

VICTOR ATIYEH  
July 24, 1993  
Tape 49, Side 2

C.H.: This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh. This is Tape 49, Side 2.

V.A.: It's an invasion of the responsibility of a governor and the prerogatives of a governor, and it is not the proper role for another elected official to be making that determination.

C.H.: Was there any kind of feeling that performance was somehow connected to economic fiscal affairs?

V.A.: Yeah, that's the idea, but the point is again that's subjective. But I still say I really believe very much, strongly believe, that - Harry Truman used it very succinctly which is the buck stops here - but the point is the governor is responsible, the governor is responsible - Neil Goldschmidt went through a real mess in human resource, and he had the director, Freddy - Anyway, they were talking about how she was wasteful with money and the thing wasn't operating right. Goldschmidt kept ducking all the time, and it was all hers. I mean, it laid on her. Now she was not a good administrator. She's a very nice person, a very nice person, I like her, but she was not a good administrator. But that's Neil's fault, he put her there. And so what I was saying, I would have felt the same thing. It would have been my fault, not Joe or Sally or Mary or Jim or whoever. It's the governor, the governor's the one that's responsible. I never believed in ducking out. So, getting back to what we were talking about, this performance audit is a subjective thing. It is not precise science. And that's a determination the voters should make and not another elected

official. Now subsequently that now is a law. Performance audit is by the secretary of state's office. I haven't heard anything about it but I'd have to tell you that the secretary of state's a Democrat and the governor's a Democrat. So I would expect that if there's a Republican governor and a Democrat secretary of state, we'll probably hear more about it.

C.H.: You also vetoed the Shield Bill. I presume that was the Dalkon Shield.

V.A.: Oh, yeah. That really got to what I called - what's the terminology for that? <sup>PRODUCT LIABILITY</sup> Well, I'll think of it. But the whole idea is applying today's standards to yesterday's product. Product liability, that was it. That relates to the whole area of product liability and how far - What this bill was doing is allowing you to go back further in your ability to sue. That's what the bill was doing. And I just didn't think that was the right thing to do.

C.H.: And you vetoed a bill that would have set guidelines for state purchases of video display terminals?

V.A.: Yeah. Here again they were meddling - In my memory there was some thought that they video display terminal was bad and it was an awful thing to do and we ought to write some kind of guidelines, and here again, we were doing that. Actually had our own investigation going, and it was one of those things that we didn't need a law on. I was just thinking, as we dealt with Dalkon Shield and apartheid and the vetoes, and you understand now when I say that friends may come and friends may go but enemies accumulate. You can see how I accumulated some.

C.H.: Did you come up with that?

V.A.: It's been so long since I've been saying it it's hard for me to remember where it came from.

C.H.: Also there was a veto of legislation to limit police authority to use deadly force?

V.A.: It was limiting the police's authority. Again, the law enforcement is a very responsible body of people. We have an academy, you have to today to be a law enforcement officer really almost have to have a college degree to be one. And you have to go to the law enforcement academy, which is now in Monmouth. There are mistakes and they are humans and they do make mistakes, but to lay a sort of heavy duty another impediment on law enforcement was unnecessary.

C.H.: Was that around particular issues?

V.A.: Oh, it may have been, I don't remember.

C.H.: There was also a bill that you vetoed which would have banned paid initiative petitioners.

V.A.: Yeah, remember we talked about that earlier. I'm not hung up about whether petitioners are paid or unpaid.

C.H.: What was your assessment of the last session of yours?

V.A.: Oh, I think slightly contentious. It was an ~~airage~~<sup>AVERAGE</sup> session, nothing brilliant, nothing great. We still didn't solve the property tax issue that was still lingering. We talked about that. To that extent it was a failure. As it turned out it would be a major failure because we now have Ballot Measure 5 because nothing was done.

C.H.: I'm not sure if this particular incident was talked about before or not. I noticed a news article that said you had made a complete recovery from an illness the doctors believed was caused by an adverse reaction to antibiotic medicine he had been taken. Rumors Atiyeh was suffering from a serious illness.

V.A.: That was one of those times when I told you earlier how do you go to the press and tell them you're not going to die. I'm not even sure they really finally decided it was all about. Just wasn't feeling well. I did mention, I think I mentioned, that Dolores had said to me and Denny Miles thought about it that it may have something to do with the, you know, the Bahgwan was out doing things to people. I'm not sure, there's no proof of any of that.

C.H.: But that was happening at the same time.

V.A.: That was happening at the same time, yeah.

C.H.: Actually, maybe we could go on to Rajneesh, now that you mention it. That was happening over a long period of time that you were dealing with Rajneesh.

V.A.: I thought to myself time and again, you know, with the recession that we had and the things we were trying to do in terms of building up the state and diversifying the economy, but particularly the recession which was pretty burdensome on Oregonians. We really didn't need the Bahgwan also. You know, if you have one at a time, but to get the double load was something. And the Rajneesh were very abrasive people. Very. And Oregonians were appropriately very angry. They were insulting, they were terrible to the people in the city of Antelope. They were just not nice people.

C.H.: Maybe we could go back a little bit and review how they ended up here. What was the background?

V.A.: The Bahgwan was looking for some land.

C.H.: He was in India and looking for some land.

V.A.: Well, no, in the U.S. The Bahgwan was from India.

C.H.: He was forced to leave India. I think he was forced to leave for tax reasons, wasn't he?

V.A.: It was interesting when he finally went back. There were a lot of cities in India - they could kick him out, we can't in a democracy, but they can do that. - They were looking for some land. If I recall, there were parcels in Texas and somewhere else. But anyway, this parcel of land up near the city of Antelope became available. It could have happened in Texas, it could have happened I don't where else they were looking. It did happen because they found a piece of land in Oregon and they bought it. That's how they came. It's been a total puzzlement to me all these years that so many talked about - they all took new names, but they were accountants and lawyers and doctors, you know, professional people - how in the world they give over their life to somebody else was something I could not imagine why someone would do that. But they were very obnoxious, very abrasive, very insensitive. They just rubbed Oregonians the wrong way.

C.H.: Wasn't one of the first episodes that because a conflict start with their desire to establish a publishing plant for the publishing of Shree Bahgwan Rajneesh's books, and that was thwarted because of the zoning of the land use designation. It was designated for agriculture, and also it was not in an incorporated area. Wasn't that the first?

V.A.: See, that surrounds the whole issue of our land use law. At the later stages is where they did this bargaining with me and we told them the governor doesn't bargain. They were in court. But they were doing everything they can. First they took over the city of Antelope, and we talked about that, didn't we. Remember we talked about them not getting cigarette money and liquor revenues, and you asked me how come, and I said they took over the city of Antelope, which was an incorporated city.

C.H.: I'm just looking at it from a devil's advocate point of view. They were trying to have a self-contained community on their land. This was not because of there were certain business applications that they were trying to do there. It was therefore deemed illegal because of the zoning and the land use. You had said in our last session I believe it was that if a people in a certain area want to be able to have some kind of use for that land, they should be allowed to have that. But since they were not allowed to incorporate in that area, then they had invested so much money in that land already - I think they were putting in \$64 million ...

V.A.: They put a lot of money into it.

C.H.: ... that then the only way they could survive as a unit would be by taking over the nearest closest town which this town of Antelope which had like 48 people in it.

V.A.: First of all, maybe you misunderstood. I don't think I said this is my land, I can do anything I want with it, because I did say that I do believe in land use planning, which means that somebody has to give up something. What I was saying, the people came out here and they treasured their land and they had this attitude. This is my castle, you know, this is mine. There was that possessiveness which I understood. But I also said - and now it relates to the Bahgwan - that the laws would be applied evenly. The temptation was to apply them unevenly.

C.H.: Do you think if they had been left alone like they really wanted to be left alone, at least the feeling was that they were looking for a very isolated place in Texas or Oregon, a place where they could be all by themselves in one unit far away from everybody else, that if they weren't forced to seek some kind of

remedy outside their boundaries that they would have just been left alone and not caused any problems.

V.A.: They said they wanted to be left alone. But they didn't do anything that would indicate that that's indeed what they wanted. At one point they were going to take over the county. That was their avowed purpose, to take over the county.

C.H.: Because they weren't getting their way?

V.A.: You see, basically I'm saying is they were trying to do some things. Actually they were working at the margin of the law. They didn't step over. They tried to step over and actually were in the courts because of it, but they kept pushing the law as far as they could push it, and to say that okay, here are these people, they want to just be left alone, and so now will you please change your land use laws to fit them - that is not an even application of the law.

C.H.: But what about other newly planned units that say - and I'm not sure whether this applies or not, but take Charbonneau Village, for instance. If Charbonneau Village wanted to create its own entity and here it is surrounded by farmland and they just want to be left alone and they are a very tight, insular community, they're allowed to do so. But here the planning commission said they had to attach themselves to an incorporated area and the nearest incorporated area was Antelope, you're forcing them at that point, legally, in order to exist where they want to exist, you're forcing them to go to Antelope and take Antelope over because that's the nearest incorporated area.

V.A.: I hear what you're saying, and my sigh comes about from the fact that they were not subtle about taking it over. They had guns and they were intimidating and if they had said look, we've

got this, we're peaceful people, we want to leave people alone, we think you're wonderful, the state says - there's ways of doing this in a less abrasive way than they were doing it.

C.H.: I think everybody agrees that they were very abrasive and very obnoxious in the way that they went about doing things, and I think that even part of their philosophy was to be iconoclastic, to destroy sacred images, to destroy established reputations of things. So I think you're really right in that area. But I think that the guns and things that became very intimidating came a little later when there was this big reaction by first the local community and then the larger state community to somehow confront them, which seemed to them to be some kind of a threat which they thought there might be reactionary forces which might necessitate that they protect themselves and have guns. I don't think that happened when they first took over Antelope, did it?

V.A.: I can't recall the timing, how it evolved. I would say to you however, as you describe the situation, and I understand, you're not arguing in their behalf, that they were the confrontational people. Oregonians weren't the confrontational people. If you were to listen to the people, for example, in Antelope, they didn't go out and get guns to defend themselves against the gun-carrying Rajneesh. They were really afraid. They were intimidated. Badly intimidated. The intimidation actually took place by the Rajneesh. They became quite cocky, pushy, or whatever term you want to use. We can do whatever we want, we're the Rajneesh, that kind of an attitude. And I don't know if they would have gotten their way in a more orderly, peaceful, amenable way of doing business. I don't know if they would or wouldn't. I would say to you that I think government acted very, very responsibly in the



sense that they weren't saying no you can't do this because wear red clothing and have beads and whatever else. They were saying this is the law and you have to follow the law.

C.H.: But I think some people saw Antelope and the citizens of Antelope as being the victims between this conflict of land use laws being applied in such a manner that did not allow the Rajneeshis to use their land in the way they wanted to, and Antelope just happened to be there, and they ended up overrunning Antelope for that reason.

V.A.: That could very well be. There's so much - But there was terrible torment going on. Near the end as you recall they brought in these homeless and then dumped them in the city of Portland.

C.H.: When they first took over Antelope, as they were taking over Antelope, they set up new businesses, didn't they, in Antelope. And then they had people on the school and councils -

V.A.: They just ran the city the way they wanted to run it.

C.H.: And then when they took over the town, they renamed it Rajneeshpurim. Then there was a defamation suit by Antelope residents and it lost, I think, in Multnomah County Circuit Court. Do you know why it lost?

V.A.: No, I don't. But certainly if you needed any proof that law was been applied evenly, even in the face of anger, that was proof by itself. And they had a hotel down here in Portland. They had their printing shop here in Portland somewhere.

C.H.: And they had a restaurant here too, in fact right around the corner, didn't they? A little restaurant up there where the New York pizza place is.

V.A.: It could be. I wasn't here at the time, I was in Salem.

C.H.: That's right. Some of the other issues that came up during that time was that they had a meeting hall which then the state wanted to tax at \$1.1 million, and they were given permission only to use it as a greenhouse, and it violated zoning to use the thing as a meeting hall. There was a question as to whether it should be tax-exempt or not, being a religious organization and a question as to whether it was a religious building. Do you remember that at all?

V.A.: Yeah. But do you recall we were talking about land use planning and I was telling you that it just didn't make any sense at all that here's a farmer on his 320 acres, or whatever he had, and that his son couldn't build a house on that farmland? Okay, the reason I'm giving you that, because I talked about it, is that there were land use laws, like them or not, and what could go or not go on certain agricultural - certainly in agricultural zone, it was pretty specific what could go - everything else can't go - in an agricultural area. And so they get caught up into the same thing as this farmer where his son can't build a house on.

C.H.: But they felt that the land really was not of much agricultural value, that they tried to improve the land. They put in reservoirs, they tried to improve the soil, but it wouldn't grow anything.

V.A.: Don't you remember I told you about agricultural land with rocks on it?

C.H.: Yeah, I know!

V.A.: Okay, and so we're not talking about whether this law had any common sense to it. The fact is that it was there and the

fact is that that's what it was called. And they're no different. I made it very clear to Oregonians there is no special treatment either for the Bahgwan - there were people thought that the Rajneesh were getting special treatment. The laws were going to be equally applied. And I said this is a great practice in what democracy is all about. I don't like them. Oregonians didn't like them. But that's not enough to kick them out. You either believe in a democracy or you don't believe in it. This is an order in which you deal things as they appropriately should be dealt with. I don't know whether I said it or not, but somebody said you've gotta do something about these people, meaning kick them out. And I said I'm not sure you want me to have that authority. Because if I do, who's next?

C.H.: That's right.

V.A.: I know I think I did say, because we touched on the Bahgwan about the guns. You know, they're driving around with the guns. And I said, what do you want me to do? Every pickup truck's got a gun hanging off the back rack. Some people can have guns and others can't have guns? It was not easy and a lot of Oregonians in their anger, and I understand it, said do you know the governor is not doing anything about the Rajneesh? But the fact is that we were, we were watching it, we did a lot of things. We'll talk about it, I suppose, when we get the opportunity. Because they were a threat, I think, to the peace and safety of not only themselves but of Oregonians.

C.H.: But to a certain extent they did try to operate within the framework and kept on being rejected.

V.A.: Within the framework as they saw it. You see, it had to have their spin to it. Not what anyone would consider the normal spin.

C.H.: They did submit a city plan to Wasco County Court in July of 1984. After that was rejected they appealed to ~~LUBA~~ <sup>LAND USE BOARD OF APPEALS</sup> and they remanded the matter to the county on November 2nd. But Wasco County in December declared 640 illegal winterized tents - didn't declare they were illegal, the tents had utilities and solid walls and the planner there, Dan Dureau, had been thwarted at previous attempts to inspect the place. They wouldn't let him come onto the land. So there was just this building up of hostility really on both sides. I mean, both sides really felt that they were really being threatened. And then apparently I guess Wasco County Judge William Holst said he became violently ill the previous summer after drinking water offered him by Rajneeshis along with two commissioners on the visit. Was that the first incident that maybe sort of they might be in poisoning?

V.A.: It was evidence and then of course the salmonella down in The Dalles.

C.H.: That was in restaurant? They thought it might have been a salad bar or something like that.

V.A.: Yeah, it was a restaurant in The Dalles, that's right.

C.H.: Were they ever able to directly connect that to Rajneeshis?

V.A.: Yes. Yes.

C.H.: There was another problem because the BLM fire crews were not allowed onto the land to put out a fire that was there. And there was a civil dispute over their ranch with their former foreman, Robert Harvey. It seems like there's just all these

things that happened around that it must just sort of really tumultuous time.

V.A.: It was terrible.

C.H.: There was a terrible over the Rajneeshi's importation of thousands of street people interpreted by opponents as an effort to increase their voting strength for the November 6th elections.

V.A.: That was part of their plan.

C.H.: I remember that they were bussing homeless people from Portland and other places.

V.A.: They got them from back east. And these poor souls were being brought over here and they said well, you can stay or whatever you want to do, and if they didn't want to stay, then they'd dump them here in Portland. And I kept saying publicly, you brought them out, you have a responsibility to send them back. But in the meantime we couldn't let the homeless be the victim, so we got some money and got some to Salvation Army and quietly the Salvation Army but I never told the Rajneesh about that because I wanted to keep the pressure on them. And they never knew that. They never knew what we were doing.

C.H.: There was also issues of immigration fraud, weren't there?

V.A.: Yes, and that's where of course the Bahgwan finally got caught up.

C.H.: Fraudulent visa applications and marriages and things like that.

V.A.: All kinds of things, and you know, they may have perceived themselves to be pure as the driven snow, but the fact is that they had their way and if they couldn't get their way then they were going to get upset and then we were taking advantage of

them, and the point was that they were being treated just exactly the same. You get back to these tents on the land. Let me give you this example again of the father whose son can't build a house on his farmland. And here they were building tents and thought that was perfectly okay. Or building houses. And then they did obscene things like 87 or 93, I don't know where it ended up, Rolls Royces. You know, that's kind of obscene.

C.H.: But of course that's democracy, right?

V.A.: That's democracy.

C.H.: But they weren't taking care of the homeless people much.

V.A.: They weren't taking care of them at all.

C.H.: Maybe we could just touch on the key players a little bit in this. There was Shree Bahgwan Rajneesh, who was the religious leader and he was seeking permanent residence for medical reasons, I believe, and as a religious leader, in the U.S. Then there was Ma Anan Sheela, and she was the president of the Rajneesh Foundation International. She was the one that became the most ..

V.A.: She was the mouthpiece.

C.H.: She was the mouth.

V.A.: The mouth.

C.H.: And she was the one that caused the most problems for people, didn't she.

V.A.: Yeah. I can't give you the names of all the players. By that I mean I have heard the names, but when the meetings took place I never meet with them. <sup>GERRY</sup> Jerry Thompson and Bob Oliver did. So they got to know these people by face and by name. Obviously Sheela was on the front page of the newspaper. I'm trying to think

of the man's name, he was one of the leaders as well. It was another woman and a man.

C.H.: There was a Yoga Vidja who was president of Rajneesh Purim International Commune - maybe that was the other man. What was your involvement as governor? What kinds of things were you doing and when did it first come to your attention?

V.A.: Oh hell, it came to attention rather quickly. And all of these things that took place in Antelope. You couldn't go to the airport without seeing their red clothes and beads. And you know, there was no way of escaping where these people were. I was in The Dalles one time, where was it, as close as I came. They came in the front door and I went out the back. Saw them coming in.

C.H.: Were they coming in for you?

V.A.: No, no. They were coming.

C.H.: Were you afraid they might recognize you?

V.A.: No, I just didn't want to meet with them. The point was, in my mind, is that I didn't want to give them any more *credibility*

[End of Tape 49, Side 2]