

VICTOR ATIYEH

June 28, 1993

Tape 41, Side 2

C.H.: This is an interview with Governor Atiyeh. This is Tape 41, Side 2.

In February of 1984, right after your trip to San Francisco, there was the Hawaiian open golf tournament and you did go to that.

V.A.: Sure did.

C.H.: United Airlines sponsored the event and paid for the trip. But people had problems with that, didn't they?

V.A.: Oh, maybe they did. It wasn't - I don't recall it as being some kind of big scandal or anything. I don't think it was front page on anything.

C.H.: What was the purpose for the trip?

V.A.: Actually nothing in particular. I was invited to play in the Hawaiian open. It wasn't going to cost the taxpayers any money. I like to play golf. So I went, watched it, enjoyed it.

C.H.: The papers said that "As governor, Atiyeh does not receive a vacation allowance of the type that is earned by appointed state officials. Atiyeh receives his regular monthly salary whether or not he is on an officially declared vacation." Actually, this is what Denny Miles had said, and they quoted your salary as \$55,423 and said you worked 80 hours a week. The criticism by the press was that "the governor never should put himself under heavy obligation to someone who might do business with the state, and this should not be passed off as public business."

V.A.: That's interesting. I've said this earlier, and I'll say it again, I never really had any real problem with media if they disagree with what I'm doing. The only time I really have a

problem is when they strain - and there's some times when they would strain to take a shot. Then I would have a problem.

C.H.: Apparently Governor McCall had made the same trip.

V.A.: Oh yeah. Matter of fact, when he made the trip there was some pretty classy gifts out of the whole shebang. I did get a pair of shoes. I got a shirt which I still have. I think that's about it.

You do pick a pro - professional - to play golf with, and the way they do it is they have all of the players in this room and they have all the professionals up on the wall, and then they have different handicaps, and then they draw your name. And when they draw your name, you can make a pick. Well, by the time they got to my name, Peter Jacobson was still available in my category, so I played with Peter Jacobson. And it was just great, as far as I'm concerned. And we played 18 holes, and then I watched the tournament. We did play more golf, at different golf courses around Honolulu, right through that area.

It was a good trip. I enjoyed it.

C.H.: How did you do?

V.A.: Oh, we didn't do very well, I guess, as I remember.

C.H.: You're an avid golfer, though, aren't you?

V.A.: I like to play golf, yeah. I didn't play particularly well, but I'm not a particularly good golfer anyway. I do remember Peter Jacobson really is a very kind person. And I remember this, because I've told this story. At one point, my drive was up against a small mound of grass, the grass was a little taller. Anyway, I took a shot at it and really scuffed it rather badly. Peter Jacobson was kind of - oh, he said, "That was a tough lie, Vic. That was a tough one." You know, because I didn't hit it very well. I said, "No, Peter, that was a bad shot." He was just trying to be kind.

But you know, those criticisms of course come up. I suppose to some degree it's legitimate. As we've said before, I've never felt that I was obligating myself. In terms of what that might have cost, it probably didn't cost United that much, because you know they're going to fly the airplane anyway to begin with. I'm sure I had contributions that might have amounted to more than whatever they did over the years. But I never felt obligated. I mean, I didn't feel like they were buying anything. They weren't buying me, buying my vote, or anything like that.

On the other hand, it didn't hurt to know and at that time the president was Ferris, and in the event that Portland was pretty much involved with United Airlines, you know, who knows when it might have been of help that I met him and he met me. So anyway, I went.

C.H.: During that same time, was the National Governors Association's annual winter meeting in Washington D.C., and you did go to that?

V.A.: I did go to that.

C.H.: And what was that like?

V.A.: Oh, like all the rest. Had these big shows and plenary sessions and subcommittees - that sort of thing.

C.H.: Was there anything notable about it?

V.A.: Not that I remember.

C.H.: Well, then we come to the Mideast trip. And this was a big event for you, wasn't it?

V.A.: Sure was.

C.H.: Maybe you could tell me a little bit about it.

V.A.: It was all initiated really with the Jewish community here in Oregon asking that I take a trip to Israel. And, oh, I don't remember when they first asked, a year or two before. My answer always was the answer, "I'd like to do that." But I also

would tell them, "You know, understand if I ever do that, I'm going to have to go to Syria." And here in Oregon they understand that. I'm not sure if they do in Miami Beach or New York City, but in Oregon they understand that - that is, the Jewish community.

So anyway, we got to thinking about maybe the potential. I hadn't thought of it at the time, but no governor had ever taken a trade delegation to the Middle East. Some Oregonians already were doing business in the Middle East. I think of Niedermeyer Martin had been selling lumber over there, and I'm trying to remember the name of a ^{WESTERN POWER PRODUCTS, INC. - BILL BEIGHTER (SEE BACK OF THIS PAGE)} electrical - it was electric generators, but anyway they were being made in Hood River. They were selling over there - that is, there meaning Saudi Arabia.

So finally I thought, "Okay, that's not a bad idea. Let's do that." So the trip actually involved Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and then the trip to Israel. The media followed us. That would be Channel 6 and Channel 2, the *Oregonian*, the *Register-Guard*. I think that was all of them. Anyway, they stayed with us through Saudi, Egypt and Syria, and then the trip actually to Israel was not the trade delegation. At that point, I was now going and make the trip to Israel.

C.H.: You refer to it as one of the most glorious events of your life.

V.A.: It was. It was.

C.H.: You hadn't been back there since you were a child; isn't that right?

V.A.: Six years old. And I've told this story, and the reason that I'm telling this story is that I was surprised. I grew up as an American. I grew up, you know, went to grade school and high school and played football and went to college, and you know, although Arabic was spoken, my mother and father spoke Arabic and we would listen to the Syrian friends they had, and there was a lot

of that going on, and of course we had the Arabic food and all of that, but you know, I never thought of it as being anything particularly unusual. It's just part of our family life. I never thought of myself other than as an American.

And then when we flew to Saudi Arabia, that was our first stop, and we landed in ~~Jidda~~^{JEDDAH} and we were going to switch airplanes, and we had some time in between. And when they opened the door, and we didn't walk out into a ...

C.H.: Concourse?

V.A.: Yeah, you just walked down to the - down to the ...

C.H.: Pavement?

V.A.: Pavement. And all of a sudden I get this huge emotional feeling, and that's why I'm telling this story, because it surprised me. I didn't think about it. I hadn't thought about it. I hadn't thought, "Oh boy, you know, I'm going back to my roots kind of thing." I never thought about it. I just couldn't hardly wait to get down on the ground. And I'm in Saudi Arabia, I'm not in Syria yet.

So I tell that because I'm surprised by my own emotional reaction. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I enjoyed it then and I enjoy it now. We had a good trip, we met with a lot of dignitaries and cabinet officials in Syria. The business people that were with us, they were impressed with the entree that we were able to provide for them.

C.H.: Who came with you, businesswise?

V.A.: There was quite a few of them, and I can't remember them all. We had the wheat people, which was Bob Buchanan who became fairly prominent in the Goldschmidt administration in the Department of Ag. Ed Neidermeier. I'm going to have to really get through the list of them. There were several that made the business trip with us.

SEE LIST

C.H.: What products were you hoping to sell, aside from wheat?

V.A.: Well, a lot of it was kind of missionary, to let them know and find out what it is their requirements were and how they were, and what they were doing. There was all kinds of construction going on at that time. The big joke was the official bird of Saudi Arabia was the building crane. There was a lot of that going on. Oh, I can remember, [indiscernible], they do a lot of engineering work, and they had been doing work over there also. He was among them.

So my mission - when a governor takes a trade delegation, it's kind of to open doors. And I said to them, because of my business background, you know, "If you want me to make calls with you, I'll be glad to do that," when they have their own business appointments. The governor is always doing ceremonial things. But I was willing to go talk to their prospects. But I was always for them and their business, and so I was lending the prestige of the governor's office. And I enjoyed it. Being a businessman, I did enjoy it.

The same thing would be true if you made trade delegations to the Far East. But you know, could we sell wheat? Well no, it turns out we couldn't at that point in time; they were subsidizing the wheat that Saudi wanted to become self-sufficient in wheat, and they were really subsidizing. As I recall it, it was costing them about \$32 a bushel, and it was selling here for under \$4 a bushel. Right here. So it was a huge subsidy. But you learned what they were doing. We went over to ^{JUBAIL} ~~Jebail~~. ~~Jebail~~ was a city that they built, and you know, there has been many cities planned but very few planned and built within seven or eight years from scratch. And this was an industrial, petrochemicals, steel.

C.H.: In Saudi Arabia?

V.A.: In Saudi Arabia. And their whole idea was, they know someday they'll be out of oil, they want to really build up an industry out and exclusive of oil, which was the only money they had. They were building schools, it was very impressive. I didn't see any - but I'm sure there might have been some - of what you might call slums or poor housing or anything like that. Education was good, clean. I enjoyed it.

I had hopes to meet with King Fahd, but the queen of Denmark came at the same time and I have to guess that she's a little more important than the governor of Oregon. Anyway, I didn't get that opportunity, but I met with many, many top cabinet people.

C.H.: The delegation was also trying to sell a \$100 million water pipeline, is that right?

V.A.: That was all part of it.

C.H.: Was that C.H. ^{2M Hill} [indiscernible].

V.A.: See, they're engineers and they were looking also at the airport as being - not the airport itself. There was an airport built, so they had a large area to be developed, and that was a project that ~~C.H.~~ ^{Crown Hill} [indiscernible] was interested in. But there were those kinds of things.

Egypt was a little more difficult - Egypt was having financial troubles - trying to find business in Egypt. Much of the industry in Egypt had been socialized, owned by the government. We met with a chamber of commerce. One of the things that they were real happy about was that a lot of businesses were being deregulated. I think at that time, if I remember, they said 20 percent now was not owned by the government. They're going in the right direction. They were building some things. Again, we were interested in wheat, and incidentally, even today, one of the big importers of Oregon wheat is Egypt.

C.H.: You also met with President Hosni Mubarak, too, at the time?

V.A.: That's right.

C.H.: What was that like?

V.A.: It was very good.

C.H.: Was it just a formal meeting, or -?

V.A.: Well, I met with him, and this wasn't a large crowd of people, it wasn't the trade delegation. My cousin Sammy Kahl went with me; he speaks Arabic - I don't speak any Arabic - and helped in the interpretation. But he had his own interpreter, anyway, that is, Mubarak did.

He apparently enjoyed it because several times they knocked on the door and there was a delegation from Sudan that he had an appointment with, and he'd tell them to wait. We spent more time than I think he'd planned on, and certainly more time than I planned on.

I will tell you that prior to the trip, I had a briefing by the State Department and the Security Council. They'd give me some briefings on those countries. They were talking mainly about, as I recall, Syria and President Assad, and that he really wasn't interested in peace, he was interested in the development of his party and that he obtained his ownership and his control. I remember that specifically.

But I started my conversation with Mubarak and President Assad and Prime Minister Shamir, who was prime minister at the time, I started with each of them exactly the same way. And I knew how they would look at me. Here I am, Arabic background, and they would look at me that that's how I'm coming. My conversation started out, "I want you to know that I'm a devout American." Then we'd talk about some other things. But I wanted to position myself, so that I'm not pro this or anything, the only pro thing I

am pro-American. Mubarak's and Assad's reactions were identical. They said, "Wonderful. Can't ask for anything more than that. You know, whatever's best for your country, that's fine." And that was a positive reaction.

I said the same thing to Shamir. I got no reaction at all. When I came home - and we'll get back to Egypt in a minute - I really yearned to at least explain to our State Department my view. I said, "I know mine isn't the only view, but just let's plug in my view." That was very frustrating. I offered to go back to Washington D.C. I just wanted to tell them about what I thought.

I finally met with McFarland in Dallas, Texas, at the convention, the Republican convention. I had talked to George Bush and told him - I've got something I want to say to him. I'll make it short here. I said to McFarland, "When I left I heard that Syria wasn't interested in peace. I've come home to tell you that I think Israel's not interested in peace. As long as there's a continual threat to Israel, the U.S. will continue to send them money, and they're very dependent upon the money that America sends. And if that threat's taken away, we really have no reason to continue to send a lot of money, and I don't think they really want peace." And I think that even today.

Actually, the amount they get per capita is huge. Compared to any other country, it's huge. I've got some real strong feelings on that whole subject. But it all comes down to what I said: I'm a devout American and I don't think it's in our best interests - I'll give you a quick why. Do you recall when there was a gasoline shortage? The price went up and the shortage of gasoline being delivered from the Middle East, and we saw the effect. It became almost a recession in terms of - because we need that for the economy of this country.

And yet we call Israel a strategic ally. And I'm saying, strategic how? I'm not sure how. Now, on this most recent war with Iraq, you saw that Israel really was almost a non-player. So now how are they a strategic - you know, how can they help us? Our real interest - I'm speaking now of the United States of America now, not anti-Israel or pro-Arab - it's clear that our strategic allies are the Middle East, and particularly Saudi Arabia, and the oil-producing countries. That's where our interest is because they have such a profound effect on the economy of the United States.

Back to my visit with Mubarak, it was good, it was very interesting, we talked about a variety of subjects. I did learn. You know, you learn as you go. When I went from Egypt to Syria, I had to go through Cyprus because there was no relationship between Syria and ~~Israel~~^{Egypt}. And obviously the same was true from Israel to Syria, you had to go back to Cyprus and then to Israel to make that trip. But I think it was by and large a successful trip.

I will always be impressed - I was in the Rameses Hilton, a very fine room, very western, first rate, first class. And I'm on a high floor and I'm looking down out of the window at some of the most poor - I mean just terrible housing. Right out of my window, out of this fancy hotel I'm in, and all of the poverty and terrible living that's right around me. And I remember that. Of course, I saw these things which surprised me. Their pyramids and the sphinx I'd always envisioned as being out in a lonely desert. Have you ever been there?

C.H.: No, I haven't.

V.A.: It's not out in a lonely desert. It's right on the edge of Cairo. I mean, I saw it from my hotel window. That surprised me. Anyway, I saw the sphinx and I saw the pyramids, and then on to Syria.

C.H.: Before you left on the trip, you were briefed by the White House before leaving?

V.A.: That's right.

C.H.: Was there any difficulty in setting up your itinerary and where you were going to go and how you were going to get there?

V.A.: No.

C.H.: What did the White House brief you about?

V.A.: Oh, they talked about the countries, and I mentioned once about their view of Assad and Syria, and those kinds of things. Nothing too much. A lot of people were nervous that the governor's going to that terrible part of the world. I was not for a second nervous. Actually, my wife was a little nervous about going over, but she went to Syria and she was there a whole week before I got there. She was there actually two weeks and I was there less than a week.

C.H.: Why did she go over early?

V.A.: Well, she went over with my cousin Sammy Kahl's wife, and they toured around the country, and she enjoyed it immensely. But there was a lot of concern and nervousness, because there's so much misunderstanding about that part of the world.

I will tell you a story that the superintendent state police said, "Lieutenant Holbrook's going with you." I didn't feel the need for security, but he felt better about that, so Lieutenant Holbrook went with me. He was never nervous, in Saudi, in Egypt, in Syria. As a matter of fact, he still speaks very highly, very fondly about his personal impressions of Syria and his relationship with the security people, and they were there, you know. They just took them in. Just one of the regular guys. And here he's Scandinavian background.

But when we got to Israel, he got nervous. And I think it was because they walk around with guns everywhere. You can see guns

down in the bazaars in the cities; there are guns everywhere. And so he went to the embassy and got a .38 revolver and he carried it all the time we were in Israel, and then of course turned it back in. Even in Israel, though, I wasn't nervous. He got nervous. I wasn't nervous.

C.H.: Does he perform any other function other than bodyguard when he's with you?

V.A.: No, and he didn't do much of that either because there wasn't much need for it. He'd go. But, you know, I mentioned Syria, gosh, it was motorcycle escorts and cars filled with these security guys. And they were a pretty jolly bunch of people. I don't think they were as well trained as Lon was, but he got along. There was just really no need for him. And he wasn't hovering over me, or anything like that. He was just nearby all the time. So you know, it wasn't necessary. I know he's glad he took the trip, and he's a good companion to be around, but I don't think there was any real need for it even in Israel.

C.H.: They did talk about, in Egypt - and I'm not sure if this is President Mubarak or it was somebody else - about discussing the possible move of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

V.A.: That's right. That was going on throughout that entire trip, and it was absolutely insanity. It was interesting to me that, when I was in Israel, they weren't really that - they weren't hung up about it in Israel. This was something that the U.S. politicians thought would gain brownie points with the Jewish community in America. And I don't think they really fully understood or realized that we're talking about - you know, the Muslims as well as the Christians are involved in Jerusalem. And the Muslims are all over the world, not just there. And that would have been an absolutely affront of the worst kind, around the

world. Not just there in the Middle East. It was stupid. And Israel wasn't - I mean, it wasn't anything that they were asking for. It was just something that was just initiated here in this country, thinking they'd get brownie points, the politicians thought they'd get brownie points, with the Jewish community in America.

C.H.: But once it got moving, then it probably became an issue then.

V.A.: Well, it just was stupid. Just stupid in the real sense that there needs to be peace. In all my discussions, I said there needs to be peace. With the prime minister of Israel, with Assad. I don't know what that peace is, but there needs to be peace. And what I'm thinking about is the people, not the governments. I can't imagine people living on a daily basis with fear. And Israel is a good example, in Jerusalem. You know, they're living all the time. Why are they carrying guns? Because they're afraid of some Arab terrorists or Palestinian or somebody, you know, bombing or shooting or something. And there were instances like that.

So it's a terrible way for people to live. It's a terrible way for the Palestinians to live. And so, that's why peace. Not because you want to save a government, the Assad government, or the government of Israel, or whatever it might be. It's just the people. And even today I'm frustrated by the fact that there's no peace. So that's why there has to be some - I believe and I told them - Shamir, I told Shamir, and I told Assad the same thing.

I don't know whether you want me to talk more about it, because I've got a lot to tell you about my visit with Assad and my - you know, what happened in Israel and some of my thoughts on that subject. It was a fascinating speech. My trip to my village.

C.H.: When you first arrived in Syria, there was a little confusion about your arrival, wasn't there?

V.A.: Yeah. It was a little surprising. I thought there would be, you know, quite a delegation down there. They were prepared for it, but for some reason there was some kind of a lack of communication as to what time we were arriving, and it was kind of embarrassing to them. Anyway, we got in and the celebration began. Oh, I enjoyed it.

C.H.: One of the first places you went was Qunaytirah, and they were trying to show you the destruction of their territory.

V.A.: The martyred village, that's what they call it.

C.H.: Was that awkward for you being there?

V.A.: No. Matter of fact, it's a very fascinating story. We went there, drove to Qunaytirah. Qunaytirah is right at the foot of a high point on the Golan Heights. The Golan Heights is a long stretch, it's not just one small place, it's a long mountain. But there's a high point. Right on top of that high point is all kinds of electronic equipment, towers and dishes and all kinds of - on this high point, right there in Qunaytirah. Israel is occupying that. I almost believed they could hear us talking down here in Qunaytirah because I'm down there and you could see it right there, and right in between is the U.N. There's a little strip in there where the United Nations are. Qunaytirah was destroyed.

[End of Tape 41, Side 2]