

Tape 61, Side 2
September 10, 1993

CH This is an interview with Governor Atiyeh. This is Tape 61, Side 2.

VA You asked about advice. I guess the only thing I would really say is that I would like Oregonians to be a little more sophisticated in regard to, I'm going to say, politics. But I mean like Ballot Measure 5 kind of things. Superficially being swayed by silver-tongued politicians. You know, to say that, What I'm about to do is pretty darn serious, so I better pay a little bit of attention at this point in time.

Don't be embarrassed about being proud of the country, don't be embarrassed by saying that you're proud to be an American. Think just a little bit once in a while. I'm not asking Oregonians to make this a full-time study. Think every once in a while about the benefits we have. Think less about these are my rights and a little bit more about what are my responsibilities.

CH What advice would you give to aspiring politicians or public servants?

VA Same that I - that's easier, because I've said it a number of times. If you're in this for your ego or if you're in this because you want to improve your business, I'd just as soon you stayed out. If you're in this because you want to give something to Oregon, that you want to make Oregon a better state, then God bless you, and I hope you win.

CH Is there a way you could sum up your own personal philosophy of life or your spiritual beliefs?

VA No, I don't think so. I'll let somebody else do the summing.

I really have tried to live my life as straightforward and honestly as I could have. [I'll] continue that. I won't do anything - I won't try to do something indirectly I can't do directly. Certainly, I'll always respect other people. I may disagree with them. If I don't particularly like them, I don't get angry about it. That may be the last time I'll see them. Those are my choices.

But I think, really, life itself is less what have I gotten for me than what I have done for others. I think that's the greatest measurement, what have I done for others. That involves, you know, Boy Scouts, the Japan-America Society, being governor, or whatever. You don't - obviously, everyone isn't going to be governor, everyone isn't going to be in the legislature, everyone isn't going to be a mayor or a city councilman or a county commissioner, but isn't it wonderful we've got coaches for Little League, we've got Sunday school teachers, we've got people that - Meals on Wheels.

I still remember, I went down to a church in Salem one day. They invited me to have lunch at the place where the people could come and have lunch, and also the people come on - Meals on Wheels. That morning it turned very cold. It was icy out. I'm walking to the church very gingerly to go down the steps to go inside the building. And, yet, here the folks showed up on Meals on Wheels, and they were picking up the food and they were going to go out and deliver it. I mean, it was treacherous. This was not

kidding, it was real treacherous out there. Well, that's what I mean. That's the measuring of it.

I was just at the Fred Meyer Classic, and people volunteered to be marshals out there. That's not an easy job. I mean, sure, you get a shirt and a pair of pants and you get to go and see the great golfers, that's fine. But, my goodness, they're there, they pick up cigarette butts and paper and make sure that the people are treated well. But on and on it goes. You know, I can't go the whole litany of things.

Volunteerism is almost a unique thing in the United States. I've said people don't appreciate volunteers, and there is one way in which you can truly appreciate them, and, yet, it will never happen. And that is if all volunteers in the United States quit for one week. All volunteers quit for one week. Then you'd realize the impact of what they - but volunteers can't do that. They won't quit, they're going to keep going.

Well, I - I'm talking too long on it. I really believe that's part of the - that really the measure of life is not what have I acquired for myself, but what have I given to others. That's lasting.

CH How do you look upon this stage of life? What is this stage of life? [laughing] Some people get offended by senior citizen and things like that.

VA No, no, no, no. You can't help but count. You know darn well I'm at age seventy. You know you don't have another forty or fifty years, and so you know that within a relatively short period of time - who knows - that's all going to be done with. But I must say that I'm not - I

can't say, oh - you know, you sit back with a satisfied smile on your face and start kind of counting the gold. You know, I was governor, I was a senator, I was president of this or that or something. You know, the gold chest.

I'm satisfied that I conducted life as I think life should be conducted, although I'm not totally infallible. I'll still come back to the fact that I look back, when my children were growing and Dolores was doing the raising and I was doing all kinds of other things, and I say, Gee whiz, that wasn't right. This is not a blameless life of mine, I know that. But, still, I've conducted it better than most.

And maybe it's something that was in my mind. You know, a lot of people live and die and they - nobody ever knew they were on earth. Well, at least whenever they make a list of who the governors were, that name, Vic Atiyeh, is going to show up. You know, there's a mark there somewhere that indeed there was somebody by that name that was here on earth at one time. That's kind of nice to know. It doesn't do me any good once I'm planted, but it's nice to know we're leaving that behind. I think my children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, great great grandchildren, they'll be proud that their grandpa or great grandpa, or whoever it was, was governor of Oregon at one time. That's not bad.

CH Not to sound grim, and I've never asked this from anyone before, but [laughing] what would you like your obituary to say in the paper?

VA Oh. They'll say all kinds of things. It's interesting. I know that the obituary is basically written, because they know that that's a big event when a governor dies.

I really would hope, and I've said it before, I would hope that somebody would note that I really cared, really cared.

CH So you would like what, again?

VA That they would note that I really did care. I cared about people, cared about the state, I cared and loved my wife and my children. Not in a phony sense. I mean genuinely cared. That would be kind of nice if they would notice that.

CH Well, do you have anything else to add, to comment on, to say? Any other thoughts?

VA No, I - maybe a little insight as to what appeals to me.

CH Please.

VA I have this thing I call Whimsy, Wit, and Wisdom. Wouldn't it be kind of interesting - I don't know, maybe there's an insight here, but some of the things I've kept track of.

There are two kinds of people who don't say much: those who are quiet and those who talk a lot.

He's as memorable as Whistler's father.

Lincoln, he commented once, after listening to a lengthy speech, I never saw so many words compressed into so small an idea.

Power is not taken away from people, they abdicate it, they give it away.

Those are among the things I've got, these different things that...

CH These came from where?

VA Here, there, everywhere. Some are my thoughts, mostly, some maybe I heard from somebody else.

In a temple in northern Honshu, island of Japan, I wrote this down: The summer grass 'tis all that's left of an ancient warrior's dream. I thought that said a lot.

Direct your efforts more to preparing youth for the path and less to preparing the path for the youth. That was Judge Ben Lindsay[?] had said that.

There is one that I really thought was great. Oh, I like these little jokes. Under communism you have to wait fifteen years to buy a car. With capitalism you get the car right away, but it takes fifteen years to pay for it.

What's the difference between communism and capitalism? In capitalism man exploits man, under communism it's the other way around.

I met a young lady at a conference where it was - it happened to be a Middle East type conference. She said, I went to Israel and came back from Palestine.

And Lincoln, of course. This is really good. By assuring the freedom of the slave we assure the freedom of the free.

I've got notes on what the national debt is and how huge it is.

There was one here that I thought was particularly good. It happened to be Martin Luther King.

While I'm looking for it, An Indian treaty is not a grant of rights to the Indians but a grant of rights from

them. That's the U.S. Supreme Court.

It's easier to cool a zealot than warm a corpse.

Another one I can recall is that it is better to - this was a black man giving a speech. It is better to say "I are rich" than "I am poor."

And Clark Kerr said, In dealing with their own problems faculty members are the most extreme conservatives. In dealing with other people's problems, they're the world's most extreme liberals.

This is interesting. Doing for people what they can and ought do for themselves is a dangerous experiment. In the last analysis the welfare of the workers depends upon their own initiative. Whatever is done under the guise of philanthropy or social morality which in any lessens initiative is the greatest crime that can be committed against the toiler. That social busybodies and professional public morals experts in their fads reflect on the perils they rashly invite under this pretense of social welfare.

Now, having read that to you, the person that said it was Samuel Gompers, the father of the American labor movement.

The Lord's prayer has fifty-six words, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address has 266 words, the Ten Commandments have 297 words, the Declaration of Independence has 300. A recent U.S. government order setting the price of cabbage has 26,911 words [laughs].

When we take man as he is, we make him worse. When we take man as if he were already what he should be, we promote him to what he can be. That's Goethe.

But I'm still trying to find - I've got one, why are there more Democrats, but - [laughs].

Yeah, this one. Maybe it relates to me and who I am,

how I deal with politics. A man was asking the manager of Willy Hoppy[?], that great and perennial billiard champion, How come Willy always wins his matches? Simple, said the manager. His opponent is always playing Willy, and Willy is always playing billiards.

That's how, I guess, you keep your eye on the ball.

Well, gosh, it was a good one, and I kept it.

Another thing that I think you've heard. I've said it many times. A person understands the meaning of life when they plant a tree under the shade of which they know they will never sit.

Well, I'll be darned.

CH This stretches out over a number of years, I take it.

VA Oh, my, yes. Oh, yes.

CH Do you think you'll ever publish it as a collection of sayings?

VA Oh, I don't know if anybody would by - maybe. It runs the gamut of things. Some jokes, some things that have - here we are.

This is Dr. Martin Luther King. On some positions cowardice asks the question, is it safe. Expediency asks the question, is it politic. Vanity asks the question, is it popular. But conscience asks the question, is it right. There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe nor politic nor popular, but he must take it because conscience says it is right.

Now, that's good stuff.

No farmer ever plowed a field by turning it over in his

mind.

We are all made of the same clay, but a jug is not a vase.

It's like putting your ear to the ground in the middle of a buffalo stampede.

Well, anyway, there's more of this sort of thing.

Be modest. A lot was accomplished before you were born.

CH It's like a saying I saw in a U.S. post office yesterday that said, Be patient for what you do not have and be thankful that you're not getting what you deserve.

VA You know, these are marvelous little tidbits, and I pick them over from time to time.

Here's one I just recently sent to - oh, Winston Churchill. Some see private enterprise as a predatory target to be shot, others as a cow to be milked. But a few see it as a sturdy horse pulling the wagon. That's not bad.

And, then, my friend George Shaw, the great quarterback, he says, I started out with nothing, and I have most of it left [laughs].

CH Is that the way you feel?

VA No. But, you know, you hear something, and you write it down. Some make me laugh, like that one just made you laugh and made me laugh. So I keep track of stuff like that.

Everything isn't heavy with morality. I've got here the Clinton cabinet: transportation is Ted Kennedy, housing is Leona Helmsley, and labor is Anita Hill, defense is

Rodney King. So I've got stuff like that. The family adviser is Woody Allen, treasurer is Charles Keating.

So there's stuff in there just because it's kind of funny.

Ah, this is it. Garrison Keilor, is that how he pronounces it?

CH Yes. "Prairie Home Companion."

VA Some luck lies in not getting what you thought you wanted but getting what you have, which, when you've got it, you may be smart enough to see it is what you would have wanted had you known.

So, it's a long way of saying that you really are probably better off than you think you are.

And, then, Debbs Potts said, Good judgment comes from experience, and experience, well, that comes from poor judgment [laughs].

Well, you don't want to spend the whole tape on it, but that's a smattering of things that - some are funny, some have a message.

CH Anything else you'd like to share?

VA No. [laughing] I think we've shared as much as I think anybody could tolerate.

CH Oh, I'm sure you have a lot more to say if given the opportunity.

VA I don't know about that. I will say, for the tape, it's been a real pleasure, and I mean it. And you leave

that on the tape. And I'm impressed with the homework that you've done prior to the time we have interviews, which shows you put a lot of work in getting ready to talk to me. And I would also say for the tape I feel very sorry for you, whoever is transcribing this thing.

CH Well, thank you very much for your cooperation on this and all the time that you've put in on this. It's a lot to expect from anyone, and it will be a valuable resource for many people for years and years to come.

VA It will be interesting to see what happens with it. People look through it. I know that whoever listens to it will say, Well, that's his opinion.

Maybe I would say one final thing that I've said many times, and I think I said it on the tape. Don't read between the lines. George Bush said, Read my lips. You know, too often people will say, Well, that's what he said, but this is what he meant. No, I said what I meant.

CH Well, thank you for saying it.

VA You're welcome.

End of tape 41, side 2.

[End of interview]