

VICTOR ATIYEH

August 30, 1993

Tape 57, Side 1

C.H.: This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland, Oregon. The interviewer for the Oregon Historical Society is Clark Hansen. The date is August 30th, 1993, and this is Tape 57, Side 1.

V.A.: Well, I was saying that I don't think Oregon suffered, but Scoop Jackson just got all kinds of military bases, just all kinds of money into the state of Washington. LBJ did a big job for the state of Texas. So it depends if your the majority party and if you have the seniority. Tip O'Neill did real well for his state, as powerful Speaker of the House. So when you ask the question, so much depends. I think that Mark Hatfield is respected by his colleagues. He can get a lot of things accomplished that others could not, I mean other senators could not. Maybe a better illustration is - I recall visiting Kit Bond, who was governor of Missouri, and Jay Rockefeller, who was governor of West Virginia, right after they'd been - well, not right after, they'd been elected U.S. Senator. I was back in Washington, so I went to say hello to them. I like them both. Kit Bond was, he just didn't seem to be real happy. He's Republican in a minority. Jay Rockefeller was just happy as a clam, and he's a Democrat in a majority. So maybe that's my best illustration.

C.H.: Why did you go back to visit them? I mean, how did ...

V.A.: Oh, I didn't go back to visit them. I was back there. So I thought, Well gosh, I'm just going to say hello. You know, we're friends, fellow governors, how do you like it? What's this new world like? Social business. Just a social visit is all it was. And so maybe that's my best illustration.

C.H.: Going on to our representatives, I think that we probably talked a lot about some of them. I don't know if you ever came in contact with or knew Walter Norblab.

V.A.: Yes, I knew Walter. Matter of fact, it was interesting. He passed away during the primary race of a heart attack, and I thought - Well, I'll give that a try. It's the only time I ever thought about Congress. Fortunately, and I say fortunately because he was a good Congressman, ~~as~~ Wendell Wyatt, he was picked and then he won that race. I didn't know him real well, but I knew him well enough, by first name, Walter, you know, and Vic.

C.H.: What was going through your mind?

V.A.: I have no idea. At the time I thought, Well, gee whiz, it's open, maybe - I think I could do that job.

C.H.: This would have been what year?

V.A.: Gosh.

C.H.: Was this before you were in the legislature?

V.A.: No, no. No, I was in the legislature. I was in the legislature.

C.H.: And you're in the first district.

V.A.: I was in the first district. But fortunately, anyway, they picked Wendell Wyatt. He was by far a better Congressman than I would have been.

C.H.: What was your impression of Wendell Wyatt?

V.A.: Oh, a great guy. First class. Good Congressman. Good in every respect. Good in working with his colleagues, he was respected by his colleagues, he worked well, he listened to Oregonians. He worked very hard for Oregon.

C.H.: He's a real gentleman, isn't he?

V.A.: Absolutely. First class. First class. He's just a very special guy.

C.H.: He was followed by Edith Green, wasn't he?

V.A.: No, Edith was in at the same time.

C.H.: She was in at the same time.

V.A.: With a different district. She was in this Multnomah County, whatever this district. See, he was first district. They worked extremely well together, and Edith Green of course has been known for education, but she did a lot of other things. She had her head screwed on real good, and really a first-rate lady. Those two really were first-rate Congressmen - and Congresswoman. - They were great people. I mean, Oregon would be very proud to say, These are our Congressmen, and I think perfectly right in doing that. They were good. Good people.

C.H.: It would have been Les AuCoin that followed Wendell Wyatt.

V.A.: Les AuCoin followed Wendell, correct.

C.H.: And you've talked a little bit about him. Of course, he was in a long time as well.

V.A.: Who, Les? Yeah. When I would go back to visit, and of course it varied from time to time, but I would always call on Les. Les, obviously - Well, our separation between the two of us was not that wide, you know, in terms of general philosophy. And he served Oregon well in the first district, served him very well, very conscientiously. I really didn't care to call on Weaver, although I did. I would call Ron because I like and respect Ron Wyden. I think he's doing a good job. The newest ones, DeFazio and - I don't really know them that well.

C.H.: Kopetsky?

V.A.: Kopetsky, yeah. I don't really know him that well.

C.H.: Of course earlier there was Al Ullman.

V.A.: ^{I know} ~~The new Al~~ X I would call on him as a governor, and of course he was chair of - we call it ways and means.

C.H.: What kind of relationship do governors have with their federal delegation, and how do they coordinate activities and agendas?

V.A.: I tried to do that and it's very hard to. In spite of our friendships. I always try to let them know where I was and what I was trying to do, but it really wasn't - I tried with what I call an Oregon delegation, I mean all five of our Congressmen and two of our Senators. When I would go back as a governor, I would have a breakfast at the Capitol Building. Not too often some would show up, but they would usually would send staff, you know. It's not easy, it's not easy to do it.

C.H.: Is there any time that you'd get together with them like before a Congressional session to try to work out an agenda for the state of Oregon, or the things you need and want along with what they want?

V.A.: No. I would try [indiscernible] do it back there than here, it's more convenient for them, and that's where we would try to do it. We'd try to get our staffs working together to let them know where we are and what we have in mind and the kinds of things we'd like to do. But still it was not an easy thing to do. I could not put an Oregon delegation together for Oregon. You know, that's what I had, I thought that would be ideal. It just doesn't work. For I don't know what reasons. Several of them I think are political, some may be jealousies. You know, I want to take credit, whoever it was. Some just pure and simply time. Their availability for time.

C.H.: Would it be to their advantage to try to seek out a real substantial relationship with you and work out an agenda? I mean, is that even a practical thing to try to consider?

V.A.: Well, it's certainly practical to consider, but in terms of execution I think it's not possible.

C.H.: Because of the distance?

V.A.: Well, the distance and for the other reasons that I mentioned earlier. It sounds good and this is what I desired, what I hoped would happen, and it just never really came together, and so you just keep trying to do the best you can. Obviously the best thing to do then is you just call them one at a time, which I would do. Tell them what we're up to, and the kinds of things we're interested in, and ask them if they have any particular agenda. So that's the easiest thing is just to take some of my time, but that's okay. If I go back to Washington, I'll just spend an extra day there.

C.H.: What about Bob Duncan?

V.A.: Gosh, I like Bob. He was Speaker of the House when I started. He was Speaker of the House for two sessions, my first two. 1959, 1961. I got along together very well with Bob, liked him very much. Matter of fact, saw him just the other - two days ago.

C.H.: Really.

V.A.: Yep. I appointed him on the energy council. I hired Pat ^{Amadeo} Amadeo, who worked for Bob. We've had a good working relationship. I like Bob very much. Good guy.

C.H.: I guess the only other person I see down here that I don't think we've talked about is Charley Porter. Did you know Charley at all?

V.A.: Yeah. Charley Porter, very vaguely. I would try not to call on him. I mean, he just was a loose cannon in my view. Of no real influence in Congress.

C.H.: Going on to some of the other business leaders, we really haven't talked about a lot of them. You have talked some about Glen Jackson, and you appointed him to the head of the

Economic Development Commission, and I think that you've said a number of things about him already.

V.A.: Yep.

C.H.: And a few others. Don Frisbee, did you know Don Frisbee?

V.A.: Yes, I know Don Frisbee quite well. I like Don very much. I consider him a friend, I think he considers me a friend. Politically, I think at times he was a little naive.

C.H.: In what regards?

V.A.: Well, he was just naive in the sense of he thought some things would - I don't think he was - He was not a political person. He didn't understand politics quite that much. He was a close associate of Neil, when Neil became elective governor. But I like him. I think he served his state very well, he's made major contributions to the community and charitable causes, good man.

C.H.: What about Bill Naito?

V.A.: You have to put Bill and Sam together, really.

C.H.: Well then, Bill and Sam.

V.A.: You have them separately?

C.H.: Well, you know, I guess Bill has a kind of higher profile in some ways than Sam.

V.A.: But Sam is sort of the outside guy and Bill is sort of the inside guy. Together as a team it's very difficult, I don't know them that well, as to who was the major contributor to the success of the business. They are both very, very well respected citizens of the state and very high regarded and I hold in the same light, both of them.

C.H.: You have been in the same downtown business core for many, many years. I would presume that you crossed paths often, but is that the case?

V.A.: No, no. Not in that kind of sense, not certainly in a business sense, meaning some relationship with us businesswise, or in business organizations. I think it's just mostly a lot of their civic work where we would come together.

C.H.: The Schnitzers?

V.A.: Never really got to - Well, I know them, reasonably well. But here again we didn't really do an awfully lot of work together. I knew Harold and regard him very highly. Why can't I think of her name?

C.H.: Arlene?

V.A.: Arlene. Worked with her as a governor, a lot in regard to the art world. I like Arlene, I like Harold. The Schnitzer family has been very good to the community. Certainly they've created a great number of jobs for Oregonians, and I think they were happy with what they were doing. Again, I think they were good Oregon citizens and clearly Harold and Arlene, with their contribution to the Performing Arts Center and that complex that we have, they made major contributions to that. They're very good people.

C.H.: What about Howard ^{VOLUME} ~~Columb~~?

V.A.: Howard I knew - He was a very, very quiet man, a very reserved individual. Didn't see him too often. Respected him immensely. Did an awful lot of good, really a lot of good for the comment.

C.H.: And Norm Winningstad.

V.A.: Norm I got to know a fair amount while I was governor and he helped participate a great deal in some of our entertaining the Japanese, and I remember specifically when the first ^{KEVIN ANDREW (CAME)} [indis-
^{CAME TO OREGON}cernible]. Morita likes to fly helicopters and Norm had his helicopter and he was a good success. And Norm and his wife

Delores had done an awful lot. They have been very generous contributors to civic causes.

C.H.: Norm Winningstad has been off and on an ally and a critic of yours.

V.A.: Yeah, well, that's Norm. I mean, you understand, there's very little grey in his life. You're either right or wrong, there's nothing in the middle, you know, that's just the way it is. And that's Norm. Norm's just outspoken and I'm not offended by that.

C.H.: How would you profile Phil Knight? Did you have any contact with him?

V.A.: Very little. Know him, he knows me, but I really had very little connection with him.

C.H.: Going a little bit into the labor end of things, what about Nelly Fox?

V.A.: Okay, before we drop into there, let me put a name that you don't have on your list. That's Mort Bishop and ^{BROT} ~~Brought~~ Bishop. That's Broughton, but we call him ^{BROT} ~~Brought~~. They have been very much involved with the Historical Society, but I knew Mort better than ^{BROT} ~~Brought~~, but I know them both very well. I knew Mort working with him in scouting. I asked Mort several times, because of my very high regard for him, to be on some board or commission. He turned me down every time. He didn't want any part of it. And it was not a matter of favoritism, I like him. I like his philosophy. I just like him. I think he's just this very bright man, and I think he's make a super governor. But he turned me down every time. I appointed ^{BROT} ~~Brought~~'s wife Mary to a commission. She's a bright woman. I know Mabel, that's Mort's wife. Well, I know the family very well. Anyway, I want to bring it up because I think so highly of them, and they've been major contributors to the Oregon community.

C.H.: Are there others that you'd like to mention in the business community?

V.A.: Well, that one jumps up at me. The Wessingers, of course. I bring their name up, and I knew ~~Berry~~^{Bill} very well for a long time, and Fred, but Bill a little bit more than Fred. I knew them both very well. They were among many things I can certainly remember very fondly as being kind of really helping immensely on our Deschutes purchase.

C.H.: The Deschutes River?

V.A.: The Deschutes purchase. Fred I think is or was chairman of the Oregon Heritage Wildlife Foundation since I left office. And they've been good, good citizens of the state.

C.H.: Others?

V.A.: Yeah. I'm not thinking about civic work, and you know, I'm thinking to myself, there certainly may have been others, but I keep thinking between - Well, my family, my brothers Edward and Richard. If you pool together the civic work that we all have done, I'm real proud of it. I really am proud of it. Rich has been president of the Portland Golf Club, he's been president of the Lion's Club, he's been chairman of Salvation Army, he's worked very hard at that. Ed has worked at the William Temple House, he's been on hospital boards. I know there's more than what I'm just trying to tell you now. Ed started his Rotary Club, been president of it, he's been district governor of it. That almost scratches the surface of what the Atiyeh family has done civically. I really don't know who could stack up that kind of a record. I think if we sat down and wrote it all down, which maybe they have, if we put it all together, I don't know.

C.H.: Have you done any kind of a family history?

V.A.: No. Well, Ed's done something, but more historical about the store and when it started and that kind of thing, not in

the sense of what I'm talking about now. But I've thought about that many times. How come, how come - certainly my brothers - how come they haven't been recognized for what they've done? I mean, community-wise. I don't know really of anyone that can quite match that. They did pick the Naitos one time for citizens of the years, but when you ask I'll have to tell you that, yes, the Atiyeh Brothers are still here as a family-owned business, and that's sort of miraculous, the way things have been going. And I'm proud of the fact that we're still a family business after, now what, ninety-three approaching ninety-four years. That's pretty good. That's all I have. Now Nelly Fox.

C.H.: Well, I'm sure there are other people on labor you can comment about too.

V.A.: Oh yeah, a whole bunch of them. I was very friendly really with most of the labor representatives in the legislature, in spite of the fact that they never could count on me for a vote. Doesn't mean I wouldn't vote with them, I mean, they just couldn't count on it. They always presumed that I was going to go in a different direction. But we already talked about that. You know, I'm out for the creation of jobs, and they come up with some silly things, but Nelly, I think, did an extremely good lobby job. ~~Herb~~^{IRV} Fletcher is more of a bull in a china shop kind of guy, intimidating. Nelly was more of a trying to convince sort of person. But I go way back to, gosh, I remember my first session, a fellow called Rosey MacDonald. He'd been an AFL-CIO lobbyist for a long time.

C.H.: Rosey MacDonald?

V.A.: Rosey MacDonald. Always had a rose in his lapel. And as we adjourned and he came up and said to me, You know, Vic, he said, we just hardly ever agree but I sure respect you. And I thought, Well, that's kind of nice. I've really had some I would

call good friends, not good friends in terms of social, in terms of what they would expect of me as a voting legislator or as a governor. We wouldn't always go that way. But I would always try to be up front with them. I don't know if we really covered it, but I told them when I met with the whole bunch of labor folks prior to one of the sessions, I don't recall which one, but later rather than earlier, as a governor. And told them what I needed was to have some cuts in the cost of workers comp, that I didn't have any problems at all, I didn't think the benefits were too high and would be willing to support increased benefits, but I had to have cuts and better efficiency in workers comp. Unless I got that, I was going to veto any increase in costs. I told them that. Before the session started. At lunch. There was, I don't know, maybe twenty of them or twenty-five of them. I don't know if they ever believed me. They kept coming at me with increased costs, and I kept saying, I already told you what I'm going to do. Don't you believe me? And I vetoed some of their bills.

C.H.: Other people in labor?

V.A.: George Brown. George is gone now, I guess I can tell the story. When I was on the labor committee, chair of the labor committee and all, and I was getting to the point where I really didn't consider myself an enemy of labor. And yet I was always voting against some of the bills that they had in mind. And it was frustrating to me. And I said, George, I want to talk to you. You know, I'm telling him, I really don't think I'm the enemy, and let's have dinner. Okay. So we were going to a place then called Chuck's, I think there's still a restaurant there, it's still in Salem but north of the Capitol Building.

C.H.: Is that the steak house?

V.A.: Uh huh. Well, by the time I got there George had already had several too many drinks. So, with Dick ^{GROENER} ~~Gruner~~ we

walked him over to the motel - Dick's motel room - and put him to bed. So I never did have my conversation with him. George was a good guy. Again, I mean, I would recount that. I have a favorite story about Irv Fletcher. I was down at their convention and Irv was up for re-election. It was not a big deal. So he was re-elected, and I saw him afterward. I said, Irv, do you know, I said, you owe your election to me. He looked at me. How come? he said. Well, I was thinking of endorsing you.

C.H.: Did he laugh?

V.A.: Oh yeah.

C.H.: We've talked about some of the other governors and I just thought I'd run over them real quickly just to see if you have any other further comments. Because we have gone, I think, over all of them. John Spellman, Washington governor John Spellman?

V.A.: I would go back to that saying that the one I felt very comfortable with and worked with very easily was Dixie Lee Ray.

C.H.: Dixie Lee Ray.

V.A.: Yep. I met her shortly after I was elected. Went over to Vancouver and she had a Washington office there. We hit it off right away. John Spellman, of course. He's a Republican and we got along together, we had no problems at all. A little more remote when it got to Booth Gardner, although he and I got along together extremely well, and I think, I know that we respected each other immensely. Coincidentally we were in Osaka at a Japan Western Association meeting, and at that time he was about ready to leave and there was some thought about running again for governor. And he wanted to talk to me about it and we had some chats. So, you know, we had a relationship that I think mutual respective. But I still remember Dixie very fondly. She was an interesting woman, an interesting governor. Would do some things really ...

C.H.: She was very colorful, wasn't she?

V.A.: That would be a word for her, yes.

C.H.: What do you think of when people refer to her as colorful?

V.A.: Well, colorful. You know, I don't know what colorful really is. She really didn't have to abuse the press as much as she did. She was rather abrupt, unnecessarily. I think I did tell the story about when she was running for re-election and there was this delegation going back to Africa, and some of the people were from Washington, and we were right there in the airport, and she wouldn't want to go. "Come on, Dixie, let's go talk to them." Once we got there, she was just fine. But you know, there was some things about her, she was just an independent - I guess you'd call a non-politician. She certainly was a non-politician.

C.H.: Is that term non-politician - what kind of connotation does that have?

V.A.: How can I best described it? What I'm thinking of is just a matter of being sensitive to what you should be doing. The illustration at the airport is a good one. Even if Dixie didn't want to go, she was governor of the state of ^{Washington} Oregon [sic]. There were people that were volunteering their time to go help the starving people in Africa, and they would have been thrilled by her presence. She wasn't thinking about their reaction, that my governor came to see us off, you know, that kind of thing. I guess it's that kind of sensitive I'm talking about.

[End of Tape 57, Side 1]