

VICTOR ATIYEH

June 28, 1993

Tape 41, Side 1

C.H.: This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office at Atiyeh International in downtown Portland, Oregon. The interviewer for the Oregon Historical Society is Clark Hansen. The date is June 28, 1993, and this is Tape 41, Side 1.

Well, the next thing I wanted to talk about here was the flap over the Bohemian Grove incident. It was, according to the paper, "an all-exclusive male retreat where powerful men attend secretive Masonic-like rites, doff their clothes and relieve themselves on trees and perform off-color skits where the men perform both male and female roles." Is that an adequate way of describing the Bohemian Grove? [laughing]

V.A.: That's the perception. Well, first of all, it is true that females are not allowed there. That's true. And were there important people there? Yes, that's true. I'll start at the end, and then back up.

When I returned - of course, this is of some note that the governor had gone to the Bohemian Grove, so the media wanted to know my impressions. And I really took them by surprise. I didn't do it deliberately; I was telling the honest truth. And I said to them, "You know, the thing that impressed me the most was that there's music everywhere." And there was.

The setup is they have this Bohemia Grove, and they have two areas in which they have a performance. One is totally musical, that is, just music, not singing, not acting. And then each year they write a play, a brand-new play, and that's performed in another area, and it's a kind of a musical play. And yes, sure,

they don't have any women there, so that obviously in the play there are men dressed like women, to be part of the play.

But then they have these camps, they're all over the place, and the man that invited me was from Medford and he belonged to - I've forgotten the name of the camp - and there's places you can sleep, small houses, you know, back up in the woods. Although this one where I stayed wasn't that way, some of the other camps, they had pianos there. We went to hear a pianist in somebody's camp one morning. At night, I can remember going to bed you could hear guitar-playing and music.

So when I said my reaction was it really was a lot of music, a lot of music. Now, there was a lot of drinking going on, usually in the evening after whatever performance they have. They also had a notable speaker; I'm trying to recall who it was. But that was part of their program. There was a kind of a lake there and you could just kind of sit around, and they had speakers so you could hear the speaker.

But there's all this wild imagination. If you don't know what it is and women can't go - yeah, it's true, there's some guys that would water the trunk of the tree. I didn't see a whole lot of people doing it, but some did it. It's sort of a "ha-ha, I did that."

They had this large area where you'd go and have your meals out in the open. They just had benches and tables, buffet-style at the time. But you know, it's funny. Ford was there while I was there, Kissinger was there while I was there. I saw them both, talked to them. But you know, I'm saying to myself, "You know, if indeed these big shots are gathering together to figure out some way to screw the little people, they don't have to do that once a year." When I got to the airport, there's corporate jets all over the place. They could get on the telephone or they could fly

anywhere, and they could screw the little people every day of the week, they don't have to wait for the Bohemian Grove to do it. So that perception that they're getting together to connive against the little people is crazy. That's not what they're there for. And so, it's a misconception.

I went once. It isn't something that I'd yearn to go again or join - you have to pay money to join - you know, it's not kind of a thing. I'm glad I went. Found it interesting. It's not as evil as I think it's perceived to be. Maybe some people don't like it because there aren't women there, but you know, they've got their own reasons for maybe disliking it. But it really isn't as evil as they portray it to be.

C.H.: And it only happens once a year?

V.A.: Once a year.

C.H.: I vaguely remember reading in the article about that about how a lot of the newspaper people, news people will be just outside the gate waiting for people to be coming and going. And then eventually did they get into flying them in and out with helicopters because of some kind of protest?

V.A.: Well, there was going to be a protest when I was there that we heard about. So I actually left early because I had to get back, and I had several hours, once I got in to - I'm trying to remember the town. But once I got to where the airport is, I had quite a bit of time.

C.H.: It was in Northern California, wasn't it?

V.A.: Yeah, it's in Northern California.

C.H.: Near Santa Rosa?

V.A.: Up in the wine country.

So I left. If they were going to barricade it or, you know, demonstrate, I couldn't have gotten out to get my airplane. Incidentally, I was flying commercial, not one of these jets. So

I left early. I deliberately left early, just so I wouldn't get involved with any of that demonstrating. If it happened, I wasn't there to see it.

C.H.: People referred to it as Perils of the Old-Boy Network.

V.A.: Well, yeah, the Old-Boy Network is - that's a good term. And yet, you know, when I think now of Governor Roberts, she's got the Old-Girls' Network. I use that word, but I don't use it offensively. What she really is demonstrating is that you go to people that you know. That's how it happens. And she's going to people that she knows and has confidence in, and they happen to be women. And so oftentimes men will go to men because they're friends and they know them. So it isn't by a design; it's just I suppose that by the nature of us as humans.

So the Old-Boy Network is not something that's designed as an exclusion; it's just by the natural way of things. And now I use what I call with Governor Roberts the Old-Girl Network, because you find a lot of women there. And I don't find that offensive, I'm just saying that just kind of proves that you go to people that you know and have confidence in. In her case, it was women, and with men it's men.

C.H.: This being still 1984, there obviously was a primary and a general election. Were you very much involved in the election efforts of 1984?

V.A.: Not too much, as I recall.

C.H.: Being an incumbent governor, do you go to people that are running for the legislature or for other offices, other Republicans, and help them? Or do you stay aloof from that?

V.A.: I don't stay aloof. I don't insert myself. I don't have a program of working at it. Oh, when they're recruiting, sometimes I'll give them a call, whoever they're trying to recruit to encourage them to run.

C.H.: Were you encouraging anybody to run?

V.A.: I can't define it for you. I'm just giving you what I remember. Every once in a while a candidate might ask if I'd come to a fund-raiser or something like that, and if it's convenient I would go. But I wasn't deeply involved, or deeply enmeshed. Obviously I wanted to see Republicans take control if they could, but I wasn't the point person.

C.H.: One thing that was mentioned was your support of Senator Hatfield during the Sakos affair, where he was accused of being involved in, I believe, some real estate deals that his wife, Antoinette, had gotten involved with in her real estate business. Is there anything you could say about that?

V.A.: No. You know, bringing it more up to date, he got involved in the University of North Carolina. And I would say to you that my confidence in Mark Hatfield has been strong and unshaken. Mark Hatfield may have used some misjudgment, and even Mark Hatfield might have been even naive in some instances. But I would never believe for a minute he would deliberately do anything that is not legal or correct, and if I were to weigh whatever they accused him of - you spoke of one instance, I spoke of North Carolina - if I put that on a scale and measure that for what he's done for Oregon, and for the nation, that wouldn't even move the scale. The weight of what he's done for this country of ours, and the State of Oregon, is so much heavier than anything anyone might try to tarnish Mark Hatfield with.

C.H.: What do you consider his main accomplishments to be?

V.A.: Well, I'm going to be more amorphous to start with. First of all, I'm going to use the word integrity, in spite of the talk about scandals. He is really an upright and honest individual. He nurtured through - of recent events, he was pivotal on the timber relief. He was there on the wilderness area. There's

obviously the Health Science Center with all the things that are going on there, that Mark Hatfield's been intimately involved with, all of which is good for mankind, but also good for Oregon. I'm trying to remember his record; he's got a great record. He's highly regarded by his colleagues, which is a good measuring stick. He's been a legislator, secretary of state, governor, U.S. Senator. I don't know of anyone who's given that much public service in the history of Oregon.

C.H.: During the election, the papers also mentioned a rapprochement you had with the AFL-CIO and Herb Fletcher. How did that come about?

V.A.: You mean my getting angry with them?

C.H.: No, no. That you actually had a recovery from those incidents, that there was a bettering of your relationship with the AFL-CIO.

V.A.: Oh. Well, I can't answer that question - by memory, that is. You know, I never really felt angry. I was frustrated. Remember we talked about that earlier.

C.H.: That's right.

V.A.: And I said I don't have to talk to Irv. I think it was more media and Irv Fletcher than it was anything that I felt that strongly about.

C.H.: You also fought against the 1.5 percent property tax limit that was going on at the time.

V.A.: Right.

C.H.: But you had support that in 1978?

V.A.: I had said that I was going to vote for it. I said there was some problems with it, and that if it passed and I was elected, I would work to make the changes to correct it. It failed in '78, but you recall we talked about it, I came back with what I

felt were corrective measures that would relate to it. That never succeeded, either, but I kept that part of my promise.

That time it was really a big campaign. I was one of the points on that one. And it did fail, but by a very, very small margin. And my speech in 1985 said it's to the credit of Oregonians that this thing failed, but legislators, this is your last chance. That's in my '85 address to the legislature.

C.H.: Well, prophetic, looking back on it. How did you view the election results then, when they finally came in in 1984?

V.A.: Well, like all of them, I've never been 100 percent happy, but I'll never be 100 percent happy. Wouldn't that be wonderful some day, that everything that you wanted to happen during the course of an election came out exactly the way you wanted it?

C.H.: Yeah.

V.A.: It just doesn't happen that way.

C.H.: Just about that same time, there was a report that came out from the City Club of Portland, and it said Governor Vic Atiyeh should be more visibly involved in boosting economic development in Oregon, according to a City Club of Portland report, and that there was a lack of new public consensus for economic growth to replace the consensus for environmental protection in the early 1979 period is the single most important deterrent to coordinated action in economic development, the report emphasized. A desirable first step, for example, would be for Atiyeh to assume chairmanship of the Economic Development Commission, the committee urged. And apparently you were puzzled and bothered by this report. Looking in retrospect, I bet they regret ever having criticized you in the area. Things certainly changed after that.

V.A.: Well, I'm angry because you'd think - first of all, these are supposed to be bright people, they're supposed to be

aware people, number one. Number two, they never interviewed me in terms of coming to conclusions on this. As I had told you earlier, there was a lot of things that - this was one of my personal commitments, and we had already done a lot of things. For example, they say that I should take over the chairmanship. All of that's cosmetic stuff, and I wasn't interested in cosmetic stuff.

So we were working actually much harder, and maybe what it all washes down, and the historians write about Vic Atiyeh, there will be a lot of things that they won't write about. And if I were purely political or I'm thinking about being one of the great governors of all time, I didn't go about it the right way. And remember back to what's leadership and all the rest of that. I knew what had to be done, and went ahead and did it. To just take over a thing like economic development, that's just cosmetics, that doesn't get you anywhere. I was already the leader of economic development among those that needed to be knowledgeable about it. By that I mean my prospects, going to Japan, talking to people, having visiting delegations and talking to the teams of people that came in from Japan to see if they wanted to make investments. I was there. I was there every time, every single time, without fail. And as you know, we'll get into the trips and things like that. The organization of the Economic Development Department, land use planning, on and on we go. Unitary tax.

All of it was designed really to move us forward, and I would say to you, yes, you're right. If they would have had hindsight on that one, it would have been entirely different, because when I left office, that was one thing I really accomplished, and that was diversifying the economy of the State of Oregon. That happened. And it was proven by the recession that we went through where everybody was hurting in Oregon did very well.

C.H.: One of the first events that you did participate in was attending the reception with the Chinese premier, Zhao Ziyang, in San Francisco in January of 1984. What kinds of invitations did you get as governor that you might have turned down? Especially I'm thinking of humorous or ridiculous events.

V.A.: A humorous thing was Zhao Ziyang. Governor Deukmejian invited me to come down. They had - I've forgotten what it was - a business group, anyway, from California and the San Francisco area, and were their host the premier. And they had an afternoon session on business, and the premier was there - which I went to - and then that evening, there was a banquet. A big banquet.

But the humorous part was - I don't know if I covered that with you. Well, I'll probably repeat it if I did. I was sitting next to the premier. Sitting slightly in back of us and between us was the interpreter. So we had a conversation during the course of the banquet. And then I'm thinking about Ruby Lewis. Ruby - I was to collect autographs for Ruby, one things that I was doing over my tenure as governor, and I got her some good ones. All of a sudden, I say to myself, "You know, it would be kind of fascinating if I could get Zhao Ziyang's autograph."

So I asked the interpreter, "Does he give autographs?" And so she made the interpretation. Yeah, he'd do that. So Ruby Lewis has probably the only autograph of former premier Zhao Ziyang in who knows where. And I got that for Ruby. I felt real proud about that.

C.H.: How did you come to be collecting autographs for somebody else?

V.A.: Well, Ruby, she's a great person, she worked in my office. I had a great deal of - with all the people that I worked with - affection, and this was something of interest to her. And I'm exposed to Rich Little - which I got an autograph - Henry

Kissinger, I got an autograph, Carol Channing I got an autograph - anyway, I got a lot of them, I can't remember. Notable athletes. You know, governors get a chance to meet people like that. And so, I'd say to - I don't think I did this with Zhao Ziyang - but I'd say, "Would you put 'To Ruby'?" That was Ruby Lewis. To Ruby, and an autograph. So that's what I'd do. You know, in terms of autographs for me, people would come and say do you mind if I get your autograph. My answer was always the same: "I'd mind if you didn't want it."

C.H.: Well, as governor you must have gotten a lot of invitations to various kinds of events all over. What kinds of things did you go to, what kinds of things did you turn down?

V.A.: There were some things - I'm going to cover a field that's a little bit different, but the national governors would have two meetings a year; one would be in Washington D.C. and one would be some other state around the nation. I only went to one of those. That is, what I'll call a mid-year meeting. I didn't think a great deal of them. I did go. I didn't have a chance to talk to my colleagues, but we had Western Governors, and we had Republican Governors, and all of those I went to. But, you know, places that were going take time and just be social, I just didn't need that. I was busy and I didn't - so I wouldn't go to them. I just went to one. I actually wanted to go to two. I wanted to go to one in Portland, Maine, because Portland, Oregon, Portland, Maine. I wanted to go to that one, but I've forgotten what interceded. Maybe it'd been the Bagwhan or a Japanese delegation, I don't recall, but anyway, I didn't go.

So I went to one in - I think was South Carolina. It was 1986. There were people asking me questions like "What do you like about you job, and what do you dislike about your job?" And the reason I bring it up this way, my answer to dislike was always the

in Independence they have a celebration on the Fourth of July. They had this contest with elected officials, organic frisbees. Now what organic frisbees are, are dry cow pies. I'd say, "You guys really want to know if I'm serious about running for office." I'm out there tossing these cow pies around, organic frisbees. They get the politicians involved.

I was involved in a - what was it? - a turkey race, I think it was, in Klamath Falls. Again, they'd just get the politicians out there doing that.

It was kind of a wild thing. I recall down in Albany they had a celebrity animal show, where you'd show animals. And I'd gone to 4-H and Future Farmers, I watched them show cattle and watched them show sheep and pigs. Well, they had sheep and I watched the kids. I tell how would touch the sheep while they were handling it to kind of control them. A cow stepped on my foot.

But the pig, the pig is the hardest thing in the world to deal with. If you've ever watched them, they had these wooden canes. I really felt like I was going to whap that pig, but I thought, no, that wouldn't be very good for a politician to whap that pig.

I've been to destruction derbies - not destruction. Well, it was. Yeah, a destruction derby. Anyway, the winner - I got on the back end of their car and they drove around in the victory thing, and I'm hanging on. I can remember Lon and I, he was shaking his head. This governor's crazy, he's just crazy. But it was kind of fun. You're getting involved with what the people are involved with. Oh gosh, the things you do. I don't think I want to do the turkey thing again, and I wouldn't want to do the show thing again.

But it's still good. People like these things, and maybe - I never had that real sense of being embarrassed, you know: "Oh, if I do that I'm going to be embarrassed." I'd just kind of plunge in, and if I'm not good at it, how'd they expect a governor to be

good at it, you know? They have fun, and I really wasn't embarrassed. Just kind of get worked up into it and enjoy it. Have a good time at it.

C.H.: When you went down to see the Chinese premier, was there a purpose behind that trip other than just participating in it?

V.A.: No. That particular one, no. It turned out that later on when I did this in China, and I again met with him that we at least had that connection, but I didn't have that particularly in mind. It was a dignitary and Deukmejian was a friend of mine, and San Francisco was close, and all of those things. So I went down there for that.

C.H.: There were a lot of protesters at that event over situations in Taiwan and Tibet. Did you see any of that?

V.A.: No. No.

C.H.: Shortly after that, then, you made an announcement about a trip in September to the Far East, didn't you? Was that connected at all to your going down to San Francisco?

V.A.: No. All of these things we're thinking about working on, beginning to prepare. In 1984, we'd been working with Fujitsu. Going back, we'd call on some of the people that we hoped were prospects. We thought we had a chance for an announcement by Fujitsu. We'll get into that when we get to the trip. But no, the trip to San Francisco was not really connected. We'd been doing a lot of work all ahead of that.

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same. I dislike making decisions on my schedule. I'd about, oh, 130 requests a month to do something in Oregon, and obviously I can't do 130, so I'm going to have to tell some people no.

And I remember being on the other side of that, meaning I would invite a governor, and I can remember that my event was the most important event that was going on anywhere. And so I remember all of that. And so to decline was something I just didn't like to do. My secretary would bring in all these invitations, and I'm supposed to sit there and say, "Well, I'll do this, and I won't do that." And it was "I won't do that" that I disliked the most because again, as I say, I remember.

I can't define how I would make that decision. It never related to the size of a crowd. Some governors, some elected officials would relate it to how many people are going to be there. I'd never relate it that way. It may be proximity, maybe I can do two or three in one weekend, or you know, that kind of thing. And if I go one place, I can't go diagonally across the state to another one, that sort of thing. That's how those decisions would be made. I never believed the "how many" thing anyway. You know, they tell you, "We're going to have 400 people." Well, if they had maybe 75, that's pretty good. So the size didn't mean anything.

Clearly, the League of Oregon Cities, Association of Oregon Counties, that kind of thing I would attend, Oregon School Boards Association - those are things I would go to. Pendleton Roundup, that was always set aside. Rose Festival, that was always set aside. Those kinds of things. Try to find out in advance so we could put them on the schedule.

C.H.: Any bizarre or unusual invitations?

V.A.: Oh, I'm sure there must have been. Now you're really trying to jog my memory. There have been some things I have gone to, but - I was telling somebody the first time I ran for office,