

VICTOR ATIYEH
August 25, 1993
Tape 55, Side 2

C.H.: This is an interview with Governor Atiyeh, and this is Tape 55, Side 2.

V.A.: Well. All of sudden it flashed in my mind - this is now a couple of months after I left - this is the first time I haven't been down in Salem at the opening of a legislative session in 28 years. Now the point here was it took me a couple of months to realize that. You know, it wasn't that the next day I said, oh I'm not there for the first time. It took me a couple of months to kind of finally dawn of me that I wasn't there. So you can understand that I wasn't missing the process.

C.H.: What did you do the next day? Do you recall what your - what did you do after you got up in the morning?

V.A.: Well, all I can remember is that we had a garage full of boxes and the house was - we hadn't really fully moved in. We were doing some moving but we hadn't fully moved in. What actually occurred I decided I was going to go into my own business. And so I started an office. But I spent most of the time at home unpacking and less time at the office and then gradually a little more time at the office and less time at home and pretty soon all the time at the office and very little at home. And it took us a long time to empty the boxes, and I think there's a few that aren't yet emptied.

C.H.: Maybe we could go onto some of the things that happened beyond Oregon, in terms of you're being a representative of Oregon as the governor and review some of the things that you did and some of the committees and organizations you were a part of. One was the National Governors Association's Committee on Energy and

Environment. I know we've talked about some of the Association meetings but in terms of this specific committee, what did you do?

V.A.: Not an awful lot. You know, those are not productive formats. The best, if you want to say somewhat useful, was Western Governors. A smaller group, we had a great deal of compatibility between us, and I'd mentioned that before, you know. The federal government owns so much of our western states. I think we mentioned before I really didn't go for those kinds of things. I mean, I didn't go to the conferences for those reasons. You know, I was on that committee because it was something of interest of me. I thought maybe if something comes up I can have some input. But these aren't really places that you can honestly accomplish things. It's very much like going to Congress and testifying before a committee. That's not where you get things done. It's good for show and the media likes it but that's not where you get things done. As a matter of fact I refused a couple of times, when asked to go back there and testify, and I said - that is by the National Governors Conference or something of that kind - I said, You know, if this is purely cosmetic I can't be bothered. I don't want to take the time for it. If this is an input place, fine, I'll go. But I know that's not where you deal with it. You go talk to the legislature, you talk to the staff, that's where you do your business, you know, the committee is just a show. You can enter into the record. Whoever's going to read that record? Nobody reads the record. I mean, I know all of that stuff and so it's wasteful of my time. Some people feel good about it. I went back to Congress and testified on a bill. Well, if it makes them feel good, okay. I mean, I'm not - For me, for Vic Atiyeh, that just wasn't - I'm not interested in that sort of thing. So you ask about National Governors. I wasn't interested in getting in line to be a chairman of it. That to me was kind of wasteful at the

time. I had a lot of things that I wanted to do. I was chairman of Western and Republican Governors. But not at the national, didn't even try to get in line for that. I'd go. I'd talk to my fellow governors. I didn't get a chance to see them too often. That's where I got a lot of my work done.

C.H.: You were also on the National Governors Association Committee of International Trade and Foreign Relations. Now international trade was quite a specialty for you, you'd done a lot of work in that area. Were you able to use your experience in that capacity to ...

V.A.: A little bit, but here again the only place really anything that really actually happened, and we talked about it, was that visit in Japan with the LDP party. That was supposed to be an exchange. I don't think the other half ever took place, meaning LDP back to the U.S. National Governors. But that's about the only thing that really what you could call solidly happened. I don't recall we got into any arguments. I think by and large most governors, contrary to Congress, most governors were fair trade, free trade, if you will - free trade isn't quite right, fair trade is the right way to say it. And so unlike Congress and maybe administration - well, Congress mostly - it was fascinating to me. I'd given speeches on the subject where Congress was trying to close doors and raise hell with foreign countries, mainly Japan. More than half the governors - more than half - went to Japan to lure Japan to come to their states. They said, wait a minute, wait a minute, what's going on? We have incentives to do that. There's a book on incentives, it's incredible. States, cities, counties, incentives, there's a whole book on it. So it's maybe an inch thick. While we're doing all of that, Congress is going the other way.

C.H.: You were the chair of the education commission of States National Task Force on Indian Education. That was also another area that you had a lot of - all the way from very early in your legislative career - you had a focus on that.

V.A.: Yes. And that time we got something done. Here again the typical - and I guess it was because of my experience - the typical is that they'd appoint these committees that people would feel good about. They'd hold committee meetings and the staff would write the report. And I guess the staff thought they were going to write the report. After we held a whole bunch of hearings the staff wrote a draft and it didn't have any semblance to what we were talking about. We cured them of that real quick. We meaning - actually me and some of my committee members, and particularly me and my friend Rudy Clements, who represented me when they went to Alaska, I couldn't go. And we weren't going to have anything to do with what the staff was doing. You know, they were going to do their own report. No way you're going to do your own report, we're the committee members, we're going to do the report. That time, we took them by storm. Normally the people get together, they feel good about being on a task force or committee, and they go through the motions, and then the staff writes a report. Well, with me as chairman, they weren't going to do that and they didn't.

C.H.: So what did you do then?

V.A.: Well, we wrote the report the way we thought the report reasonably should be. We had some very fine competent American Indians on that committee, people who were involved in education, knowledgeable, from gosh, I don't know, Oklahoma and, you know, there were many states represented on that committee, good people. And I wasn't going to let all their work and efforts go to waste. I can't remember the details of it. I just know that what the

staff had was sort of problem and we wanted to have something real in it.

C.H.: And do you feel that the concrete ...

V.A.: Yeah, that one came off okay.

C.H.: There was also the Republican Governors Association Campaign Committee. What were you involved in that?

V.A.: Not much there. I think that was more window dressing than anything. I didn't do very much.

C.H.: Also you were liaison between the western governors at the conference and the Western Interstate Commission for High Education.

V.A.: That wasn't very much either because that's how I got to be chair of that particular committee. Some people covet positions like that, I didn't. I was so intent on being the governor of Oregon and working as hard at it as I could that I really didn't wanted to get diverted too much.

C.H.: You had mentioned that you were chairman of the Western Governors Conference and as chairman you had a proposal that the western states hold the presidential primaries and caucuses on the same day. Was that your proposal or somebody on the committee?

V.A.: No, somebody else.

C.H.: Whose proposal was that?

V.A.: I don't recall, but you know, we're smaller - except for California - the western states are all small, all trying to vie for attention, try to take us seriously kind of thing. It's not much different, you know, when they formed our Constitution each state has a proportional number of representatives according to their population. But all states have two senators, whether its Oregon and South Dakota or New York and California, we all have two senators. And that's also why the electors, you know, we vote for president of the U.S. but the ones that really elect someone are

the electors. It seems like a kind of a fifth wheel or something. I guess you can't call it a fifth wheel anymore, they got these rigs running up and down the road. But anyway, it seems like some kind of anomaly but it's also a matter of states retaining - smaller states - some kind of authority, won't get trampled by the big states. So those things are always constantly at work. Try to keep some kind of balance, some kind of authority. So a little idea on this larger primary was that somebody pay attention to us because as a bloc we'd be a lot of votes. Each state doesn't have very much. But I don't believe in that. That's just sort of, you know, you do what you need to do and do it - I'm talking about now the primary part - and heck with it. I'm not going to be involved with somehow trying to get somebody's attention in terms of a primary. I think the Republicans, George Bush lost the West - certainly he lost Oregon twice - that's by design. I mean, they put their money where they thought more electoral votes were. I hate to lose it. You know, my candidate losing my state. But they just didn't put any money in Oregon. You know, we've got some other states, and I said, okay. You've got to conserve your money and put it where you can.

C.H.: Were there other things that you did as chairman of either the Western Governors Conference or the Republican Governors Association?

V.A.: Well, we worked hard in terms of Republican Governors to try to raise money, try to help election and re-election of Republican governors. That was a more partisan thing. The Democrats have theirs as well. So we use our own advice and judgment, try to set up a good office.

C.H.: Was there anybody's campaign that you were directly involved in?

V.A.: No. I offered, but I can understand, you know. The Carpetbagger theory is pretty potent, and I don't mean Carpetbagger. I offered, for example, with Deukmejian, you know, if you want me to come down and do some campaigning for you I'll be glad to do it. But I also understood that, you know, what the hell is the governor of Oregon doing over here, trying to tell us Californians who ought to be our governor? Or visa versa. I understand that. So it's not very useful. Apparently I could be helpful in the state of Washington, although the state of Washington didn't ask because Clark County gets all Oregon news and so I have a little currency in southern Washington anyway. But no one asked me to do that. There, I think it would have helped, but in most places it wouldn't help.

C.H.: Going on, you accumulated a large number of honors and awards as governor and I thought I'd review some of them. I'm not sure what all of them ...

V.A.: Okay. Yeah.

C.H.: One was the Lloyds Center 1980 Metro Achievement Award. What was that?

V.A.: Well, these are retailers. You know, here's a retailer that made good. Actually, when you start looking at the history, I'm not sure until maybe you go back to the very early days when almost everybody was a small businessman, that there was a small businessman that was elected governor. I would be very unique. Governor Meier was governor, but you couldn't hardly call him a small retailer or a small businessman, so I was kind of unique in that regard. I've really not studied it, but it'd be kind of an interesting study to see - Maybe in the very early when, as I say, everybody was a small business person, that might of been true. But of recent history what I would have to guess would be late 1890s, I don't think anybody like me became a governor of Oregon.

Anyway, they were kind of proud of the fact. That's how I got that award.

C.H.: Were there any times when all the Oregon governors that were alive got together?

V.A.: Oh yeah. Matter of fact, not this year, early last year, Associated Oregon Industries had us all, including the incumbent - that would mean Mark Hatfield, Bob Straub, myself, Neil Goldschmidt, Governor Roberts. We were all together.

C.H.: What was that like?

V.A.: That was not too bad. They wanted us to give our views of - I've forgotten whether it was the future of Oregon or something. It's interesting to me so few of them really prepare for such a thing. I did. They said five minutes and I prepared five minutes worth of something to say. But it was kind of nice for the audience to see all five governors there. I had just returned from a trip overseas - just returned. Matter of fact I was really beginning to get quite sick, and the following day, if it had been on a Tuesday instead of a Monday or whenever it was, one day later, I probably couldn't even have appeared. I wasn't feeling well. But we were all there. There's a photograph of it. I think I've got a photograph signed by all the governors. I think we were going to distribute them around and everybody going to get one. So I think I've got one.

C.H.: You were also Knight Commander of the Court of Honor of Scottish Rite Masons?

V.A.: Yep. That's a very distinguished degree in Masonry, and I'm a Mason. You can work toward degrees. Do a little study, go through some ceremony - of course apply for it and pay your dues. But the 33rd degree is something they give you. So they notified me that I had received this. Now I'm not a very good Mason. Matter of fact, that would be very charitable for me to say

that I'm not. I mean, that would be kind. So I said, you know, I know that those that receive that degree have done a lot of work in Masonry. And I said, you know, I'm really very proud but I don't really deserve this. And they said, no, we give it, not just for your work in Masonry - for someone that is, you know, the individual represents Masonry well. They would say he's a Mason, and that would make them feel good. So I guess that satisfied me a little bit. But I don't think I really deserved that one, but that's a very distinguished degree.

C.H.: The 33rd degree?

V.A.: The 33rd degree, yeah.

C.H.: Is 33rd degree always Knight Commander?

V.A.: That's what the title - generically, it's 33rd degree. That's what the people call it.

C.H.: And you were also on the Portland Inner Scholastic League [~~indiscernible~~ ^{HALL OF FAME}].

V.A.: Yeah. Yeah. I'm laughing because here again I'm sure I didn't deserve it. Maybe it was because an athlete that played football at Washington High School made governor, but as I've said so many times, they introduced me as an outstanding lineman at Washington High School and University of Oregon, and I'd get up and I'd chuckle and I'd say, You know, I wasn't considered that good before I was elected governor. And I'd tell them that when I was at Oregon the coach who knew me very well referred to me as "Hey, you" - which, incidentally, he did. We got to be good friends, John Warren and I. But again, I was an all-star when I played football at Washington High School and made governor. I guess the combination of those things.

C.H.: In 1981 you received several awards for your stands against racial harassment. One was the Golden Aztec Award of the Oregon Development Corp.

V.A.: Yeah, that's a Hispanic organization.

C.H.: What did you receive that for?

V.A.: Again, because of my interest in - well, racial and religious harassment.

C.H.: Was there a particular incident or event or - ?

V.A.: You mean something specific?

C.H.: Something specific that you had done that -

V.A.: Just the request for that bill and getting it passed. Those awards all came for that reason. That incidentally was the largest plaque I ever got. It's big, I mean, it's big. It must be, I don't know, two feet by two feet or bigger. It's big.

C.H.: Then there was also the special award from the Oregon Region of National Conference of Christians and Jews.

V.A.: Same thing, same reason. And the Department of Justice award and the Christians and Jews, all for that. I've got them hanging in my office.

C.H.: Then there was the Community Relations Meritorious Service Award from the U.S. Department of Justice. That was the same?

V.A.: That was that, yeah.

C.H.: And then there was a special award from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

V.A.: All in that same vein.

C.H.: And the Distinguished Public Service Award of the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai Brith of Oregon?

V.A.: That's it, uh huh.

C.H.: Was there anything in particular?

V.A.: No, it all related to the fact that we asked for and got that bill passed.

C.H.: And the bill again ...

V.A.: That made racial and religious harassment a felony in Oregon. And that call came about, and we talked about it on the tape earlier, this cross-burning and - I was personally offended, I hate bullies, I really do hate bullies, have since I was a kid. And I know that if you give them a little bit of slack they'll just keep going. You've gotta call them. Bullies, they'll turn back if you call them. But if you start trembling in their face, they just get bold and bolder all the time. So when that occurred I said, We've got to do something about that. Talked to the attorney general's office, talked to the Department of Justice Region X, you know, what can we do, how can we get this job done? Then when I included it in my address to the legislature, it came as a total surprise to everybody and they were looking for all kinds of things, but not that. I did mention that. It's worthy again for the tape that I had to fight two Democrats at the last minute to get that bill passed. Ruth McFarland and Ted Kulongoski.

C.H.: Why?

V.A.: They just wouldn't let the bill out. I thought that bill would go. I thought that bill would go sailing. It passed at one o'clock in the morning of the last day of the session. It was one of the last bills passed. And I can recall really pounding hard and arguing with Ruth McFarland and Ted Kulongoski in my office late at night to get that bill passed. But we got it passed. As soon as it passed I went home. I stayed there till that happened. Then they adjourned a little while later, but not much longer. And it always surprises me because, you know, here are the "champions of the little people and the downtrodden" and opposed. And they got this reputation, I've said many times, they have a reputation they do not deserve, and I'm talking about Democrats now. And Republicans have a reputation we don't deserve.

But we have it. They have it. I don't know how you change it because in actual performance they do entirely different.

C.H.: What was their reasoning for being against it? Do you recall what they said?

V.A.: They wanted to insert some more things. I wanted it as clear as it could be. I wanted it very clear and I said just racial and religious harassment. But I think someone had put in sexual discrimination. I didn't want any part of that. I just wanted it - because that was the one that shouted for attention. And I didn't want to blur that message.

C.H.: You also earned the highest council and regional volunteer awards for the Boy Scouts. Were there particular things that you did for either that -

V.A.: Here again, those awards they give you. You can't, there's no if you do this, this and this, you'll get it. It doesn't work that way. Boy Scouts, I was everything. I was of course a boy scout, I was a scoutmaster, an assistant scoutmaster, a district chairman, vice president of the council, president of the council, council commissioner, gone to two jamborees. I was on a region then called region 11, now its called western region. They grouped regions into larger units. I was chairman of exploring for the region. That was regional work that I was doing in scouting. Went to regional meetings. And so first of all comes the Silver Beaver, which is the council award. And you know, when you've worked in the vineyards for a period of time and you're named [indiscernible]. Yeah, I think we ought to have him. So you get the award. I'm very proud of it. You know, it's one of those things I said, you know, the only problem with the award is you can't wear it every day. And then the same thing holds true on the region when they finally decide that you've done enough work on behalf of scouting in the region that you get it. There's one

other award which is the national award. That's called the Silver Buffalo. We do have one Silver Buffalo actually in Portland. ^{VITTZ-JAMB} Vince Ramsdell, which is Roberts Motors Co. Nice guy, really nice guy, good scouter, quite an achiever at the national level, chairman of Boy Scouting, you know, he's performed well. He's the only one in Oregon that I - well, he is the only one in Oregon. But it's quite, you know, after all, when you work hard in it and then you get these awards, it's very touching. I treasure it.

C.H.: Were there other awards or honors that you received that you found particularly rewarding?

V.A.: Well, those are pretty big. I've gotten an honorary degree. Did I tell you about the honorary degree?

C.H.: I don't think so.

V.A.: At Willamette University? I was to address Willamette University, commencement address, and they were going to give me an honorary degree. In all the years we'd been married, ^{Delores} Delores didn't graduate, I didn't graduate from college. Delores held very high store by a college degree, and she always - You know, we'd read about people or some friends. She'd always say, And they've got this degree. She thought that was very important. Oh, look at this person, she'd read about them, that had these degrees and graduate degrees. So anyway, they presented me the honorary degree. I'm governor of Oregon. And I started my speech. ^{Now} Now Delores thinks I've made something of myself. Not being governor, not being in retail business, not being a state senator, I've got myself a degree now.

C.H.: What was it in? What area was it in?

V.A.: Right there. Doctor of Public Service. Then later on I got an honorary degree at ^{Hank Yan} ~~Pan Yan~~ University in Korea.

C.H.: In what area?

V.A.: Philosophy of Laws.

C.H.: Actually maybe this would be a good time to review some of the things that are on the walls here in your office.

V.A.: I tell you, we go by office we do a lot of remembrance there.

C.H.: Okay.

V.A.: We can talk about - I think we did talk about this one. That was the agreement with ~~Tai~~^{TAIWAN} Wan, a province of ~~Tai~~^{TAIWAN} Wan.

[End of Tape 55, Side 2]