

VICTOR ATIYEH
August 25, 1993
Tape 56, Side 2

C.H.: 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 August 30th, 1993, and this is Tape 56, Side 2.

Well, we were sort of covering the last of your career as Governor, and I thought that maybe I'd go on from that point and sort of review a for of the people who you worked with in the legislature and people who were a part of Oregon's delegation.

V.A.: Okay.

C.H.: Mark Hatfield you've had a long relationship with and you've been fairly close to, from what you've said before. How does he stand now in terms of his career? I noticed in the paper the other day that he had just surpassed the longest period of any Senator in Oregon's history, and that was Charles ~~McNeary~~^{McNARY}, wasn't it?

V.A.: That's right, yeah. Maybe ~~McNeary~~^{McNARY} might have even been longer, but he ran for Vice President with - was it Wilkie? I think so.

Well, you know, my thought when I read that is that that's one of those things you just sort of get because you live long enough. And what Mark has done to me has been sort of the landmark thing - all the things he's done both for the nation as well as for Oregon; it's just an incredible thing.

C.H.: You entered the legislature when he entered his governorship, didn't you?

V.A.: Yeah, he was elected in 1958 as Governor, and in 1958 I was elected as a member of the House of Representatives. And at that point we got to know each other.

My admiration for him is just immense, and we've talked about that. I just have to - well, I can't cheer him enough in terms of what he's done, his personal character. There's been a few speed bumps, none of which I consider significant in terms of his service. I mean, they're not even a grain of sand on the beach, for me. He's really an outstanding public servant. And I think to myself he's devoted his whole life to public service. He has to be, and will always be remembered as really a great U.S. Senator from Oregon - not just from Oregon. Certainly the respect he has back in Congress is immense.

C.H.: Can you recall a specific either event or something that he has helped to create that stands out in your mind as being identified more with with him than anything else?

V.A.: No. Well, I think he would like to think, although I don't know this for certain, the great efforts he's done on behalf of the Health Sciences University, and that has been quite a signal thing. And obviously it's going to be very beneficial for human beings, with the research that's going on and the technical ability because Mark Hatfield helped establish those facilities.

But he's done so much; you know, which way do you turn? It's very hard. Which is his best, which one is - I don't - you know, each one was important. Recently the opening of the new locks; that was important for the commerce of the area.

It's hard to come up, there's so much of it that he's done on our behalf. Gosh, I don't know.

C.H.: One person we haven't talked about very much, if at all, was Gerry Frank. A lot of people referred to him as "Oregon's third Senator." Have you known Gerry Frank? I presume you have.

V.A.: Yes. Knew Gerry Frank when he was manager of the Salem Meier & Frank's, and even before that.

I think he served Mark well. Obviously anybody - including Mark, but anybody in public life, and you would include Gerry Frank in public life because of the high profile of Mark Hatfield, is going to get some barnacles, the term I would use. But no, I think he served Mark very well.

C.H.: He's not quite as active today as he used to be; is that right?

V.A.: No, he's actually retired out of that. I don't know if he's doing anything, to be honest with you. I saw him not too long ago. He's just living a normal human's life. He's still interested in books. He said he was going to have a new book out on New York. He goes to New York, loves that. But he's just doing whatever he wants to do now.

C.H.: You've talked a fair amount about Tom McCall and Bob Straub and Neil Goldschmidt, and you've talked a little bit about Barbara Roberts, and particularly while you were Governor. And if you were to give her a report card today in terms of the first half of her term of governorship, how would you rate her?

V.A.: I don't think it would be unfair - I'll give you a quick description that I - people would ask me early on, and even after a while as Governor, "Well, what about Governor Roberts?"

And I'd say, "She's a very nice lady, way over her head."

And I don't think it's unfair in terms of whatever history this is going to be to say that. When I say that in terms of being a governor and all that's required of being a governor, I don't think she really matches up. And I want to be very cautious because she is a nice person, as a person. But you know, when I say what I do, it has nothing to do with the person themselves.

I think we talked about Bob Straub. Bob Straub was a very good State Treasurer. When he became Governor, he'd reached a point where he wasn't able to match up to that. Nothing wrong with it; it just happens to be that's the way it was, in terms of his knowledge and experience and whatever else.

Governor Roberts - and I must tell you I'm somewhat surprised because she'd been in the legislature, you'd think she'd get the hang of some of this - really is not able to deal with the problems that needed to be dealt with in a way that it should have been dealt with. I think I mirror, obviously, a lot of Oregonians, some of which are more superficial looking at it because her favorability is way down, and so a lot of Oregonians, for whatever reason, don't think that she's doing a very good job.

Mine is more a judgment based upon my years as a legislator as well as eight years as Governor. So I think she's - I like her. I think she's a nice woman. She got to a point where she just wasn't able to do the job that was necessary to be done.

She could have some way bridged that by having people working with her that had some experience and knowledge and good judgment. Well, she wasn't able to do that, either. And so where she could have and should have been able to call on people for some assistance, she really didn't have the right kind of people to do that.

So I'm only hesitant that I don't want to be cruel about this. I do think she's a nice lady. I just don't think that she is matching up to the job that's required.

C.H.: Do you feel sympathetic with some of the things that she's challenged with right now, particularly the tax situation that you were challenged with?

V.A.: Well, yeah, I can relate to that. It's just how you respond to it.

I was absolutely amazed. I went down to - they invite governors at the opening of each session, so I went down. I got there early and went down to the coffee shop, saw some of my friends down there, chit-chatted. Still had some time, and so anyway, I was ahead of time, and I walked into the Governor's office. I thought, "Well, if she's available, I'll just chat with her a little bit," understanding that, you know, myself I would be preparing the speech to the legislature.

I asked if she had a few minutes; sure, she did. And we went in and chatted for a little bit, and I'm thinking about Ballot 5 and telling her my thoughts on the subject and that Oregonians really need to be satisfied that we do have a problem before they can - before they'll try to help solve it. And we chatted about that for a little bit.

So then the session starts, and then it comes time for her address. And she hardly even in passing mentioned Ballot 5. And I'm saying, you know, this is the major issue. This is the big deal. And she's addressing the legislature, and she didn't say anything about it.

And there were lost opportunities. I think back on her first state of the state, she got great coverage. I never got coverage anything nearly approaching that. And so here's an opportunity to tell Oregonians, "Look, folks, we really do have a problem. Yeah, I know that you want to cut your property taxes; I don't disagree with you. I understand you think that there's a lot of inefficiency in state government. There's some, but not that much." Whatever the message is.

And this is her first state of the state. She's getting on television, radio, newspaper. I never got that kind of coverage. I'm not lamenting about it; I'm just saying that she had a great opportunity to talk to all Oregonians.

So what did she say? Well, she said she's going to clean out the attic, the boards and commissions. Now, I know enough about boards and commissions, most of which are self-financed. None of them amount to anything, a hill of beans, in terms of the problem we've got with Ballot Measure 5.

And she's going to move the General Services over to the Executive Department. And I'm saying to myself, "You give us a million dollar solution to a billion dollar problem."

I've said, it was a great political speech, but that's not what we're after. When we're in deep trouble, you've got to communicate with Oregonians and tell them we're in deep trouble. Tell them why you think so. So that was an opportunity lost.

Another opportunity lost when she called the legislature into special session without consulting them about, you know, "This is what I want; give it to me, and we'll go from there." Again, to highlight it. But then all of a sudden it gets pretty much foggy.

It's pretty much like the result of the last legislative session. If it had been very clear, we've got a problem, people passed Ballot Measure 5. They said, "Take some of your general fund and relieve property taxes. Now we've got this smaller bundle left, which means we're going to have to cut. Now let's cut." That's a clear message. But it would get all mixed up with the sales tax and the sales tax vote and, you know, all of a sudden the message is not clear anymore.

C.H.: Wasn't that her attempt to address the situation in terms of lost revenue?

V.A.: Well, but she didn't propose it. This all came from the legislature. She didn't say anything in her message to the legislature.

Larry Campbell had the only clear message to start with, and it got diluted as the session moved along, and he said, "We're

going to cut." He's the only one that really had a plan. Whether you liked it or not, he was the only one that had a plan.

What I'm now worried about, and I think I may have stated it, is that the sales tax will go out, the people will defeat it, and we're going to have to wait another two, three years before we even try to deal with it. In the meantime we're going to have to suffer with Ballot Measure 5.

I said repeatedly, because I've said it in my speeches as Governor, it isn't that I don't believe people wanted property tax relief, and we tried to find a solution for it. That wasn't the one. That's my only - you know, it isn't that we shouldn't have it, but that just wasn't the one to have.

Even if you go back further with Goldschmidt, and he provided a measure where the schools would all get a tax base. He said, "That's part of it. Fine, that's part of it. Let's go on to the next part." They never went on to the next part.

And so it was just a compound of major errors that put us in the shape we are today. And it's too bad, and I think Oregon schools have to suffer. I think people that come to the State for services have to suffer. Needlessly. I say needlessly, it's laws. It's in the constitution, Ballot Measure 5 is there. But we shouldn't have had to have gone through all that torment.

So I'm just saying there were lost opportunities that the Governor had that she could have communicated with Oregonians. She didn't necessarily have to come up with answers. She just had to describe the problem. And they wouldn't have bought it the first time, and I understand that. But you know, if a credible voice said, "Look, I'm responsible, I'm in charge of the State, this is the way I see it, and we've got to do something about it." Well, those are the opportunities that she had.

You know, she got all mixed up with this electronic conversation with Oregonians that was kind of a cute idea; it even got national attention. The new way of communicating. That's a lot of baloney, certainly as far as the state of Oregon is concerned. It doesn't take you very long to communicate with Oregonians. Go out on the road. You can communicate with Oregonians real easily.

And then she says, when she called the special session [indiscernible]. And I said, "Who are you talking to? Nobody I'm talking to says this is what we want." And so you know, she was just - she was getting the wrong signals. Maybe she made the decisions based upon the signals she was getting, but she was getting the wrong signals.

C.H.: We haven't had very many other senators in recent years because Bob Packwood and Mark Hatfield have been in there for such a long time, and we've talked really about most of our senators, but going back to the Newbergers and Wayne Morse, and looking also at Mark Hatfield and Bob Packwood, how would you compare them, or how do they stand in history as far as you see them?

V.A.: Well, Wayne Morse will stand tall. He was the one that - of all the things they remember is his single stance on Vietnam. Served a long time, was known for his intellect.

I didn't know him very well. Didn't know Richard Newberger very well. I got to know Maureen, but that's afterward.

But I do remember telling someone one time that I've never heard Wayne Morse speak. And they said, "You haven't?"

"No."

"Well, he's going to be speaking somewhere; it's \$25."

I said, "I wouldn't pay \$25 to hear myself speak, let alone Wayne Morse." That was my response at that time.

I of course have heard him speak. He was running in '74 for the U.S. Senate, and that was during the campaign. He was very

enamored with your senior senator." Gosh, that was almost every word that came out.

But he'll be remembered as a major U.S. Senator from Oregon. I don't think he is at the same level as Mark Hatfield, in terms of U.S. Senator and productive results for the state - and the nation.

Briefly back to Mark Hatfield, I think I was there when Mark Hatfield made up his mind about Vietnam, and he was Governor at the time. Caught the tail end of a conversation in which apparently at that point I got a sense that he'd finally concluded about Vietnam and his thoughts against it, against Vietnam, which he carried over as a U.S. Senator. I don't know that for sure. I just have that memory and that sense. It was almost in passing.

C.H.: Can you remember the situation around that?

V.A.: All I remember is - I remember because it stuck in my head, I was going into his working office for whatever reason, I don't recall, and he was ending a conversation with - whether it was Travis Cross or Warren [indiscernible], I'm not sure. It was that kind of a deal. And I just said to myself - you knew, I heard this, and I said, "Gosh, I think Mark has made up his mind about Vietnam."

C.H.: And how did you feel about his ...

V.A.: Vietnam - my own personal views on Vietnam?

C.H.: At the time. I mean, we've talked a little bit about your Vietnam views later on, but this was obviously much earlier because he was still Governor.

V.A.: Well, first of all, I wasn't that much involved, but I was never one that believed the domino theory. I just didn't believe it. Which was the theory in Vietnam: "We've got to stop them here."

At that point in time, that was not a role that I had to play, it was not a role that I had to make any decisions, it was just my

own personal views on the subject. I thought Vietnam ought to stop, but the only ones that thought that they were the ones that had something to do with stopping Vietnam were the ones that were out demonstrating. And I said, "You don't have to be out demonstrating to be against it."

I wrote one of these notes, "the war was wrong but the soldiers weren't!" You know, we took it out on the soldiers, just because the war was wrong.

I still remember a nice young man I know the family; he went over and got killed in Vietnam. It's a tragic moment in our history. But the tragedy really was the fact that Americans took it out on the soldiers. That's terrible. It's an awful thing to do.

At the same time, very angry with those that went to Canada. You know, they're willing for somebody else to die, but they don't want to - or get injured, or whatever. And then the fact that there was an amnesty. I said, "God, they're getting rewarded for doing something." That's not right. When all these other soldiers went and suffered, and many died, why should we reward somebody that draft dodged?"

Anyway, that's my thoughts.

C.H.: Bob Packwood, of course, has been in almost as long as Mark Hatfield, still the junior Senator. Will he always be the junior Senator in relationship to Mark Hatfield?

V.A.: Oh, yeah. He of course will have that stain, whatever the result's going to be.

It was interesting that I've - of course, I've been with Bob in social kinds of event, Dorchester kinds of things. You know, I would never have said he had a drinking problems. I mean, there was nothing to me that ever indicated to me that he had a drinking problem.

C.H.: The stain you're referring to is what?

V.A.: This matter of sexual harassment.

C.H.: Right.

V.A.: I've never seen that kind of thing, either. But then, you know, I'm not with him all the time. But you know, all of these things that are now surfacing, and ladies are saying that he was sexually harassing them. But you know, it's interesting how you know someone, you are with someone, and then you just don't really know some of the things that are involved in their life.

Although I'm not going to make a judgment. I'm kind of unhappy with Betty Roberts, who I appointed as a Supreme Court Judge, and I'm only unhappy in the sense that she has both a legal and judicial, clear up^{to} the Supreme Court, background, and yet she is saying you're guilty until proven innocent. So I'm surprised at Betty Roberts on that count. There may be a suggestion that she has a responsibility for greater restraint than some of the others who have freedom to do whatever they wish.

C.H.: Of course, she's retired from the Supreme Court.

V.A.: I understand. But that doesn't mean that all of a sudden you can change your views that you're guilty until proven innocent. You're supposed to be innocent until proven guilty.

Well, we'll have to wait for that scenario to play itself out. And I'll be darned if I know what they're going to finally decide. You know, I thought to myself - and I didn't realize some of the nuances, but they could take away his seniority. That would be a blow to him.

C.H.: And to the state?

V.A.: Well, I'm not sure, in terms of the state. To whatever degree he can work with his fellow Senators, whether he has seniority or not. Seniority really plays itself out in committee as to where you sit in the chair and who gets to speak first.

C.H.: But that still could have an effect in terms of how much - well, right now he's minority head of finance.

V.A.: Yeah, they could take the committees away, I think. They could take his seniority away. Those are all possibilities.

I don't think they're going to kick him out, but you know, I don't know that. So it's hard to tell.

C.H.: At what point - and maybe this is more of a hypothetical question than specifically about Bob Packwood - but at what point does a politician decide that he's more of a liability to the people that he's representing or trying to represent than an asset?

V.A.: Well, I'm not sure a politician would ever arrive at that point. You know, I paused for a minute. You know, it would take quite a person to say, "I'm a liability, ergo I think I should resign." I don't think that's a part of the politician's makeup.

You know, I'm not prepared to say, for example, after we talked about Governor Roberts, with a favorability rating of less than 20 percent - you know, well, maybe it's time she should resign. I wouldn't even suggest that. You know, that doesn't lead to that. We're not talking about extracurricular stuff. We're talking even governmental stuff.

C.H.: Well, even in a case like that, so many people have signed recall petitions for her - what, aren't they on their third try now?

V.A.: Yeah, I wouldn't sign it. You heard me say what I think about her performance as Governor, but still I wouldn't sign a recall petition.

You know, to ever suggest that Bob would say, "Gee, I'm going to be a liability, ergo I'm going to leave," I just don't think he would ever do that.

C.H.: But is there a point where someone should?

V.A.: Oh, I think yes. And when I say that to you, I'm thinking about Peg Jolan now, convicted of a felony. She should have resigned on her own. She finally did, but I mean, it took a long time to get there.

C.H.: Is waiting for the next election always the best recourse in a situation like this?

V.A.: That would be the normal reaction. In fact, it was Peg Jolan's reaction. "Well, let the people decide in the next election." That would probably be the number one reaction that would take place. "Well, I'm just going to stay here. I think I'm doing a good job, and we'll let the people decide, come next time around."

That would be their first reaction, not a reaction, "Gee whiz, I've lost my ability to assist; I ought to resign."

But when you ask are three times, yeah, I think Peg Jolan should have resigned. I surely don't think the legislature - when I say that, of course, it was the Senate - they didn't do themselves any good by not only giving her a committee but giving her chairmanship. Getting rewarded for being a felon. You know, that doesn't do the cause of public service any good.

C.H.: Going back to Bob Packwood, what would you say his biggest contribution to the state has been for all these years? Or do you feel that there have been ...

V.A.: Well, I'm sure there has been, and if I had some time to think about it I'd probably come up with some things. It doesn't come as quickly to mind as the things that Mark Hatfield has done, but I'm sure that Bob has done some important things for Oregon.

[End of Tape 56, Side 2]