

VICTOR ATIYEH
August 18, 1993
Tape 54, Side 2

C.H.: This is an interview with Governor Atiyeh, and this is Tape 54, Side 2.

So you went to the Kennedy Center to see ^{//ELEPHANT MAN"} [indiscernible]?

V.A.: Yeah. And I'm thinking, you know, this is pretty heavy stuff. The smartest one was Scott Matheson. He was sitting next to me. He was the Governor of Utah. He went sound asleep. And I thought, "Well, Scott, you're smarter than I am."

But it's really very nice, and then afterward a few drinks, and the President's milling around and all these other dignitaries are. You can wander into the Green Room and the Red Room. You know, it's very entertaining. It's a tuxedo affair. And then you go home.

But that's a typical kind of thing. The invitations were beautiful and nicely engraved. The President and Vice President, they sit in the front row at the entertainment. They just have chairs lined up in the East Room. So I'm a souvenir guy, so they get up, and usually they don't care, there's a card that says "Mr. President" or "Mr. Vice President," and I thought I'd just scoop that up a couple of times for a souvenir, off their chair.

You know, it's a wonderful thing. You go in, and you meet the President, get your picture taken, and in a month or two you get a copy of the picture. So I don't mean to take it really just off hand; it's really quite nice. And it's not an opportunity I would have had had I not been a Governor.

C.H.: Also on that trip you went to New York City with State Treasurer Bill Rutherford to discuss Oregon's credit rating with the financial service companies on Wall Street, which was lowered

because of a projected revenue shortfall in the Veterans Home and Farm Loan Program occurring and the Court ruling that the state could not require holders of some of the loans to pay higher monthly payments to reflect an increase.

V.A.: Well, that's not the first time I went there. I went there with Clay Myers, as well, and I think we did cover that. I told them in Wall Street, I said, "I don't understand you people. We've got a huge deficit in the federal government, and they've got a high credit rating. You know, we have special sessions to rebalance our budget, and our credit rating goes down. I don't understand that."

C.H.: Did they listen to that?

V.A.: Well, they listened to it, but it doesn't have much impact.

C.H.: Also in March of '86 you rebuffed the recommendations of a presidential commission and said that you won't require drug testing as a condition of employment with the State of Oregon.

V.A.: Yes.

C.H.: You said that what workers do on their own time is their own business as long as it does not reflect on their job performance, and you don't see it as a major problem in state government?

V.A.: That's correct.

C.H.: Is that your general attitude about people's private lives, that they can do what they want?

V.A.: Yes. You know, I can recall at one time we had a salesman in the rug business, a bachelor. I don't know how he really did it, maybe because he was young, but you know, he'd go out almost every evening and he'd do some drinking and he'd have girls and stuff, and I knew that, but he was always good at his job, and he was always there. He was a good salesman. So I mean,

this is not something that I would do. I'm not sure I would have the stamina to do it. But anyway, my feeling is that the only time that I have an interest is when they're working for me, and if what they do affects their work for me, then that is, I think, a reason to discharge them. But if they want to do whatever they want to do in their private life and it doesn't affect my area of responsibility, that's their business.

That doesn't mean I condone, I certainly don't condone the use of drugs, but that's generally my position, and it sort of comes from my history as an employer.

C.H.: Also in March of '86 you selected ten areas of the state to become Oregon's first designated enterprise zones?

V.A.: Yes.

C.H.: That was to help the ailing economies of those areas?

V.A.: That's right. And new and existing businesses creating jobs in the zones would qualify for property tax exemptions. How did you come up with this plan?

V.A.: The enterprise zone idea was one that had been established. The thing I found very curious is there were communities that were more communities that I chose, but for some unknown reason to me the legislature limited the number I could do that with. I was contending that they were hoping there would be a Democrat Governor next time, and let the Democrat Governor pick the rest of them.

But it was a matter of application and studying their situation. And with those that we could select, we picked the neediest, and that's how we did it.

It didn't come off the cuff. It was with some study.

C.H.: Is it still under-used, or how ...

V.A.: Oh, I'm not sure how much it's used. It's not a bad device. And among the reasons it's not a bad device is that way

back again in the tape I recall telling you that it's very hard to distribute jobs around the state, so you have to give places the greatest opportunity that they have, give them whatever opportunities that they might have an advantage over someone else, and that's one way of doing it.

C.H.: So what kind of property tax exemptions would they get?

V.A.: I don't recall, to be honest with you.

C.H.: Was that somebody on your staff that came up with that?

V.A.: No. This was a state law that would allow this to happen. This was not something that was invented by us.

C.H.: In May of '86 you had another Far East trade mission, and you went to Fujian, China, Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea. Singapore and Malaysia were dropped. Now, did we talk about this before?

V.A.: We briefly did. To the extent that now it's pretty late for me to start opening up something, and so we'd better go to the places that know us and we know them and just reinforce our continued desire to do business with them.

C.H.: You talked with Governor Hu of Fujian, didn't you, on that trip?

V.A.: Yes. He's the man that was there at the time I signed the agreement, and it was just sort of revisiting is really what it was.

C.H.: Were there other people that you had discussions with - I mean, I'm sure you did, but I mean other dignitaries on that trip?

V.A.: Dignitaries in the sense presumably governmental, not really. I may have met with President Chun in Korea. I met with President Chun twice, and incidentally, President ^{PARK} ~~Pok~~; that was in 1979, and only a couple weeks after I was there he was assassinated by one of his generals.

But I was repeatedly meeting with business leaders: presidents and chairman of companies like Samsung in Korea, and Gold Star, and places like that and people like that, and major companies that we'd called on in Japan. That was part of my agenda, just again to call on the chairman or presidents of the companies.

C.H.: Were any arrangements concluded at that point?

V.A.: No. It was a matter of just kind of reinforcing - you know, knocking on the door again.

C.H.: Another controversy that was arising again during this time was over the permanent site for nuclear waste. I think by this point they had narrowed down to about three locations: over by Hanford, Nevada, and I think a spot in Texas, wasn't it?

V.A.: Yeah, I think so.

C.H.: And Hanford had five of the worst sites of contamination already - or it was the worst of the five sites that they were looking at, rather.

V.A.: Yes.

C.H.: And there were no sites in the East, where 85 percent of the spent fuel is produced. Did you address those problems?

V.A.: Mm-hmm. But this was a choice we weren't going to make; this was a choice by the federal government. Again, recall, I suppose even today now, with it must be about the 30th or 33rd anniversary of preemption by the federal government dealing with the waste of nuclear power plants. So it's a federal government matter. Obviously there was comment on the part of the governors, and my comment really was that it wasn't that I didn't want it close. The fact is that Hanford was not a good site. It just was not a good place to put it. I didn't say to put it in Utah or Texas or anything else.

The other comments was that kind of angered almost - you know, "You produce it all, and we have to store it." Meaning the West. And that seemed to be eminently unfair.

C.H.: Did the Western Governors' Association ever address that issue?

V.A.: Not directly. They got tangled up in even acid rain. You know, some governors wanted to do something and some didn't. Not really. Not to any appreciable degree.

But the fact is that right now, all around the United States, and legally, I would add, is that these waste rods are being stored on site. We have them up at the Trojan nuclear plant. That's where they are. It's a matter, then, of finding a place where you can - oh, there's a variety of ways of doing it; classification is one, but storing it.

Incidentally, I said one time, trying to get a handle on this, "How big a space do you need for this?" You know, "How much geography are we talking about?"

And the answer was about the size of a football field. Well, that becomes something that you can understand. That's all we're talking about.

C.H.: For a permanent site?

V.A.: For permanent storage. About the size of a football field. And you know, you think somewhere in this United States they can find something that size.

Now obviously they have to take more space than that to clean it up and classify it.

C.H.: But the actual deposit spot would be about the size of a football field?

V.A.: That's right. And I know that there are storage places in Kansas, I think. There are salt caves, you know, that are very stable, and they're huge. People use them for storage of all kinds

of things. But that was never on anybody's list. Out West was on their list.

C.H.: You talked about suing the government or joining Washington in a lawsuit?

V.A.: Yes.

C.H.: Did you eventually do one of those two things?

V.A.: I think - no, I don't think so, because I think Hanford did come off the list.

C.H.: What was your relationship with Secretary Hodell, Interior Secretary Hodell?

V.A.: Very good. Very good.

C.H.: And were you working with him on these issues?

V.A.: Well, certainly we'd talk. I know Don very well. He's an Oregonian. He was head of Bonneville. I've known him both socially as well as politically. He's a good thinker, a good steady head.

C.H.: So did you propose a plan for what should be done with the waste?

V.A.: No. No, that wasn't up to me to do that. I couldn't say, "Put them in the salt caves in Kansas." You know, I know enough about this to know that this is very highly technical. Yes, it does get political, but for me to say, "Put it somewhere else," that was not the role I should play.

C.H.: You know, in going through some of the news accounts, they listed a few of your suggestions, and I'm not sure whether this actually falls into the category of a plan or not, but you talk about moving most of the dangerous waste and studying ways to deal with the rest of it, and also putting the nuclear reservation on a strict clean-up schedule for radioactive and chemical waste and directing the Federal Energy Department to comply with federal and state waste disposal requirements that already apply to private

businesses, and that the Department should set aside a percentage of annual plutonium production budget for safe disposal of the radioactive leftovers.

V.A.: That to me is instead of saying "Put it in Kansas." It says, "Wherever you put it, these are the criteria you should follow."

C.H.: And did you have any reaction to those proposals?

V.A.: No.

C.H.: In what kind of a forum were you presenting them?

V.A.: I don't recall now.

C.H.: Was it a letter or ...

V.A.: I'm thinking it was a letter, but I'm trying to - the next question is to whom was it addressed, and I can't recall.

C.H.: You said that you would also recommend that the N-reactor at Hanford be shut down if the Department of Energy could not guarantee that it would continue to operate safely?

V.A.: Yes.

C.H.: And did you have any response on that?

V.A.: No. But you remember way back when I was telling you that we were told by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission that we had to submit a plan, a safety plan. And they ran us through drills; remember, I told you about that?

C.H.: Right.

V.A.: And they didn't have a drill of their own. I said, "Why don't you have a drill, and I'll critique yours?"

C.H.: Going on, you had some comments that you made to the annual convention of the Oregon Newspaper Publishers' Association meeting on July 25th at the Rippling River Resort. I notice you smiling, and I presume you took great pleasure in being able to give the news media some suggestions as to how they should do their business?

V.A.: I really had to force myself on them. They had invited me, and I had attended, and my job ^{ALWAYS} was to help hand out plaques, ~~and~~ ^{BUT} I wanted to speak to them.

C.H.: [laughs] And they didn't want you to speak?

V.A.: And I guess they didn't want me to speak. I had to force myself on them.

And my whole - the general thrust of what I was trying to tell them is that my concern was - I wasn't going to say that "all you print is the bad news and you don't print any good news," but it had some of that flavor. And some of that flavor related to a balance in the news because if you read the news, all that's happening in Oregon, or nationally, is somebody's getting killed, somebody's being shot, somebody's been murdered, the terrible things we're doing on the homeless now, but not necessarily then, all this. And yeah, that is news. But it's a small part of the news, and so what you do is get the population unbalanced. They think that this is the whole world.

I don't know how many times my wife will say, "Gee, the world's going to hell" - she doesn't quite use those words. But no, no, the world isn't, but that's - if you get it all coming your way that way, you don't get the balance. That was one thrust.

The second was I did indicate there was some laziness on the part of the media, and I'm not sure exactly, but I do remember in my own head that there were times when I had my media availability that we were - we'd prepare, you know, what kind of questions. And there were some important issues that were never brought up in my media availability, and there would be other times where I would give an answer that I knew, and I deliberately did it this way to just scream for a follow-up, and there would be no follow-up.

And then the third was that there was - I didn't mind columnists; columnists are free to say whatever they want - but when

someone writes a story, there should be no editorializing in the story. And I gave them the example - I don't know if I mentioned it to you before; I think I may have. But early on, I had a Buick Skylark as the Governor's car, and Jack Burns of Burns Bros. was doing the gasohol thing, and he said, "Would you stop by, and we'll get a little media attention for gasohol, and tank up?"

"Sure, Jack." So here I am with this Buick Skylark, and it's the number one car. I mean, I didn't have the Lincoln. I had the Buick Skylark. And we drive up there, and televisions there, and the reporters are there, you know, and they're tanking up the car.

So I read the *Oregonian* the next morning, and this is what I remember: "Governor Atiyeh pulls up in his sleek, black Buick." And I looked at that, and I said, "Black, yeah. Buick, yeah. Sleek? A Buick Skylark is sleek?" And so see, it was editorializing that here is this big, fancy Buick pulling up, you know. That's what I meant by editorializing in writing.

I had to be very careful because I didn't want to whine, and I didn't intend to whine. It was just my observation as someone in politics, and I know how sensitive the media is. And I think they almost took it wrong. They had some problems that maybe I was whining, and I really wasn't. I really didn't intend it to be that way.

The media is really very touchy. Very, very touchy. At times I was dealing with what I thought were very serious constitutional questions, which they would treat rather lightly. But if you start tromping on the First Amendment, even on its outer edge, this is big news. On the outer edge. But if you're at the heart of any other constitutional question, they're very objective about that.

My relationship, however, with the media I think was very, very good. Very rarely did they ^{STRAY} stray to criticize. I treasure a little calligraphy thing given me by the capital press for my

accessibility, because I know how rare that kind of thing is. So I had a good relationship. But I had to force myself on the publishers so I could give a speech.

C.H.: You also talked about shallow reporting and revolving-door assignments?

V.A.: Yeah. There wasn't anybody there that really had any relationship with some past history. You're right; I had forgotten that, that they really - people kept coming in, and their view of what was going on was not - "tempered" may not be the right word, but with some past knowledge of what else has happened before. So that they are really at a disadvantage in trying to write a story, because all they know is that moment in time, and that subject, and it gets kind of put out of place.

So I'm basically saying, you know, "You should have people become well-acquainted and understanding in reporting the news." Earlier on when I was first there the representatives of the media were fairly permanent people. They were there every session. But pretty soon it was just changing all the time.

C.H.: You also commented about lack of accountability. What did you mean by that?

V.A.: Well, they would agree, but they'd never come up with an answer of how they monitor themselves.

Let's take recent events, in which there was really overkill. And you know, we've watched it on the news - I'm trying to think of a recent event - oh, I guess it was a politician. I think he was running for President. They were tracking him down and there was a girlfriend or something.

C.H.: Gary Hart?

V.A.: Could be, yeah. And the question was was that overkill. You know, remember they shadowed him and - I've forgotten what all.

C.H.: Of course, he dared the press.

V.A.: But you know what I'm trying to say. They even questioned themselves, was this overkill.

C.H.: That's right.

V.A.: And when you have instances of great agony and trauma, you know, do you show the people that are agonizing, whether it's the death of somebody - you know, show those people? But they've never come up with their own way of monitoring themselves, and they know there are times in which they haven't acted responsibly. "They" meaning this broad area of media. And that's pretty much what I was talking about.

C.H.: Some of your recommendations was to demand a continuation of access to the Governor's Office and to try to record more of the accomplishments of people?

V.A.: Yeah.

C.H.: Also to consider carefully what can be done to give the people in the press more background, more experience and more depth on the beats that they were assigned, and you were just talking about that in terms of the lengths of their assignments, and also to bring readers "the thrill, the pride, and the enduring liberty we draw from this incredible Constitution."

V.A.: All those things are important. They may not think it's important. They may not think it's news. Oftentimes when I would be criticized, sometimes not quite strained, but for no real reason, my inner reaction was, "You know, this job is tough enough. You really don't have to make it any tougher. If you disagree with something, I can understand that." And it wasn't a matter of extolling the virtues of elected officials, but you know, for someone to read an article that said, "Vic Atiyeh did a good job," that just doesn't exist. So what's the sin of saying, "Vic Atiyeh, at least this time, did a good job; he doesn't do a good job all

the time, but this time he did a good job"? I don't mean just Vic Atiyeh, it could be any leader. But it doesn't happen.

Now I know there's some speculation that the media's on Clinton's case. Some think too much so. I don't happen to think so. And I think it's true that the media did quite a job on George Bush. They certainly thought they were right in doing what they did, but again, they didn't talk about all the great things he had done, and there's no sin in saying some of the great things he'd done. It's a fact of history.

He removed the threat of nuclear war. That by itself, that just by itself - certainly Communism gradually was deteriorating, but certainly during his watch they finally became unglued. That's not bad. These are important things.

But we hear about abortion and family values and all this other stuff, which, you know, I can understand that, but that's only one part of the story.

C.H.: Right. In August, then, in '86, you went to the National Governors' Association meeting at Hilton Head, South Carolina, and the governors discussed issues regarding liability insurance, federal tax reform bill, international trade. Was there anything that came out of that meeting that was of any significance?

V.A.: Not particularly. As I think I mentioned earlier, that was the only mid-year conference I went to. They would have them every year while I was a governor, once in Washington D.C. and once in what I call mid-year somewhere around the United States.

The one I really wanted to go to badly was in Portland, Maine, just because it was Portland. And something came up, and I don't recall, which really prevented me from going. So this is the only one I went to.

C.H.: What is the main purpose of these - I mean, aside from the advertised purpose, but what is the main significance for a governor to go to these?

V.A.: My purpose was to really talk with my fellow governors. I had to really work awfully hard to get to - well, that didn't happen with the National Governors. It did happen a little bit with the Western Governors, and a little bit with the Republican Governors, where the governors would just sit and talk to each other. No staff, just governors talking to one another.

But the Governors' bureaucracy, the palace guards just didn't want those things to happen. They were afraid that their governor would say something that their governor ought not to say, or couldn't answer something - whatever. Whatever their reason; I don't know, it's hard to tell. But nonetheless, if you can't do it singly, you could talk to a governor, "What are you doing," you know. I'm not talking about plenary sessions and all the cosmetic stuff that goes on. My reasons for going at all was to talk to my fellow governors, not this cosmetic - I considered all this plenary stuff as cosmetic, and that's mainly the reason I didn't go to mid-year. I went to Washington D.C. That was a big deal. You get to go to the White House. That was a big deal for me. But to go to another one of those things, I wasn't interested.

C.H.: Then you made your eleventh trip abroad as a representative of the National Governors' Association and to Japan, and that was with ~~Governor Martha Lane Collins of Kentucky~~ and Governor George Ariyoshi of Hawaii.

V.A.: Yes.

C.H.: What was the purpose to that?

V.A.: Nikaido, who was at one time one of those LDP - Liberal Democratic Party - one of the powers within the party. And he had suggested that we have a meeting. I met with him, and we talked

about it, and I said, "That's a good idea." I took it to the National Governors' Conference and recommended that we do that, that we do have this kind of meeting. Searched out, you know, what kind of problems we may or may not get into, because we're talking about one political party, but it was obviously the dominant and majority party of Japan.

And it was just a matter of exchange. I was the lead governor, again because I proposed that resolution. George Ariyoshi really was very well known in Japan.

[End of Tape 54, Side 2]