

VICTOR ATIYEH
August 30, 1993
Tape 57, Side 2

C.H.: This is an interview with Governor Atiyeh. This is Tape 57, Side 2.

V.A.: Well, another illustration would be when I talk about sensitivity, you know, a governor is supposed to be governor of the entire state. I'm not going to come back to one I side before where Neil Goldschmidt blurted out out of the "middle of nowhere" meaning that anything out of Eugene or Portland was out in the middle of nowhere. That lacks sensitivity. That shows you the depth of what's really in his mind. And a governor's governor of all of Oregon, not just part of Oregon. When I was elected, let's use the first time, or even the second time, which was a larger majority, but the first time about 54 percent, that means 46 percent didn't vote for me. But that doesn't mean that I'm going to only appeal to, I mean, do what I can for 54 percent of the Oregonians. I'm now governor of the whole state, I'm not governor of part of the state. And that's what I'm talking about, being non-politician in that sense of not being sensitive to what is your job.

C.H.: What about the Washington state senators? We talked a little bit about Dan Evans and Brock Adams and -

V.A.: I knew Dan Evans better than Brock Adams, although I knew him. Knew Scoop Jackson. But again, they knew me and I knew them, and if I said I wanted an appointment they knew who it was who was asking for it. It wasn't any close relationship, but I knew them.

C.H.: Who was the other senator that was - ?

V.A.: Scoop Jackson's the one that would get everything done.

C.H.: Warren Magnusson.

V.A.: Warren Magnusson. Knew him less so than Jackson. He wasn't really what you call a powerhouse. He just had seniority just by having lived that long.

C.H.: It seems like with Magnusson and Jackson, they were not only in the right party at the right time, but they were also in representing their state when the country was very affluent. They had a lot of seniority about ...

V.A.: Yeah, we were expanding and they were there at that time. When money got tight, that's when the Republicans became a majority and there wasn't that much money to spend.

C.H.: Would you say it's fair to say that when our senators got the seniority that would enable them to the same kind of status or power that not only were they in the minority party but also one of their main contributions was really to keep the pie from being cut with a much smaller slice for us rather than really expanding that slice.

V.A.: Yeah, we got in at the time when everybody began looking at the deficits and times were good or bad. We went through a tough recession in the early years of Reagan. So when they got there, there was very little to spend.

C.H.: Did you know Slade Gordon at all?

V.A.: Who?

C.H.: Slade Gordon.

V.A.: A little bit. Not greatly.

C.H.: Tom Twoly? [?]o

V.A.: No, I didn't.

C.H.: Looking at Alaska, Governor Bill Sheffield and Wally Hickie?

V.A.: Knew them both very well. Met Wally the first time when he was appointed Secretary of the Interior. Boy, did he get

a lot of static. And Sheffield, of course, we served together as governors.

C.H.: I guess I sometimes draw a comparison between the way Hickie was towards the press and the public and Dixie Lee Ray. Do you think there's a similarity there?

V.A.: Yeah.

C.H.: He seemed to get his foot in his mouth a few times.

V.A.: Yeah, he does, yeah, that's right.

C.H.: Cecil ~~Anders?~~ ^{ANDRUS}

V.A.: Not very much. Very little.

C.H.: Either as Secretary of the Interior or as governor?

V.A.: No. No. See, when I was there we went through the three governors of Washington, but Evans was governor of Idaho, Schwinden was governor of Montana. I got to know all those people quite well. And the western governors, I mean, you can put a whole lot of them there.

C.H.: Looking back again at some of the people in the legislature, some of the people that have been there for a long time. Debbs Potts.

V.A.: Debbs, he and I have a very, very good relationship, although Debbs - and I say that without any animosity at all - I think we may have covered the time I was finally elected as Republican leader of the Senate and ran against Tony ~~Aturi~~ ^{YURRI} and won, and Tony was an in-guy. I was against coalitions. I think Debbs and Lynn ~~Debrie~~ ^{NEWBRY} along with some of the others ~~and~~ ^{TO} make sure that I didn't get any respect, particularly in terms of - That was when we had the tie ~~in Burns~~ and we put up different people for president of the Senate, and my name was never on that list. In spite of all that, and I don't say it with any animosity, he and I were really close friends. Developed a very close friendship. And Lynn ~~Debrie~~ ^{NEWBRY} too, because Lynn was my transition guy and I appointed him on

SAIF. I appointed Debbs on the lottery commission. He's still there. Debbs is quite a very interesting guy.

C.H.: Why was Tony ^{YURRI} ~~Aturi~~ on the inside, an in person and you were not?

V.A.: Well, Tony had been there before I came to the Senate, Debbs, Lynn ^{USWBLL} ~~Debbie~~, some of those folks. I came in. The interesting part, I was known as the liberal senator. I was identified as a liberal senator. I did not support coalition, never thought it was a good idea, and coalition had been a pretty comfortable thing for a long time. So, you know, I wasn't going with the flow, I guess is the word, to use that word.

C.H.: I would imagine then that not being in favor of the coalition you probably didn't support some of the coalition presidents that came along, like John Burns and ...

V.A.: Well, John became the coalition guy, and of course we at that point had to give a total vote, and I voted yes. But I voted no early on in my votes for president of the Senate, under the coalition arrangement.

C.H.: You've talked a little bit about Jason ^{BOG} ~~Bow~~ at the time.

V.A.: Jason is a very interesting guy. Just saw Kathy a couple nights ago. Been thinking about writing to Kathy, figuring now that she might be, you know, you don't get over the death of a husband, but you know, can deal with it a little bit better. It's interesting to me that Jason comes into my mind quite frequently out of all the people I served with. It's hard for me to say why. We had a good relationship. We argued. While I was governor we argued. I was quite angry several times. Yet we got along together extremely well, and Jason, I don't know why, I can't explain it to you, but every once in a while I think about Jason. And there's a lot of people I served with.

C.H.: You said a long time ago that every once in a while you think about Ted Halleck.

V.A.: But not as often as Jason Bow. Nor as favorably.

C.H.: Phil Lang?

V.A.: Phil was a nice guy. I knew him a long time. Just consider him a friend. He got involved with the hornets and gave up some of his authority as a speaker, which I didn't think was a good idea.

C.H.: Vera Katz?

V.A.: I met Vera for the very first time when she was up sort of lobbying for Cesar Chavez. Farmworkers. First time I met Vera. Vera was a good person to work with. We toured considerably as time moved along. I think she did a very good job as a legislator and will undoubtedly do a very good job a mayor of the city.

C.H.: What about Sam Dement? I don't think you've mentioned anything about him.

V.A.: Sam, good friend of mine, both he and his wife. Good, steady head and you know, he's one of these agricultural kind of folks, just - I use the term repeatedly - has his head screwed on good.

C.H.: What about Earl Blumenauer? He's been on the council for a long time, he was in the legislature.

V.A.: Well, I think I have greater difference between Earl and myself. Sometimes I think he's less sensitive to people and their concerns. Different views.

C.H.: Another person who was briefly mayor is Connie MacReady, and she was also on the legislature.

V.A.: Connie did a good job as a mayor. She carried her own weight in the legislature, was not one of the powerhouses, but carried her own weight.

C.H.: I think you've talked about Tony Meeker, haven't you?

V.A.: I hope so. Tony is really a first class guy. He served Oregon extremely well and served his district very well. Did a super job as treasurer of the state, and I wish he was my congressman. Didn't work out.

C.H.: Ed Whelan?

V.A.: Ed was a real neat guy. Labor guy. Loved to tell the story when he called a strike on his father's business. Really was quite an outspoken spokesman even as a labor leader for the Port of Portland. The Port of Portland bills Ed Whelan would always carry. Quite a moderate labor leader, as we know, he worked for, after he left, PGE as their - what would be the - sort of lobbyist in the legislature. Very well respected by both sides.

C.H.: Don ^{WILLAMET}~~Wilder~~?

V.A.: Don, a very interesting fellow. I think he was running for, I don't recall, treasurer or secretary of state, I don't remember, but one of the things that he was going to do was to canoe down the Willamette River. I thought, Boy, that's a good idea, you know, you can't talk to too many people if you're out in a canoe. Don I can recall actually when we passed the - I think I may have mentioned his name before - passed the three-way workers comp bill and he was carrying the minority report, meaning opposed to it, and I was carrying the majority report. And actually we went thorough lunch, recessed for lunch and finished off the debate in the afternoon, and just the two of us talked, no one else. Don was exhausted. I was having a good time because I had the votes. I remember that very well. He was completely exhausted. He lay down and took a nap at lunchtime. Don was sort of a loner. He wasn't able to accomplish all that he would probably have liked to accomplish.

C.H.: Going back to Ed Whelan, you talked about the story about the strike on his father's business. Could you tell that story now?

V.A.: No, other than what I just told you, he just loved to say he called a strike on his dad.

C.H.: And his dad had what business?

V.A.: I have no idea. He probably told me, but I don't recall that. All I remember is that he just thought that was pretty good.

C.H.: Are there others in the state legislature that we haven't talked about, lo, these many hours?

V.A.: Well, you know, it's ...

C.H.: Or other governors, or other people in Congress?

V.A.: I think we pretty well covered it. I would like, you know, I went through Cecil Edwards, put together a deal. So I went, being he was sort of an accumulation of who served when and he goes way back. But I kind of reviewed that. When you asked me the question, I'm sure we could spend a whole lot of time talking about each one, but I went thorough^{thru} and figured out how many different legislators I served with in the House and the Senate from 1959 til I left in 1978, and I served with 290 different legislators. And then if you would include during my term as a governors, there were 58 others. So altogether during my 28 years, I served with 348 different legislators. So surely I've forgotten some of them. You know, gosh, I shouldn't even begin it, because there's a whole lot of them. Mike Thorn^o we haven't talked about.

C.H.: Yes, we have.

V.A.: Mike Thorn was a great, great legislator, great senator, did a fine job. I consider both he and his wife Jill as close friends today.

C.H.: He's with the Port now, isn't he?

V.A.: He's at the Port now. And she's the one that really put together this Oregon Trail thing. Very, very good people, both of them. Harry ^{BOIVAN} Boyvan, I think I talked about Harry. But there's really no point in starting it because, you know, 348 is a lot of people.

C.H.: But if there are any that you care to talk about, any that you have particularly interesting stories about, that would be wonderful to get down on tape.

V.A.: Oh, Arthur Ireland, he served from Washington County. We campaigned together, he was a legislator before I started, but we served together in the House and then over into the Senate and he never referred to me as Vic, it was just, Hello There. After all those years. But I liked Arthur, I thought he was a neat guy. Leon Davis goes way back, again Washington County. Maybe as it would relate to me. He was running and I said to myself when I was running for the first time, Gosh, if he gets elected he'll be in six years! You know, this is incredible. And then when I look back on my career of 28, it was a kind of statement at that time. John Mosser, oh what a fertile brain he was, and there was a thing they kept calling the Mosser Plan. He always did have a plan of some kind and if that didn't fly he'd come up with another one. Clarence ^{BARTON} Bart. What a guy. He served as Speaker of the House, my third session in the House. Jake Bennett, who served in the House. I had real trouble with Jake Bennett because he'd been recalled, whether it was city council or county commission, I don't remember, but he was recalled. But then he was elected as a member of the legislature. I thought, This is terrible. Finally I put my mind at ease by saying to myself, well he ^{DAVIS DOES NOT} represents the ^{PEOPLE OF THIS DISTRICT} [BREAK IN TAPE] ^{BUT HE REPRESENTS THE JAKE BENNETTS OF OREGON & IDAHO} ^{ALS ENTITLED TO REPRESENTATION.} Vern Cook. Grace Peck. On we could go. I guess we might as well stop. You know, I've got good memories of some. Some more

than others I worked with. Tom Hartung, Wally Carson, Betty Roberts, those are all people I worked with.

C.H.: Jumping up to the federal level again, you've talked a little bit about President Reagan and George Bush and Gerald Ford, all of them you knew.

V.A.: Yeah, Gerald Ford I've already said I think he was one of the great presidents of all time. Knew Nixon, not as well, but I'd met him and had known him. Maybe in terms of warmth, I think I've already said this, but George Bush and maybe next in line but not very far behind Jerry Ford, in terms of warmth, you know, just was coolest, Jimmy Carter. Then next in line maybe would be Richard Nixon. Reagan was pretty austere and a very formal person. Nancy was even more austere. Barbara and George Bush probably in terms of a team were the warmest, most outgoing of the presidents I've had a chance to know. Now beyond that, I'm thinking to myself, maybe I'm reminiscing a little too soon, but some of the world leaders - I'll do that reminiscence. What else you got?

C.H.: Anybody else in the executive branch? I don't know if we talked about Bill Robertson or not.

V.A.: I dealt with him a little bit. That would be the regional forester.

C.H.: James Watt?

V.A.: Jim Watt?

C.H.: We talked about a little bit in terms of controversies.

V.A.: Yeah, he was controversial.

C.H.: And Don Bodely we talked about. Did you know Secretary of Agriculture Ed Madigan at all?

V.A.: No.

C.H.: What about any of the other Secretaries of Agriculture?

V.A.: Dwight Butt I got to know, he came out to Oregon several times. I'm trying to think of the name of Commerce. A really nice fellow.

C.H.: Mosh~~b~~acker?

V.A.: No. Before him. Actually he liked to do rodeo work, and Bob Smith would go out rodeoing with him and they'd do the team roping. He actually fell off a horse and was killed. I'm trying to think of his name. Great guy. Jim Baker I knew quite well. Strange.

C.H.: Jim Baker you knew after he was in the White House?

V.A.: Yeah, with Reagan. Gosh, I'm trying to think of some of the other names. That's a great opportunity, you know, being governor, or I'd never have met any of these people. None of them. It was interesting one time I was on Air Force One, and there was a phone between - there's two seats, and there was a phone there. It wasn't until later I realized, you know, because I didn't know who this person was, but the phone - I think I answered it, but it turned this was Admiral Poindexter. He was sitting next to me. I didn't know him too well. Later on he became quite famous. Well, there's quite a few of them. Got to go to the White House, got to get in to the White House, the Oval Office. I think I did cover the story when I was there the first time, in the Oval Office. Flew back. I think I did cover that.

C.H.: With President Reagan, or -?

V.A.: No, Ford. 1974. He had already by that time pardoned Nixon, but you know, he said, Come on back, you can take pictures and do whatever you want if it's going to help you in the campaign, fine. A few that they thought might have a chance to win. Incidentally, that day I left Portland at five o'clock in the morning, went to Washington, saw Wendell Wyatt, went to the White House briefing, pictures with Ford, got on a plane, came back.

Nine o'clock that night I'm in Happy Canyon Pageant. It was incredible to me. But I think I may have told the story, it's funny, about Dolores said to me, Is that office really oval? And I said, Gee, I don't know. But I can tell you what the rug looks like. Still rug-mad, even back there in Washington D.C.

C.H.: I presume that he had an Oriental rug of some kind?

V.A.: No, it's a special-made rug, if I recall. It was oval, but it had a border with stars around it and was a kind of blue color with tan. But you know, I wasn't going to go, first of all, then I thought when would I get a chance to be in the White House again, so I went. And the see the President, because I said there's no votes in Washington D.C., there're all out here. But it was a great experience. I recall that.

C.H.: Looking at some of the comments and reviewing your political career, there's quite a range, of course, and I might begin with Representative Tom Troop of Bend, he was chairman of the House revenue committee. He said "I think he's become a much more effective governor toward the end of his tenure." Towards the end you were supporting the sales tax, your popularity had gone down, yet he felt that you were more effective then. Did you feel that you grew into the job more as time went on?

V.A.: No, that's from his perspective. From my own perspective, I said after my first year, and I'm really the only one that really knew what I was saying, is that I went further faster than even I thought I would go. My first session was quite successful. If I measured it over - and I can't actually take count, I can't tell you by numbers, just my own sense of it - the bills that I was interested in, major legislation, I would have to say that I was successful, I don't know, 90 percent of the time.

C.H.: How do you compare your two terms? Which do you think you more effective in?

V.A.: It would vary, because I built. But building to me, you know, what's more important, the time you lay the foundation or the time you put the shingles on the roof? You have to have a foundation in order to put the shingles on the roof. So I think it was a cumulative thing. I knew where I was going, I knew what I wanted to do, it just took me eight years - sometimes less than eight years - but it took me that long just to build and to get to where I wanted to go. Economic development for example, we had to get land use plans acknowledged. It took a while to get that done, but we moved in that direction. One stop permitting, that took a while to get that all put together. Running government like it should, saving dollars, you know, there's a whole bunch of things where one was piled on the other. I think I did quite a bit in four years. But when you say measure one against the other, the giant gap was that we didn't deal with property taxes. By and large, everything else we were able to accomplish.

C.H.: Allen Hayakawa from The Oregonian had this view. Actually he had whole review of your tenure, and he has a number of interesting comments. His first one was that "Victor Atiyeh led the state through its worst economic times since the Great Depression, preserved basic state services, reinforced higher education, helped shape important state and national energy legislation, and worked to diversify the state's economy by courting business around the Pacific Rim." And we've talked about all those different elements. Did you know Allen Hayakawa? Did you interview you personally?

V.A.: I'm sure he did, but no. He did not cover me like some of those that were down there.

C.H.: But then in what you've just referred to, he said, "Unlike his three immediate predecessors and following two successors, Atiyeh struggled and ultimately failed to find a long-

term solution to Oregon's school financing dilemma and made only relatively minor changes in the state's tax system." Do you feel that was true?

V.A.: Yeah.

C.H.: Was it frustrating, and I think I've asked you this before, but having so much to do with state taxes from all your years in the legislature and being governor and having so much expertise in that particular area, it must have been really frustrating for you not to have achieved certain ends in that area.

V.A.: It was. Very much so. You know, if you go through it piece by piece, we covered it once, but I told them, the legislature, if you don't do something before the end of the session I'll call you back into a special session. They didn't and I did, and what we came up with was declared unconstitutional so it never got to the ballot. That was that Ed Fadeley Mickey Mouse thing that we had put together. You know, I knew that we had to do something to head this whole thing off, but do it in a very well-planned way. The best well-planned way, and I've already covered that, was the 1985 tax bill. That was the best I have ever seen, ever seen. That was turned down significantly by the voters. So that was frustrating. And I've identified it myself.

C.H.: Hayakawa said, "In the arcane languages of tax policy and spending priorities, politicians encode their beliefs and desires." Do you feel that that ...

V.A.: Politicians what?

C.H.: Politicians encode their beliefs and desires.

V.A.: Yeah, sure.

C.H.: That's a pretty accurate ...

V.A.: Well, basically, you follow the - you know, taxes are this matter of incentive. I never believed that. By that I mean I believe it does work. But the fact is I don't believe it should

work. You give to a charity because you believe in the charity, not because it's tax deductible. You know, that's where I'm coming from. But you know, that's the way it works.

[End of Tape 57, Side 2]