

VICTOR ATIYEH  
August 10, 1993  
Tape 52, Side 1

C.H.: This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland, Oregon. The date is August 10, 1993, the interviewer for the Oregon Historical Society is Clark Hansen, and this is Tape 52, Side 1.

You were just telling me about some of the things that have transpired in the last couple weeks since I've seen you, and you started mentioning something about a reunion of your staff?

V.A.: Yes. When I left office - well, while I was Governor, I kept saying to myself, "You know, I'm really lucky. I've got some very fine people working with me." And now I'm talking about the Governor's Office.

C.H.: Right.

V.A.: Oh, I was thinking, you know, here we didn't know each other, and then I became Governor, and then we gathered this team together, and they were all neat people, and then when I left office we all, you know, scattered. So we decided we were going to have a reunion. Well, we've had a reunion every year since I left office, with the exception of last year. We just skipped last year.

But after about three of those, I thought, "Gee whiz, an awful lot of good directors of state government, I'd like to see them again." So we've included them.

So anyway, yesterday, Sunday, was the reunion. It was really neat. You know, everybody couldn't make it, and you can't expect that, but oh, I don't know, they probably had about 50 people there. A lot of staff members, some directors of state government.

It was just really a neat deal. We had hamburgers and potato chips and that sort of thing, and pop and beer and ice cream.

C.H.: So who was there? <sup>Golly</sup>Jeri Thompson and Pat Amadeo?

V.A.: Actually, it was at <sup>Golly</sup>Jeri Thompson's house, in the back yard. She put up a tent, but it turned out we didn't need the tent for rain, but we kept it to keep the sun off. What a summer we've had!

But yeah, <sup>Golly</sup>Jeri Thompson was there, Pat Amadeo, who was - remember I told you my organization was my chief of staff and two main assistants; Pat was one of them, and Bob Oliver was the other, and he was there. Oh, we had some of the secretaries in the back office, and our director of human resources, Leo Hegstrom, was there. The adjutant general, Dick Miller was there. Gosh, I'm trying to remember. It's kind of a scattering of - oh, Tom <sup>Tombs</sup> Tombs [ph] of corrections, he was there. Among others.

It was just - it was wonderful to kind of see the folks again and you know, what's happening in their lives. It was very casual, sitting around and chatting from here to there. It was a lot of fun. I snuck in the house every once in a while to watch the PGA tournament. Dolores came in, I was in the house there, and she said, "Hey, all the guests are outside."

I said, "I've said hello to all of them." I said, "I've just been here five minutes. Leave me alone."

She was worried about, you know, making sure that I was going to talk to everybody. But it was really nice because they're really wonderful people that have done a fine job, did a super job, really, all of them.

So that's done.

So you know, it's grand to think about it. There was a lot of loyalty. People did enjoy what they were doing. They did a really good job. We worked them hard. But they had a great sense of

satisfaction out of being part of the administration, and I had a great sense of appreciation for the good work they did.

C.H.: And this is something you'll be doing every year, then?

V.A.: Yeah. It's hard to tell, you know, how long. I think they like it; I really do. You know, you worry are they coming just because I invited them? You know, you think about things like that.

But no, I think that they enjoyed it, appreciated it and had a good time.

C.H.: Well, you were mentioning something off tape just before we started, and I wanted to follow up on that. Last session we talked about some of your trips to Taiwan and Japan and Korea and Syria, and then you just mentioned a few minutes ago about the group of people getting together for Wasada ~~Inc~~ University, and I don't know if you've talked about that, but that's quite a positive development for Oregon, isn't it?

V.A.: That actually kind of cranked up after I left office. But Wasada University is a leading private college in Japan. These are the things that young kids - you know, they study hard in grade school, and I guess they call it high school, but the whole point was to get into a prestigious university. That's what you're working for because that carries great currency in Japan. Wasada is one of those. It's one of the top in this case private universities.

Well, they were looking around for an offshore campus, offshore U.S., they were looking at Germany, I think one other place, I'm not sure. But then they finally concluded, well, it was going to be U.S., at least the first one would be U.S., and then there was - you know, competition to see if they would - which state would encourage them to come, and it finally got down to Oregon and California, and Oregon did a much better job, and now

it's down to Oregon. Now, they have not yet announced for their campus. This is like watching grass grow. I tell you, this is a slow process, slower than a normal Japanese process because you've got the typical higher education thing, the faculty that's got to agree - you know, it's one of those things. But I'm positive it will happen, and I'm positive that one day in the not too distant future they will establish a campus in Oregon, probably in the metropolitan area.

We've run for two years now a - oh, let me call it a pilot program. They've actually had Japanese and American students, they've had Japanese and American professors, and they've had a summer program. And in both cases it was at Lewis & Clark College, just to give them a feel of what this is all about and how it was going to work.

So we are in line for it, and Wasada will do it, but it hasn't yet happened.

C.H.: Will that mean a big boon for the possibility of Japanese companies locating here?

V.A.: I would think so. They have to decide what they want to do - they, Wasada. I think they've been thinking about some undergraduate, some graduate, that would be with their campus. It would be our hope, because there is a high school with Wasada, that they would establish high school, or a secondary school. That would be more helpful because then as they do the Japanese come, they stay here for a while, and then they go back home.

I know of one case, one of the managers of a Japanese company - actually he was separated from his family for a long period of time because his children were growing, they were going to grad school, and he wanted to make sure that they kept pace so that they could go into a good school. And so they were Japan and he was here. And that's tough duty, you know, to do that.

So it's our hope, and I think Wasada knows it, that at some point in time they would have secondary education, and that would be more helpful.

Right now they're not looking at secondary education?

V.A.: That apparently is not their - again, they haven't made any final decisions, but that doesn't seem to be the way they're going at the time, for the present moment.

C.H.: They're looking for more of a college level?

V.A.: Yeah. And it gets down to, you know, what's in their best interest and what's in our best interest. We've been pretty honest with them, that we would like to have that. That would be in our best interest. But that doesn't seem to be the way they're going at the present time, but again, no final decisions have been made as to the content of what they're going to do and even where they'll do it.

C.H.: There was some concern that the Japanese locating here wouldn't be able to educate their family to the standards that they needed for them to continue over there.

V.A.: Yeah. So that would be very helpful, if that's the case. That's why Wasada - well, it would be two things. First of all, it's a prestigious one, and it would be known in Japan that it happens to be in Oregon; that's another good tie. And then in relationship to those Japanese that come here, if there's some value they could get out of a Japanese university, that would be helpful.

So altogether it's a good stroke. We created a committee - actually, this began with Neil Goldschmidt, but I have to admit I got a little testy about the whole thing because I was on the committee, he's the one that kind of cranked it up, but I'm the only one that was going to meetings. When I say "only," I mean he wasn't at any meetings. And wait a minute, this is his baby, you

know, and I'm working hard at doing it, and delegations would come, and I'd go to the Japanese gardens to the meeting, and he's not anywhere - wait a minute.

So finally I was on the board, he was an honorary member of the board. I thought, "Well, wait a minute." So I finally said to him, "Look, I'd just as soon be an honorary member of this board." I didn't say why I said it. I was getting a little testy about the whole thing. It's one of these things he cranks it up, and then you go do it. And I said, "The heck with it."

But we did, we had a good group of people, leading citizens. I think that's helpful, that made them feel and continue to feel that they were wanted.

C.H.: Would these school only be for Japanese students?

V.A.: Probably mostly for Japanese, but certainly I think they would be open. That's why they're mixing them right now in their pilot programs.

C.H.: So Americans could attend as well?

V.A.: Some, yes.

C.H.: Going on to these other sort of disparate areas of concerns and issues that didn't necessarily come out of the legislature but that you had to deal with as Governor, there was a criticism by the *Oregonian* that you and also previous governors did not pursue the long-range planning efforts that had been launched by McCall, and to some extent Straub, and they said that Oregon under your administration was only one of five states in the nation that employs no one person or agency to make long-range plans for state government as a whole. States become progressive and remain so when their chief political leaders strive to be visionary.

I imagine that's kind of difficult for you to hear?

V.A.: Yes. We've talked about it before. You know, what's visionary? I don't know what they mean by visionary. I recall

earlier saying that we'd diversify the economy; that's solid, that's ongoing, that's permanent, that's with us. If they want us to shoot rockets in the air, that being visionary, well, I have to agree that I was not visionary.

You know, if I were a governor that was sensitive to what the media said, I'd remember those things. Tom McCall would have remembered them. Maybe Bob Straub. But I don't. I knew what my course was. I knew what I wanted to do. You know, the *Oregonian* can say something, the *Register Guard* can say something, *Willamette Week* could say something, the *Statesman Journal* could say something, any of the television stations could say something; that's their opinion. See, you've got them coming in from all directions.

The point is that you can get diverted from what you want to do if you kept reading the newspaper or listening to television news or radio news. The point is that I knew where we wanted to go and what was important for the state of Oregon. What did they mean? I have no idea. They certainly liked the whole idea of scooping up the Willamette River with a strainer and cleaning it up. Land use planning, I suppose that's visionary.

But you know - let's just take land use planning, which of course is, that's long-range, and that's for our future, but isn't diversifying the economy the future as well? Isn't the regional power bill, Columbia River Gorge - I have to think of a few other things - don't they fit in that same category?

I guess basically what it comes down to, that it was all done without a flair. It wasn't done - this all happened. I mean, I knew what I wanted to do, I didn't do the cosmetic things of task forces and blue ribbons this and all the rest of that. We just went ahead and did it. So you didn't do it with flair. You did it. So maybe visionary means whatever you do you've got to do it with red, white and blue ribbons and spangles and fireworks. To

me, I didn't care. All the cosmetic stuff was of no interest to me. All I was interested in is: is it going to happen?

C.H.: What about this aspect of having a person or an agency in charge of long-term planning?

V.A.: That's just wasteful. Going to cost you money. Who? I mean, what person? What office? What are they going to do? Are they going to come up with their vision of Oregon's future? I think there was a good study group of citizens in the Portland area that was coming up with a long-range plan, but I don't know if anybody's following it. But that's better, that's at least a more diverse group of people which we're getting for nothing.

C.H.: Is that the Future Focus that you're referring to?

V.A.: I guess so. It was one that was going on in Portland.

C.H.: Well, there was a Central City plan that was developed, and then more recently there has been the Future Focus.

C.H.: That's right. There was one at the state level, yeah. I don't know what's happened to it. Oftentimes, you know, when these things are done, whoever was the one that initiated it and thought it was a good idea but then it's put on a shelf somewhere. I remember the focus - you had to have certain focus things and how many jobs you're going to have and how many this you're going to have - you know, a whole lot of things - and then you could measure whether you're matching up.

Not a bad idea. But I don't know if you can do things any better. All you really need is someone that does understand the state, understand what was good for the state, at least from that person's viewpoint, and go ahead and do it.

C.H.: I would presume that all of your agencies had plans and planning aspects to their programs and long-range plans of some sort by agency?



V.A.: Some more than others. Obviously the Department of Transportation does. They have five-year plans that are updated almost every year, and these are done by cities and counties around the state, and then the Department of Transportation - or the Commission makes a final decision, "Well, this year we'll do that."

It's kind of interesting what effects all Oregonians in long-range plans. When you ask the question, what's a long-range plan for LCDC? Well, I don't know if you really have a long-range plan for LCDC. The long-range plan is to make sure that we continue orderly and that we don't weaken the plans that we have. What else you could have beside that, I don't know, for a long-range plan.

What would DEQ do for a long-range plan? Well, obviously it's ongoing, just to keep the air clear or the water clear. The DEQ could still do a better job in terms of solid waste. We talked about that some time ago. The State still hasn't done a good job in that area.

So okay, where do you go beyond that? What's a long-range plan for mental health, for health, for welfare? You know, what do you mean long-range plan for what? You know, what is a long-range plan?

I don't mean to demean it. It's not a bad idea. But I basically think that there are some things that are important. Certainly our clean air and water was important. Our land use was important. And the things that I mentioned I think were important. I'll still come down to it: We did things, and if we had done them with a flair, maybe they would have been perfectly happy. The fact that we did them but didn't do it with a lot of hoorah, maybe that's why they're unhappy.

An indictment, I suppose, of the fact that they didn't really understand what really happened, which to me leads to some pretty sloppy operations.

C.H.: Well, you mentioned mass transit, and the newspaper did report that in January 1986 you wanted a fresh approach toward mass transit in the tri-county area, so you cleaned house and tried that and appointed a new seven-member board for a regional transit agency, even though some of the members had asked you to be re-appointed.

What was developing there? What was your idea in doing that?

V.A.: A lot of them had been there a long time. And oftentimes when you've been there a while, you know the course that you're on, you're comfortable with that course, there really - it's good to get fresh thinking.

The people I appointed were really very good people. The only one that really got any real attention was Ron Tonkin, and that was because he was an automobile dealer. And yet even then I think he was accepted. He is a bright man. I think he made a major contribution. He only recently went off as a member of that.

And I just really wanted to kind of shake it up a little bit and get some really fresh thinking. Not that the others had not done a good job; they had. But it really is kind of good to get fresh - I suppose it even goes back to I was personally responsible because I noticed as a legislator there were some boards and commissions that were almost permanent. There was no - you know, there was no cutoff period of time. You're appointed, and you could just serve forever. I think a major one of those was Board of Higher Education, but there were others.

So the whole point was that they would all uniformly serve for four years; none could serve more than eight. And the whole point was just to continually get fresh people in, and that's good. Now, this goes back to the time I was a legislator. Just because I thought a turnover of some degree is a good thing.

And I think that's the case. I believe it. I don't think it's necessarily good that it was eight years for the governor after what I've seen in the last almost eight years. That's my editorial comment. But nonetheless, I think it's still good. It's a good idea. The concept's good, and it's good for a democracy, and I think it's a good thing and it works.

I have to tell you I wasn't quite this philosophical that I'm getting into now except that I just wanted fresh ideas, a fresh approach, and these were all good people that accepted appointment. Very good people. No one ever suggested that these appointments were not good appointments.

C.H.: ... regarding your decision to send the National Guard to Honduras, and there was some protest because of the United States' involvement with the anti-Sandinista efforts in Nicaragua.

V.A.: Yeah.

C.H.: So what were some of the issues that you had to address?

V.A.: Again, it gets back to - I keep saying you put pressure on yourself. There was no pressure on me at all. There was no question about what I was going to do, and there was a reason for it, and I felt a legitimate reason.

The Army Guard has had from time to time different assignments. While I was in the legislature their assignment was in the event of something occurring their assignment was to go up to Alaska. So they went up there and trained in Alaska, and the whole point was that if they had to go, then at least they'd have some familiarity with it, they are prepared for it, maybe clothing or whatever. So that was going to be the best thing for us to do is to send these Guardsmen up there for training.

Well, our assignment had changed, and our assignment then was - I don't think it was South America, but anyways it was in that

atmosphere. It was in that kind of terrain, that kind of climate conditions. And the question was, okay, they were going to go down there to train. That was no different than them going up to Alaska to train. And I said to whoever questioned me, "That is their mission, and if that's their mission, we would probably save lives in the event of if there were able to train in that kind of conditions and knew what it was like and knew what they had to do."

Now, the others approached it from an entirely political sense. The Sandinistas have got a problem down there, and we're contributing to it. That's their problem. It wasn't my problem. I'm the Commander in Chief of the National Guard, and we talk about training these Guardsmen. That's what we're about. And trying to save their lives or at least let them know what they're getting into, and the best thing in the world is to send them where they were going to possibly have to be someday. So they went.

I didn't have any qualms about it, and I never had any quivers about it. I never had any concern about it. I'm saying, "That's best for the men and women of the Army Guard of Oregon to go." You can do your political thing all you want. We weren't going to get involved in any fighting. We weren't going to get involved in any support work for whatever was going on over there.

C.H.: Wasn't there some question that some of the training was very close to the Nicaraguan border and might be provocative in some way?

V.A.: There was a lot of things. People were making excuses and reasons why for political reasons we ought not to do that. I wasn't dealing with politics. I was dealing with the thing as Commander in Chief, which I took very seriously, incidentally. As the Commander in Chief, I thought it was the best thing for the Guard.

And as I say, what was the difference? They went to Alaska to train because that was their mission at that time. To me there was no difference, none at all.

C.H.: During that time the National Guard then had an invitation by the Sandinista government to visit Nicaragua. Was that accepted?

V.A.: I'm going to say I don't think so, but I don't remember that specifically. Obviously I was talking to the adjutant general during the - I remember specifically about this trip down South, but I don't recall what you just mentioned about the invitation to come visit. Come visit but don't stay.

C.H.: [laughs] I guess that would be particularly relevant for Nicaragua.

Well, going on, I don't know if we talked about this before or not, I think we talked a little bit about it, about your conflicting views with Secretary of State Barbara Roberts on the performance audits by your office. We did talk about that, didn't we?

V.A.: We did. Just to restate it quickly, I felt the performance of state government was the job of the Governor, and if there's a bad performance of state government, then the Governor is the one to be blamed. And incidentally if it was good, the Governor should get credit. It was not the job of the Secretary of State's Office. And so this idea of performance audits was something that I vigorously opposed, vigorously. Again, I remember how often I've talked about my very high regard for the three branches of government, but particularly legislative and executive, and what was the role of the executive and what was the important thing to be done. And the fact that performance is subjective. You know, "You didn't do that job right." Let's say the Secretary of State says, "You didn't do that job right." Well, that's their

opinion. You know, they don't have all the facts, actually, that the Governor has in making decisions.

C.H.: But should they enter at all into whether something was done economically or not?

V.A.: That's the fiscal audit. That's the audit in terms of dollars.

C.H.: But don't those two areas coincide at some point?

V.A.: No. Well, I quickly say no. The point is that the Secretary of State's office, their job was to audit. Audit means, "Did you spend the money right?" Now, that is not subjective. That is something that, you know, is an accountant's thing.

C.H.: What about spending the money efficiently?

V.A.: Now, that's subjective.

[End of Tape 52, Side 1]