically...

CH Is that from LCDC?

VA Yeah, but those are the kind that try to fit the shoe where it pinches really bad, and, although I can't recall that, that would have been one of those kinds of things.

CH There was another one for Goodwill Industries of Oregon regarding the purchase of property from the federal government, sheltered workshops, et cetera, which was left in committee. Why would the Goodwill Industry people come to you for...?

VA Well, I had worked with Goodwill, and particularly sheltered workshops, and it was a matter of spots that you begin to fund. I don't recall that particular bill.

CH There was another one for Goodwill regarding property control.

VA I don't remember the discussions, but they knew I was sympathetic to their cause in trying to make their life a little bit easier.

CH There was another one for the Oregon Association for Retarded Citizens regarding special education programs.

VA Yeah.

CH And actually quite a few during this session for the secretary of state. Did you have a particularly strong relationship with the secretary of state? This would have been - would this still have been Clay Myers?



VA Yeah.

CH I'm surprised, I guess, that, having defeated him in the primary unexpectedly, that he would then turn to you as being the vehicle for these bills.

VA Well, actually, we got along together pretty well. He was hurt badly personally...

[End of Tape 18, Side 1]