

# opinion

## What Atiyeh's travel will cost and do

Take my word for it: As a longtime critic of Vic Atiyeh's governorship, it's been lonely at times.

Suddenly, though, it seems I'm gaining company in recognizing Atiyeh as little more than a ribbon-cutter.

A Portland columnist recently joked about building a museum in honor of Vic, noting that it wouldn't have to be very large to showcase his accomplishments. And a Portland commentator, whose knowledge of how state government works probably comes from delivering an occasional speech to the Salem chapter of the Knife and Fork Club, was beating up on Vic pretty good just the other morning.

What's got the natives stirred, of course, is all the junketing Vic's doing these days — taking one merry trip after another while the state's economy continues to wallow at the bottom of a trough and tax relief rebellions threaten to tear apart the fabric of state and local government.

Right now Atiyeh is in the middle of a month-long trip to his ancestral homeland, Syria, with stops in Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia along the way.

Just before Vic's scenic tour of the Middle East, he was in Washington, D.C., for a week to attend a national meeting of governors. That trek was preceded by a week of golfing and surf in Hawaii.



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Supposedly, Vic was to return April 17 to take care of business until September, when he has yet another junket penciled in — this one to China, Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong.

But on Wednesday, the Department of Economic Development announced that Vic will now expand his globe-trotting by taking a two-week trip to Taiwan and Korea.

Still unanswered about all this globe-trotting are a couple of pertinent questions: What's in it for the long-suffering taxpayers of Oregon, and how much is it costing us?

As to the first question, I doubt we'll ever get a straight answer. It's hard for any rational person to imagine that a traveling circus of ragtag politicians is really going to result in more business for Oregon.

My best guess is that Atiyeh is using these trips in a vain effort to

locate those two mystery companies he promised Oregonians in his 1982 re-election campaign.

Remember? The firms were going to come in and provide plenty of jobs as soon as folks returned Vic to the Capitol, but would never show up if that "dangerous" Democratic fellow got elected.

To help spot these skittish manufacturers, Vic has taken press aide Denny Miles and a state police bodyguard along on his Middle East jaunt.

Why Atiyeh needs a bodyguard in the Middle East is a mystery in itself. The further a governor gets from his state, the less the chance there is of anyone knowing him, much less caring who he is.

Meanwhile, State Police Superintendent John Williams has assigned another state cop as bodyguard to the acting governess, Geraldine Thompson. Most folks wouldn't recognize her except for the Inspector Clouseau type trailing her around the Capitol.

As for who is paying for Vic's trips, you can bank on this: One way or the other, we are — either directly as state taxpayers or indirectly as consumers of the goods and services of the businesses who have people earning tax writeoffs while tagging along with the gov.

Atiyeh's staff claims that on the current trek, some of the expenses

are being paid by the Jewish National Fund and the governor's fellow-traveler businessmen. Before departing for the Middle East, press flack Miles said some of the costs would be paid by the state, but he wouldn't know how much "until all the bills come back."

Short of hard evidence of a massive flow of business and job opportunities into Oregon from all the spots the governor is visiting these days, it would appear that what the governor of Oregon is doing is taking early retirement — a retirement highlighted by global travel at public expense.

There's an irony to Atiyeh's junketing.

Privately, Atiyeh acts very sensitive about criticism of his leadership, particularly comments about the leadership he's failed to show. But for a politician who seems concerned about the historical view of his administration, he seems a bit confused about what to do about it.

Meanwhile, one thing's for sure. Posing in front of a display of Oregon-grown pears isn't going to spruce up the leadership image, Vic, no matter where the pears are stacked — Cairo, Egypt, or Hood River, Ore.

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