

Tape 59, Side 2  
September 3, 1993

CH This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office, Atiyeh International, in downtown Portland, Oregon. The interviewer is Clark Hansen, for the Oregon Historical Society. The date is September 3, 1993, and this is Tape 59, Side 2.

VA Well, to recap part of it, I mentioned to you - I don't know if we do have it on the tape, but as a member of the House or the Senate I served with 290 different legislators. And then, during my term as governor, I - I say "served with" another fifty-eight. So all together, during my twenty-eight years I served with 348 different legislators. I am proud of the fact that - I counted. The vetoes by governors Holmes, Hatfield, McCall and Straub - that would be from 1957 through 1978 - all of them vetoed 112 bills. I vetoed 108 by myself. And a lot more didn't pass because I threatened to veto. The media asked me about should I insert my own opinions, and I said the constitution doesn't say under what circumstances you can veto, it says you can veto, and the legislature can override. I think they overrode maybe two or three out of the 108.

The total of my legislative session days when I was working as a legislator was 1,548 days. I figured that out to be four and a quarter years of my life. And, then, if I toss in the legislative days while I was governor, that's another 793, which is almost six and a half years of my life. That's just legislative days. During my twenty-eight years I dealt with 11,217 bills, 3,642 of which were as governor. I got this all out of Cecil Edwards' book. I

went through and kind of looked at it, and - you know, [laughing] I don't remember any of this I just told you. I went through it just out of curiosity.

That's a lot of years of a person's life dedicated to public service, and I'm grateful, I'm very grateful. I think to myself so many times, you know, this really happened to me. And you wonder, how come it happened to me, a small-businessman, no real ambition to - you know, someday I'm going to be a senator or someday I want to be governor and someday I want to be president, like Clinton. It wasn't that. It was just a keen concern, and you just kind of kept going. A keen interest in trying to do what I thought was good for the state. I really had hoped that - you know, my father-in-law said to me many years ago, "I don't know why you want to get involved in politics. They're all crooks." And that's the generally accepted theory [laughs]. I thought, gee whiz, it's in such disrepute. Maybe if a guy gets in, performs honestly, others will say, Hey, Vic did it. Maybe I can do that, too.

I have to tell you that I'm disappointed that it hasn't - I wasn't trying to be instructional to people. Maybe by way of example. But I have to tell you I didn't achieve the kind of degree of success that I had hoped would come out of all this. But that wasn't a goal, I was just going to do my thing, and people could do their thing, whatever they want to do.

But I'm really proud of the fact that I was governor. I know my children are. Certainly, my grandchildren - well, the oldest is nineteen. She would have a greater flavor. She was born just before the primary in 1974. She's got a better feel for it than my younger grandchildren, but, still, when they grow up and have children, they can say

their grandpa was the governor of Oregon. I have a sense of that. I never did have a good sense of - what do I want to say? - the, I don't know, aura of being the governor. I never really did. When I was elected, you know, it was very hard for me to refer to myself as a governor. You know, who's this? I'm Governor Atiyeh. You know, I'm Vic Atiyeh. I had trouble dealing with that. I had trouble dealing with this sort of "I am the governor." You know, you've got to - there's some kind of mystery surrounding this - this big shot kind of thing. And that, incidentally, is a bit of giving up some things. If you act big, you know, make big noise, you intimidate people. I guess I could have had I been properly oriented to the fact that I was a governor [laughs].

Oh, I must tell you, though, as I moved along and I realized that - you know, I'd call on the phone, either somebody in government or somebody, and leave a message to call Governor Atiyeh, man, I'd get real great response. [laughing] But once I left office, I'm back to anybody else. If I leave a message, it may be a day or two before they call me back.

But I must - again, I started out by saying, Look, this is my view of what it is. To whoever listens to this tape, I'm pointing them in a direction. Go take a look at that. Believe it or not, take a look at it. If you boil it all down, as I said, I hope that history says that Vic Atiyeh really cared, really cared. I hope that's what comes out of it all, because I really do care, very much. I care about democracy, I really care about people, really care about people. Anyway, that's my story.

CH Well, in a few minutes you're going to be meeting in

your office with Greg Walden, who's a member of the legislature and has announced yesterday that he's forming a committee for running for governor as a Republican, and I'm wondering what you're going to tell him. What advice are you going to give him?

VA Well, it depends if he asks for it. I will tell him, sure. I'll be glad to give him any advice that I can. I will tell him what I told Craig Berkman and Denny Smith, that I won't make you choose up sides in a primary. Although I talked to Bob Smith, Congressman Smith, yesterday. He was chatting a little bit about whether or not he's going to run for office, and I told him what I told all the rest, that I was - and I was going to tell Greg today - that I wasn't getting involved in a primary. "But if you jump in, I may become a liar." I think Bob Smith would make a great governor. I don't know if I would do that or not. But anyway, that's what I told Bob. But that's what I'll tell him. I don't mind advising anyone; it's free. Certainly, after all I've been through, I think I've got something to say.

Incidentally, I don't know if you noticed that lady that went in. She was my campaign manager of my 1978 campaign.

CH She looked familiar. What is her name?

VA Carol Whitney. She had never done that before, so we called her a campaign coordinator. Then, when I won the primary, I said, "Now, Carol, you can call yourself a campaign manager." But she was in the 1978 campaign.

So do you want to cover the rest of that? I guess we

should wrap up our...

CH Well, yes, we do have some other things to talk about.  
We could do that later?

VA Yes, we can do it whenever you want.

CH Okay.

[End of Tape 59, Side 2]