

Tape 18, Side 2

CH 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 February 1, 1993, and this is Tape 18, Side 2.

Well, you just got back from a trip, didn't you, from St. Louis to the Republican National...

VA Yeah. My first meeting as a national committeeman.

CH Your first meeting as a national committeeman?

VA Yeah. I've been at a lot of meetings and political meetings, but this is the first as a national committeeman. It was interesting. We'd gone through a whole cycle of maybe - well, one in twelve years. We had a Republican president, and the president was really picking the chairman of the national committee. Currently we don't have a Republican president, so everybody was kind of excited about the fact we were going to be able to pick - we're going to pick one, and it was kind of interesting. There were five candidates: Spencer Abraham, who had been chairman of the state party of Michigan, and, then, most recently I guess you'd call him executive of the - let's see, what is it called. The National Republican Congressional Committee, raising money for congressional races and that sort of thing. Ashcroft, John Ashcroft, who just retired as governor of Missouri. Haley Barbur. He'd been pretty active. He's in a law firm, and he's done some work in Washington, D.C., and his home state of Mississippi. Craig Berkman, who, of course, is our Oregon state chairman and a businessman. And, then, Bo Callaway, who had been very prominent. He'd been a congressman, and he had run and lost, he - that's out of Georgia, and, then, I think he'd

been state chairman in Colorado and had been secretary of defense and that sort of thing. Anyway, we went through three ballots. The third ballot we elected Haley Barbur. Craig withdrew at the end of the second ballot because he really wasn't moving. As a matter of fact, he was moving, but he was moving down, not up. Both Ashcroft and Craig withdrew at the end of the second ballot. And, then, we elected Haley Barbur on the third ballot. And there's a title called co-chair, which is the women's side of it, and I really don't - they treat it more like vice chair, but they call it co-chair, and there were four candidates for that. So we were pretty lucky that we had some good people who wanted to have those offices. It was interesting.

I have to admit I didn't get nearly as atwitter as a lot of others, because once you've been through these political things umpteen times, it isn't quite - nearly as exciting. It was interesting to me to watch the young people. The first time in, you know, they were working hard, staying up late, and doing all the things I used to do. But, you know, it's a different experience. I enjoyed it. I nominated Craig, and, then, by our own rules, that person who nominates, if the candidate wants to withdraw, the nominator does the withdrawing, not the candidate. So I had the joy of nominating and the unpleasant task of announcing his withdrawal.

CH Were you supporting him, as well?

VA I supported Craig on a couple of ballots, but I really did believe that, in terms of what I was looking for, really a good technician, that there were some better candidates than that. And actually, Spencer Abraham was the one that I really liked best of all. Haley Barbur is really very good, so when you make a distinction between Spencer Abraham and Haley Barbur, it isn't that broad a difference.

CH Well, what is the activity like? I mean, what kinds of things are going on for...?

VA The chair?

CH No, among the candidates for the chair.

VA Oh gosh, it was something. They all had hospitality rooms; they all had sent out material, of course, before that.

Incidentally, I've got a lot of stuff I'll have you take if you - paper. We'll give it all to the Society.

They previously read - and they all had plans with all the delegates, and all, shaking hands when everybody was together, hospitality in the evening and coffee in the morning. They were campaigning.

CH Did Craig feel that he really had an opportunity to - Craig Berkman - to...?

VA Well, I think he knew how difficult it was, and the only thing I am sure he was thinking of is, if they get stuck at dead center, they may look for a compromise candidate, but even on the first ballot, he got the least number of votes. He got ten.

CH Out of how many?

VA Out of 165. And on the second ballot he got eight. So the dynamics was moving away from being a compromise candidate. I suggested to him he should have Plan A and B. A, of course, you continue to stay in the race and do the best you can. B, if it doesn't look like you're going to make it, then you figure out who you think will and throw your support to that person. He played that game very well. And in - I am now quoting him,

because I'm withdrawing his name, and he's saying, "And if I had a vote, I would vote for Haley Barbur." There was a cheer in the background. So he played the game very well.

CH What other rules do the national committeemen have in their...?

VA Well, it's very difficult to tell. You know, we deal with rules, but they're pretty well drafted, and they're kind of culminated at the national convention. I suppose ways of raising money. Certainly budget. Budget is always a program, and all of these candidates said that we need to get out of the Beltway and we need to build up the grass roots, and that's a - so if you're putting money into programs, then, okay, how is that working toward building state parties, county parties, work toward electing city council, county commission, state legislators, those kinds of things. That's grass roots, and that's the way it ought to happen instead of, really - you figure you're going to build a party from the top down. The only really way you're going to build it is from the bottom up. There is no really other way to do it. It's no different than a campaign. In a campaign, you know, the people see a lot of things. The debates, they see the candidates out talking, and they're quoted and all the rest of that. But - or maybe lawn signs or billboards or whatever. But campaigns are really won by hard work. Mailings; sorting out addresses; purging lists, you know, many people moved; getting phone numbers for a phone bank. There's just a whole lot of things that people don't see. We're going to get to it, but when I ran in '78, I figured that Bob Straub was governor, and, being the governor, he could raise money. My motivation was, I'll try to raise as much as he's going to raise, but I'll beat him with my volunteers. So, getting back to what I'm saying, it's grass roots, mechanics. Spencer Abraham knew

that extremely well. Haley Barbur knows it. Not quite as well, but he knows it needs to be done.

So, back to what you asked about National, I think we have to deal with a budget, and I know, having gone through building budgets as a governor, that programs convert to money. We don't say we're going to raise \$4 million and, then, now we're going to spend it. What you do is, you figure out what you want to do and see how much that adds up to, which may be the same \$4 million. So you really deal with programs. And now, because we have a new chair and we're running the show ourselves and we want to go grass roots, we'll be involved with budget, and who knows what else. I haven't been to any noncontroversial meetings so far.

CH Did they deal with issues at all?

VA Well, really, the answer is sort of yes and no. No in the sense that issues really become platform, and that's where they're formalized; however, we recognize that we've been pinned with a single issue, which is abortion, and it's not a partisan issue, and we shouldn't be pinned with that. So in terms of dealing with issues, I think that part of the program we're talking about and the money we're going to be spending is to make sure that the people of the United States understand what we are for and what we are against and not just zero in and concentrate on abortion. So to that extent, yes, we deal with issues, but not in a formal sense. The formal sense is a platform.

CH But in terms of other issues that are confronting the Republican party? I mean, is it involved at all with the platform that was drafted?

VA No. A platform is a platform, and you can't change it till four years from now, or less than four years now, but anyway, the

next time there's a national convention that's all written and is done.

CH Does that affect where the party stands during that four year period?

VA That all depends on who you are. Now, let me explain that. I learned - and I didn't know this - the right wing, the religious right wing, they worked really hard on the platform, and they certainly worked in terms of abortion and some other issues. I thought, well, okay, I've been on a platform committee, I understand all of that; however, their interpretation is a little different. They figure once a platform is written, that's now gospel and all Republicans should now get behind this platform, and if you don't, you're not really a Republican. Well, I didn't realize that. I thought they were sort of pragmatic like I am, but no, they're not at all.

CH Did they support the platform in times when it may not have agreed with their own...?

VA That's different. You'll find it interesting. I wanted to meet with the conservatives, and I had by then learned the idea that this is gospel, so I thought, well, I'd better go get a copy of our platform. You know, nobody reads platforms. Everybody works so hard and they put so much energy into getting something in the platform, and when it's all done - the press said, for example, the Republicans passed an abortion plank, and that's the only plank anybody talks about. I said, I'm going to get this thing, because these conservative folks believe it's all gospel, and I'm going to read through this platform, and I'm going to find something that I think they really don't like or probably would be against, and, then, when I meet with them, I'm going to

say, okay, you told me this. Do you believe in? Well, I did pop it on them, and I said, In there is a sales tax. Now, do you all believe that we ought to have a sales tax? Well, they all didn't think so. Well, how come it's gospel and you have to get behind this whole thing? Well, they did kind of rationalize it a little bit, but anyway, we have to back off. The Republican party really is a - the principles of the Republican party - I've said many, many times I don't shoehorn myself into the Republican party, I'm there because the broad philosophy of the Republican party is one that I believe in. So I'm not forcing myself into it; I happen to believe it. And in the broadest sense - I think I may have said this before - the Republicans are less willing to have government interference in our lives, and the Democrats are more willing, and that's the [inaudible]. Now you merge into thousands of concepts. But that's what we are. We're fiscal conservatives, we really believe in a strong family, but that's, you know - well, it becomes important in the sense that we have to be strong in order to make the nation strong, each one of us. So by and large, we believe in what I think most Americans believe in, but this has not been articulated, either through Bush's campaign this last time - and we keep getting hammered, you know, that we're the party of the rich, they're the party of - they meaning the Democrats - are the party of the common people, which is a lot of - well, I don't want to use that word on tape, but in my own personal experience, they don't deserve the image they have - again, I think I've said that - and we don't deserve the image we have. So, we've got an image, and we've got to change it.

CH Well, is there anything else about the construction of the national committee which - other areas that it might deal in or other aspects of it that are interesting or parts of it that we haven't talked about already?

VA Oh, I don't think so. It's just a structure - the Democrats have one, the Republicans have one - the structure within which you operate the party. You know, they do things like - I brought back with me - I really haven't read it - but quite a few pages, the title of which is "Promises, Promises," and this is Clinton promises. And they covered it pretty well. Okay, you can look at it and say, well, now, he promised this, but he's not doing it. So those are the kind of accumulated things. The national party can help with ideas on voter drives and computer work of a variety of kinds. That's, again, to help the state and county parties. So there's functioning, there's things to do. But no, these are just organizations designed to keep these parties healthy the best we can.

CH Did you enjoy the experience?

VA Yeah. Yeah, I did. It's different, it's interesting. I have enough hope that we'll be able to change some of the things that have been going on, and to that extent, I can't put that down. I hope that's not too blasé, but I've been to an awful lot of political meetings in my life, from our state conventions to county politics to national conventions, and, you know, you get a little more objective. I think that's a better word than anything else I could use. You get more objective about what's going on. It was fascinating to me to see young people there that this was their first time, and, you know, they were staying up late and they were all atwitter all the time. I suppose I remember those days, but I wasn't all atwitter, and I didn't - you know I didn't have a particular responsibility. I'd go visit these candidates - and I knew them all - howdy them, chat a little bit, if they had some hors d'oeuvres or soft drinks - of course, they had a hard drink too - and nibble a little here, a little there, and when I got tired, I just went to my room and

watched a little television and went to bed. I didn't have to go through all those gyrations that they went through. As a matter of fact, they had a meeting Saturday morning, and I didn't even attend that. I just got on a plane and came home.

So yeah, to the extent it's different. I think I might have tried to avoid it ~~but we~~ had a conservative, I mean a well-identified conservative, who was a national committeeman, along with a very well identified, even more conservative woman, and the then-national committeeman said, I don't want to do that anymore, and so a fellow that was even more conservative than the fellow that was in, he decided to run, and I said, ^{TO MYSELF} Now, wait, we can't have that. We've got to really kind of move things more to the center. And really the only one that could have beat him was me, and so I ran. I don't know how long I'm going to hang on. It's nothing I needed for my ego or that I coveted particularly, it's just that I want to keep my party more toward the center the best I know how.

CH Does the Oregon delegation stick together pretty much?

VA Well, they're all pretty new. Of course, I know the national committeewoman. I've known her for a great number of years. Both the national committeeman and committeewoman were changed in June when we had our state convention and had an election. Craig Berkman was a national committeeman because he was state chairman, but now, two weeks ago or ten days ago, we elected our new chairman, so the new chairman became a national committeeman, and I've known him a long time as well. So when you ask that, we get along together very well. We haven't really exercised who brings in what and how you're going to vote. I don't think we'll be too far apart from one another.

CH How do they determine the number of committeemen from a

particular state?

VA It's all the same, each state has the same. They have a national committeeman, a national committeewoman, and a state chairman, so each state has three. And there's territories in there as well, plus - I'm not quite sure what you call Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. But American Samoa, Guam, Marianas, Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. So they all have three. It comes up to 165, anyway.

CH Well, going back to the 1975 session, where we were before, there were a couple of other bills that you had - actually, they were senate joint resolutions - and I thought I'd ask you about those. First of all, the nature of a joint resolution is what? It's a proclamation?

VA Yeah. If you boil it down, it just said, this is what we think. It has no effect in law. It just doesn't have any effect. There are some exceptions. You pass a resolution if you want to have a special election or something like that. And there's memorials, which, again, just say whatever you want to say; there is a - we talked about a joint, meaning it's house and senate, but either body can pass one as well. They normally aren't all that great.

CH There was one that you sponsored for the secretary of state to amend the Oregon constitution to remove the requirement that legislators be a resident for one year preceding election, I presume in their own districts, and that was left in committee. What was the purpose of that? What was your intent?

VA Well, the whole idea is to expand the opportunity for people to vote, and I don't object to that. I do object, when they

finally got down to - which now has been changed, fortunately - the last day you can register and vote. I object to that strenuously. But, you know, to make the process a little more open, more available.

CH It didn't have anything to do with shifting boundaries of districts or anything like that?

VA No.

CH Then, there was another joint resolution direction the Fish Commission to maximize efforts to raise species of salmon that will maximize yield for fishermen, and that was signed by the president and the speaker. Since that doesn't have any real effect, what was the purpose of that, then?

VA Well, when you get a resolution, you don't put a law, but it says the house and the senate think you guys ought to be doing this. And again, understand that the departments of state government are an administrative branch of government, not the legislative branch, so they - of course, the legislature can ^{not} tell agencies of government what to do, but they do that by law. When they change the law, then you've got to do that. Well, this just says, Hey, guys, we're not going to tell you what to do or how to do it, but we think there ought to be more fish out there.

CH Is this sort of a warning to them that if they don't do that, that maybe a law will be passed?

VA Well, it could be that, or - you know, they're quite intimidated - all agencies - by Ways and Means. It means, if you don't do what we're telling you to do, we're going to cut your budget. There's a lot of ways to intimidate.

CH Well, going on to some of the other issues in the '75 legislature - which adjourned on July 14 after 153 days, so it was a fairly long session, wasn't it?

VA Yeah, it was.

CH There was a one cent gas tax that was hiked. Governor Straub wanted a two cent hike for highway repair and construction, but that was eventually rejected by the voters. The gas tax is a pretty common vehicle for increasing revenue, isn't it?

VA Yeah. But always remember, that's dedicated, and so that is not a vehicle to raise money for general fund purposes.

CH Who was head of the highway department at the time? That wasn't Glenn Jackson, was it?

VA Well, yeah, he would have been head of the commission, and, then, there's a department head, which may have been Claybo, but Glenn Jackson had been head of - commission chairman for a long time. I finally got him switched over - and we'll get to that, maybe - when I became governor. I switched him over to economic development.

CH Would Glenn Jackson be very involved in this process?

VA Oh yes, very. He was an interesting man in many aspects. I can't think of one like him today. Quite influential. He gave money, but he always kept track, and then he'd call and say, Clark, I gave to your cause, now I've got one. And it was fascinating sitting with him. I visited with him, and he always used a speakerphone if somebody would call. I'm sitting there.

" Glenn? " Yeah. " Anybody with you? " No. " And he carries on a conversation about whatever he's going to talk about. One of the joys I had with Glenn was that - you know, I was in the rug business, so we don't have all this fancy gadgets like speakerphones, but as a governor I had a speakerphone, and I thought, by George, I'm going to call Glenn Jackson on my speakerphone and talk to him while he speaks to me on his speakerphone [laughter].

CH There was also approved a three-year field burning extension, but neither side was happy about it. There would be a limitation to 50,000 acres being burned after 1977 if it was approved. Was it approved? I can't remember.

VA I can't recall. Remember we talked about that before. Always very controversial.

CH It was in and out all those sessions, wasn't it?

VA And when you say neither side, probably it was cut down more than the grass seed industry wanted, but not as much as those who were against field burning. So I suppose with neither side happy, they always say that must be the right formula. But we cured that, actually, through my administration and into Goldschmidt's administration, but at that time it was always up there, how many acres could be burned, and it was always very contentious when it came to the floor for debate.

CH But you were able to solve that problem? Well, we'll talk about then, I'm sure. Postponing all these discussions here.

There was also a measure to toughen parole restrictions on murders, which failed to pass. There were two conference committees on that issue, but they couldn't agree. Capital

punishment was the main issue, and it revolved around the Marquette [sp?] murder.

VA Which?

CH The Marquette murder.

VA That one I don't recall. I do recall there was a murderer that got out, paroled, I suppose, and then murdered someone else. I remember when they picked him up where they found him, they shot him where no man should be shot, which everyone thought was a pretty good solution to the whole problem.

I think I've said to you before, plaintiffs' attorneys really just would not let anything get through the legislature that would make it easier for their clients to be convicted. Oh, and the things that would go through were things that were loopholish kind of things so that they'd make their job easier, and that's still true today, and that was true when I started in 1959. Don't ask me why; it just happens to be that way.

Well, it sounds partisan, but all during this period of time, with a rare - with a...

[End of Tape 18, Side 2]