

VICTOR ATIYEH
July 28, 1993
Tape 51, Side 1

C.H.: This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at Atiyeh International in Portland, Oregon. The interviewer for the Oregon Historical Society is Clark Hansen. The date is July 28, 1993, and this is Tape 51, Side 1.

We were talking about the Umatilla Depot.

V.A.: Yeah, and they were going to remove - it seems to me it was gas masks, and I don't know what was in them, but there was a minute part that was very hazardous material.

But anyway, come the day for the move, and my goodness, they had law enforcement at the back, and they had vehicles in front and vehicles in back, and medical ambulances, and you know, this was the entourage from Umatilla to the Pendleton Airport. On the plane, and whoosh, and away it went. It went without incident. But an abundance of safety.

C.H.: Who pays for that?

V.A.: The federal government. That was actually their move and their equipment to somewhere else. Isn't it the case that any hazardous waste that moves through Oregon has to be - the State has to be notified?

V.A.: Yes. Not only that, but we proposed and it was passed into law where there was payment to train people en route - fire departments, police departments, train them for hazardous material and what to do in the event in their jurisdiction something occurs. And I think that's appropriate, that we at least be aware of what's occurring. I think that's most appropriate.

Now, we're talking about very hazardous stuff. High level wastes and things like at the Umatilla ordnance, very hazardous material. Well, in terms of training, it would go to less hazardous, spilled oil, spilled chemical trucks, that kind of thing, too.

C.H.: And other issues, in particular issues that involved Washington State, what about the issues of transportation of hazardous waste with them, from like say for instance their nuclear facilities. Wasn't that an issue to some extent, things that were coming across, down I-5 and I-84?

V.A.: This may be unfair, so I'm just giving you kind of an impression. They seem to be less concerned about that kind of thing than Oregon is, and my own particular is - I know it's selfish - you know, if it's moving through Oregon to go somewhere else, just as long as it goes somewhere else. Long as it doesn't stay here. Although I'm kind of chuckling because you know I was on an environmental board, and one of the things you're talking about solid waste, but it was really funny trying to find a place to put waste, hazardous, non-hazardous, garbage, whatever, and it was that everybody wants you to pick it up, but nobody wants you to put it down.

C.H.: What about other problems involving Hanford?

V.A.: That's still continuing, and that is federal because Hanford was a federal installation. And you know, the federal government preempted ^{the states or} this high-level radioactive waste, they preempted the ability of any states to do anything; they had to do it. All we can do is every once in a while ring the alarm bell to - as you see from time to time the leakage of some of their tanks, make it public and concern. Our congressional delegation continue to have pressure to clean it up, straighten it out, make it safe.

It's one of those kind of frustrating things because we - even the State of Washington, where it resides, they have very little jurisdiction over it, and so we just have to monitor it. That's really about the best we can do right now, and every once in a while shake them loose, but that doesn't seem to shake them very much, but do the best we can.

C.H.: Portland in particular is very wary of the problems of Hanford because of being downriver from a potential leakage into the Columbia River.

V.A.: Yes, but the closer you get to Hanford, the more alarmed they would be because there's a matter of dilution.

C.H.: Right.

V.A.: And so it would be harmful, certainly, down here, but much more harmful up there. And there would be plenty of dilution.

But anyway, we're all alarmed out it. It isn't a matter of being not concerned, but there's a limit because of the preemption of the federal government.

C.H.: Are you satisfied with the federal government's involvement?

V.A.: No. No, they were rather sloppy about the whole thing. I'm saying - we talked about it before - product liability, apply today's standards to yesterday, but still it was known that this was - had a long half-life. That's not been unknown from day one, and the security was very important. So there wasn't really - it was bad to be as sloppy as they've been in terms of protection and making sure that it was safe.

You know, it's really interesting. I don't know if we really covered it; I think we did briefly. But at this point I'm sure we didn't cover it. But the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in my administration actually ran a drill on what would happen if something happened to our nuclear power plant, Trojan. And they

were pretty critical, and they would analyze what we did, and we actually ran the drill. They gave us the test, we're supposed to respond, and they were going to see how we responded.

And they had - I think we ran the test three times, and actually cranked up emergency and opened the phones and had everybody there. We ran the drill. And they were judging us. But they never ran a drill up at Hanford and let me judge them. And yet we had to have this plan. Matter of fact, we got into quite an argument with them as to who would be the central source of information. Remembering Three Mile Island, one of the problems was everybody was a source of information; therefore, it was confusing to everyone.

Having observed that, I insisted that the Governor's Office be the single source of information. They wanted to be the single source of information. And we had quite a long battle on that one. But I said to them, "Look, the best known person in the state is the Governor. Who knows Joe Smith in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission?" And so it isn't that we wouldn't use the NRC information and their experts, but that source of information should be one place. It shouldn't be coming out from six different places.

C.H.: Why did they want to have control over that?

V.A.: Federal government. [laughs] That's the only answer I can give you.

C.H.: And did you resolve that to your satisfaction?

V.A.: I think they finally - well, I pause for a moment. See, it's a matter of their adopting our plan, and they didn't adopt our plan because that was a sticking point. Everything else was okay. I think they finally approved it, but I've got that "I think." I'm not entirely positive about that.

However, it now becomes a moot point with Trojan closed down.

C.H.: Right. What about situations over Hanford? Would you be involved in disseminating information, or the Governor?

V.A.: I would think that the Governor up in Washington would be, although that's a little bit different. That is a federal installation. I still think, though, that it should be determined what entity would be the - there should be a single source of public information, and what that entity should be, they should at least decide that up in Washington. But that was the point I was trying to make, a single point of information. You know, if they come to the NRC guy, if we said it was going to be the governor, "Go talk to the governor." Or if it was some workman that had a monkey wrench in his hand, he was not the source of information. Go talk to the governor. And so that was the only point we were trying to make.

And it wasn't a matter of ego. It was a matter of making sure that people did know what was happening in a very orderly way because at those points in time rumors and all kinds of things happen. We saw it all up at Three Mile Island. I mean, they ran the fire drill for us. And Governor Thornburg just had come into office when that happened.

C.H.: How have the issues around power, energy power and those problems been resolved with Washington, or to what extent were they resolved?

V.A.: In what sense, now?

q Well, there have been controversies over different types of - well, public power versus private power and how power is to be shared and dispersement of power and control over it.

V.A.: Yeah. There's not been much change. The Bonneville law gave preference to the public utilities. That's not changed. That continues. There was a great disparity between Oregon and Washington in terms of what we ratepayers paid for quite a long

period of time. That's gradually coming closer together because Bonneville, as we just noted not too long ago, is going to raise their rates so that obviously affects the PUD's. It will affect our private investor-owned utilities, but they have other sources of power. They have hydro now. The coal fire's down and the nuclear plant's down. But at least they have hydro that they put in.

So the disparity in energy costs are narrowing considerably, but there's not much change - there's no change in the preference. The preference is public utilities.

C.H.: How did you feel about Trojan being closed down and the way it was closed down?

V.A.: Well, I think they made the right decision, but I think those kind of decisions should be made on a scientific basis, not on a ballot measure, which is what we had. The people turned that down. But PGE analyzed it - you know, they were having now more frequent leaks into small pipes - and just determined it was in the best interest of the ratepayers that they do close it down instead of trying to fix it up, keep fixing it up is what they were doing. Very costly, but the fact is I think they made the right decision.

C.H.: Well, in the election people were trying to get it closed down, and PGE fought that tenaciously, and then a few months later then they decided, well, yes, they really should close it down. There was a big cry about that.

V.A.: I know. But to me that's a better process. Instead of doing it by mandate, by law, you know, it's still closed down. And the fact is it was done after careful study and some judgment, and you know, PGE couldn't say, "We oppose it, but we oppose it because we're thinking about closing it down anyway." And they probably were thinking about it. I don't think they'd come to any decision.

It was not an easy decision to make because it was going to be expensive one way or another.

But I just think that's - you know, if you can avoid law as much as you can avoid law, you're better off. And that's done on a very orderly - I like that way of orderly judgment, studying the whole issue and saying, "Hey, this just doesn't - this doesn't pencil out."

C.H.: Going on to some of the other issues between Oregon and Washington and in relationship to the power and energy plans, what about fish management; is that an issue that's been equally cooperated on?

V.A.: Going back to 1974 - and I'll explain all of this in a minute - and I'd been involved repeatedly by ballot measures about reducing the take, and it usually came from the sports fishery side of the issue, and who should get how much. I recall very vividly there was a question at West Linn, at the West Linn Inn, which no longer exists, had a luncheon meeting and a question was asked of me, and I just sort of said, "Look, I'm getting sick and tired of all of this."

They said, "What side are you going to come down on, the sports fisherman or the commercial?" That's basically what the question is.

And I said, "I'm getting tired of this. All we've been doing" - and this was my observation - "is fighting over what's left, and what's left has been less each year." And I said, "My position is I'm going to do everything I can to enhance the resource instead of wasting my energy fighting over who gets what's left."

And that's what we tried to do, and we got into all kinds of controversy, and I did tell you when I was burned in effigy down at Charleston because our indicators said that the return was low and the commercials said there's a whole lot of them out there. But we

stuck with the indicators. That's what we're trying to do. The STEP program started while I was Governor, and that was the - it was really a volunteer effort where people would put these pens, develop fish and release them. And then our own efforts - that means the Fish & Wildlife Department, and what we tried to do as best we could is to enhance the resource.

But you know, if we're thinking about the salmon fishery in 1920, it's never going to happen again. And the main culprit, if you will, were the hydro dams. They talk about forestry and all the rest, but really the main culprit was our hydro dams. And at the time I don't think anybody really said it, but "Do we want power or do we want fish? Well, we want power."

Now, it never came down that way, but that's really what it was all about.

So from that point, you know, the fishery went down once Bonneville went up and then the other dams went up, and it's just blocking the passage of fish. So we can't return to the good old days, if you will. It just isn't possible.

I'm going to divert for a second. I was a Sea Scout. This would be in the late 30's. And we were sailing down the Columbia River going to a Sea Scout regatta at Astoria. And I can remember we went out of a slough; we weren't quite sure where we were, but we stayed overnight, couldn't get ashore. But anyway, we went out on the slough, and we got out into this very large bay there approaching Astoria. And all of a sudden I smelled a barn smell, out there in this wide open bay. There was a barn there. There was a barn there. There were horses there. This was on a sand bar. And they would throw their nets out, and then the horses would pull them. That's how they did some of their fishing. Instead of by boats or nets as we know them, the nets would go out

and the horses would pull them ashore. That's what the barn was doing out there.

I can recall going up the Columbia River and seeing spawned-out salmon, a lot of them, drifting downstream down the Columbia River. That was the late 30's.

But the fishery issue is an important one. It's becoming more difficult all the time. I was involved with the Governor of Washington and the Governor of Alaska, and that was where we were trying to get a - I guess "treaty" is the right word - between the U.S. and Canada, and I recall calling the Governor of Alaska, and I think we may have covered it on the tape, saying, "I don't want all the fish; just give me some of the fish." Because the salmon would leave the mouth of the Columbia, head north up past Canada, around Alaska and out toward Japan and then turn around and come back, and they were being harvested on the way back. And so Alaska gets some and Canada gets some and we would get some. So it gets to be very interesting.

Now, what else do you have? I'm probably telling you more about these things than anybody really wants to know.

C.H.: Well, some of these issues are interesting from your perspective because as chief executive of the state in dealing with other states, you're in a unique position to evaluate those issues.

One of the other issues was on tax inequities, and I think we talked a little bit about that: Clark County and other things like that.

V.A.: Yes. Right.

C.H.: There was a repeal of the 1983 law that taxed Washingtonians working in Oregon at a higher rate.

V.A.: That came in our special session, and we adjusted that.

C.H.: And you were just referring to regarding the salmon the U.S.-Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty?

V.A.: Yes.

C.H.: And going on, what about issues of concern with California, or to California?

V.A.: Not an awful lot, except for this border dispute we talked about. There really wasn't much commerce between the two of us, governmentally, that is.

C.H.: Any of these other issues that ...

V.A.: No. The one thing that was I recall of concern to us at one point in time, and that was the gypsy moth, but the infestation was in California, and at that time Jerry Brown was the Governor, and he was unwilling to spray, which was a concern to us. And it turned out to be an appropriate concern because we from time to time find ourselves fighting the gypsy moth up here.

C.H.: What about with Idaho?

V.A.: Not much with Idaho. The only thing is that Idaho never did like what we were doing in terms of fishery, the agreement between Oregon and Washington. We'd always agree, but Idaho wouldn't.

C.H.: And why is that?

V.A.: Because they were at the end of the line.

C.H.: Right. Right. But a lot of the fish were spawning up there and coming down ...

V.A.: Well, they had hoped a lot of fish would get up there, but they figured they weren't getting enough.

That's a proper position for the Governor of Idaho, but I think also the proper positions for the Governors of Oregon and Washington. So -.

C.H.: In 1985, in August of 1985, there was a Western Governors' Association meeting in Honolulu, and during that meeting there were efforts to improve international trade, water efficiency, forest management and to study the impact of the military on

the region. Were you personally involved in any of these issues or were there other issues ...

V.A.: Well, obviously the military was not of great interest to Oregon. I recall Governor Ariyoshi was interested in the study of alternative energies of different kinds, and they're heavily dependent upon import energy. They don't have a great deal of hydro, and they have to import a lot, and he was looking at a variety of different ways of doing it. Also Ariyoshi was interested in trade from the West to the Far East, and his relationship with Japan made it even more so.

So just to the extent that, you know, those kinds of things, yes, I was. There were some things of greater interest to Oregon than others.

I recall that was a very delightful meeting. I would also add that at one point the Governor of American Samoa was the Chairman of the Western Governors.

C.H.: Is that right?

V.A.: Yes. And he invited us to go to have our meeting in American Samoa. I have to admit that we kind of chickened out politically about going to American Samoa. He was Chairman, and we went at that time to Nevada. But I would have liked to have gone to American Samoa. Still would.

C.H.: It's a beautiful place. It's really quite beautiful, but you know, I'm actually surprised that people didn't go down there. I'm sure that American Samoa really struggles to get the attention that it wants, being so far away from the United States.

C.H.: The island nations, American Samoa, the Marianas and Guam, were part of the Western Governors. They really considered their main ally Governor Ariyoshi. But I have to tell you that I was, as well. I was interested and concerned about them, but Ariyoshi was the number one, and he was the closest to them. They

felt pretty close to him as an individual. And yeah, they had some problems that really needed attention.

C.H.: Did you go to either of the other places?

V.A.: No. I've been to Guam once, but that was as a fuel stop on my way to Manila.

But anyway, of all of them, I think I'd like to go to American Samoa, but I don't know why. Anyway, I think we all chickened out about going to American Samoa.

C.H.: Speaking of chickening out, did you play any golf while you were over in Hawaii on that trip in 1985, August?

V.A.: I don't recall. I'm going to say I don't think so. My wife was with me, and my granddaughter was with me. I think the spare time I had I spent with them. I don't recall playing golf there during that particular trip.

C.H.: But it was no longer an issue?

V.A.: My golf?

C.H.: Yeah. Because it was a big issue there earlier on.

V.A.: Oh, one thing I didn't do in all the trips that I made as governor, that's - there may have been one exception, but I had several opportunities when I went to Japan and Korea and Taiwan to play golf, and I never felt comfortable doing that. And I think there may have been an exception when I played golf with Fuji Television, and they of course are very important in Oregon, and the president of the company, I may have played golf with them. But I remember vividly being invited several times in Korea to go play golf, and in Taiwan and Japan, and I never felt it was appropriate to do that.

And I would have a very, very busy schedule every time I would go. I recall probably the greatest number I had 47 appointments in five working days in Tokyo. Now, if you stop to think how long it takes to get from here to there in Tokyo in an automobile, and I

said to myself, "Well, I don't know when I'm coming back, and I'd better make the most of this trip." And you know, the State was paying for it, so I always had that feeling that I had to work and work hard while I'm on these trips. So with very rare exceptions.

Afterwards, since I've been out of office, I've played golf in Korea and Taiwan and Japan, but then that's my nickel now.

C.H.: Speaking of Korea and Japan and Taiwan, you took trips there in 1985, and in the fall of 1985 you took a trip to Taiwan, and I believe the purposes of that were for marking the 40th anniversary of the Japanese occupation of the island. Was that at all sensitive in your dealing with Japan, that you were dealing with this in relationship to Taiwan?

V.A.: No, it had no impact at all. The only sensitivity, and I think we talked about that, was that might be between China and Taiwan. But no, Japan never had any.

That was a wonderful event, but as you probably have noted, I went from there to Damascus, Syria.

C.H.: Yes. I was just going to ask you about that. Now, I don't know if we talked about this or not. I remember we talked about one long trip that you made.

V.A.: That's it. That's the one.

C.H.: Was that it? And you got there, and you were just wiped out.

V.A.: Yeah, that's right. That's the trip. And it was so funny; I had been trying to make Japan, Korea and Taiwan in one trip, but there was a time certain, which was Taiwan. That was when they were celebrating their retrocession. And so that was a time certain, and then I'm trying to work around it, but I had some things to do in Oregon, and I just couldn't - I kept vacillating. I'd say, "I don't want to make two trips. This is terribly

expensive." I wanted to see if I could make it all at once, but I couldn't.

Finally I said, "Okay, we'll go to Taiwan, and then - I don't know - a week or ten days, we'll go then to Japan and Korea." Finally made that decision. The next morning I get a call from the embassy in Syria, "The President wants you to come to this conference."

I said, "Well, gee whiz, I'm going to Taiwan."

"Well," he says, "come over from Taiwan."

If I'd known what it was all about, I don't know if I would have done it, but I did recount that story - trying to stay awake with the South Americans making United Nations speeches.

[End of Tape 51, Side 1]