

VICTOR ATIYEH

June 15, 1993

Tape 35, Side 2

C.H.: This is an interview with Governor Atiyeh. This is Tape 35, Side 2.

The second debate was in Eugene, wasn't it?

V.A.: Yes.

C.H.: And the third was in Medford?

V.A.: Yes.

C.H.: How did those go?

V.A.: They all went very well. I don't have a great deal of recollection of Eugene. Medford I do. I picked the site, which incidentally was the labor temple of the trade unions, and these were my friends down there. I found out afterward Ted Kulongoski brought a bunch of his labor friends down from Portland. Terrible mistake. First of all, you know, you've got the upstate/downstate thing, you know, and they noticed it, the local unions down there. And he made a terrible mistake. And also, and I think I did repeat that about - I know I did, when we were in that matter of two-parent family. That's where he accused me of abandoning the two-parent family. And I said, "No, it wasn't me, it was you." That all happened down in Medford.

C.H.: But there wasn't anything really significant that came out of the debates, then? They were just events.

V.A.: I don't think so. We again hammered, of course, the plant closing which was a major theme of the campaign.

I do want to flash back a little. Remember I told you I really wasn't nervous about these debates, and I genuinely wasn't. You know, it wasn't a matter of going there with a great deal of trepidation, it really wasn't. You have an inclination to head

that way. Delores would say to me, "Well, are you sure of this?" And I said, "Look. Wait, wait. Don't be anxious. I'm relaxed now, leave me alone."

Some young lady, she said to me, neat young lady, "Well, Vic, are you nervous?" And I said, "Well, I don't know, I'm trying not to be." This was now the City Club debate. "Well," she said, "look at it this way, you've got to have lunch somewhere." You know, I guess that's a good answer. But you know, by and large, for my cause and for what I had in mind, I was perfectly happy with the debates.

C.H.: You had mentioned the plant closure element as being a major theme of the election, of the campaign. Did you have your own theme aside from that? I mean, was there an official theme of your campaign, or motto, or a slant, something in particular that you were driving on? Or was it more your collective reputation and performance?

V.A.: The basic principles underlying the campaign was which one of us could really manage government the best, which one of us could indeed help us improve the economy. Oregonians are very generous, and I say that with clear knowledge. Here we were with high unemployment, we had gone through this very high interest rate, very high inflation, and they were generous enough to say, "Hey, this is not something Vic had any control over." Which, of course, I didn't have.

C.H.: Were you concerned that they might?

V.A.: Oh obviously, that's the case. You know, when somebody's hurt, they have to blame somebody. I mean, I'm not offended by that, I understand that. And they're going to blame maybe the closest one nearby. I don't know if you've ever noticed, but children probably can get more abusive with their parents than they would anybody else because their parents love them. You know.

And so, you know, I was concerned to the extent that people were hurt, and I could understand that. But who could give them the hope? Because that's what we had to have. We didn't much else but hope. Who could do that and do it well?

That's sort of a fundamental stability and all the rest of it. The matter of plant closure was a basic definition of the differences between us. And understanding really what makes business work and what doesn't make business work. And so that was used repeatedly, and of course effectively, but repeatedly because to me it was kind of a internal gut reaction. You know, others might view this as a good political tool. To me, it was something that was internal. I knew this wasn't going to work. I knew this was not good for the economic growth of my state. I just knew that. So I could get enthusiastic about it.

C.H.: But didn't the Democrats actually ask you to withdraw three radio commercials that they felt unfairly attacked Kulongoski for his stance on plant closure notices?

V.A.: Oh, yeah. Well, that's part of the deal. It hangs on today, that I said that Kulongoski was dangerous. That was the thing that they were picking on. And we didn't say that at all in our ads. As a matter of fact, the ads incidentally were only scheduled to run, and only ran, for one week. And they were only scheduled for one week, that particular set of ads.

C.H.: Wasn't there in one ad at least a woman that said "Kulongoski scares me?"

V.A.: Well, yeah, but there was a fine distinction that no one really remembers, but we do. We're talking about his programs, not him personally. Kulongoski's programs are dangerous. But that's not the way it was reported, that's not the way it's remembered.

C.H.: Well, I think a lot of people felt that it was sort of a - there was a negative campaign going on.

V.A.: Yeah, but you know, I called - this was during our senatorial campaign of last year, some of the presidential campaign, and some of the other campaigns that were going on - and I called Wayne Thompson of *The Oregonian* and I said, "Don't you wish, yearn for the good old days of my dirty campaign? Because this is nothing. I mean, mine is just really nothing compared to what's been going on." They talk about dirty campaign.

I never believed, nor do I today, that speaking about what is public record is dirty campaigning. That's public record. Now, if I were to say some things that were speculation, that were not necessarily publicly known, that may be dirty campaigning, or something that I know to be wrong, that I would consider dirty campaigning. So there's a definition, at least in my mind, what's dirty and what isn't dirty. Public record is not dirty. Reminding people of the public record of either a not necessarily elected official, but an elected official who's an opponent, that to me is fair game, not dirty.

C.H.: There were a couple of interesting articles in terms of campaign highlights that occurred. One was an intention on your part to blow up a "Welcome to Oregon" sign.

V.A.: I have to tell you the whole story of that.

C.H.: I thought that was a little odd; I'm sure there's a lot more to it.

V.A.: You know, I had - I really had had my fill. I just got really irritated. Here I'm trying to develop my state, I'm trying to get people interested in coming to Oregon, I'm trying to build the economic diversification of the state, and I keep hearing this "Aren't you the guys that want us to come visit but don't stay"?

We're talking about a period now that it's at least eight or nine or ten years away, I don't recall, because it'd been four years of Straub and four years of me, I'm still hearing that. When I got over to Saudi Arabia, I heard it. And I'd had my fill of it. It seems to me that the sign as you go out - as a matter of fact, I think there was a picture one time of snow and some people standing around and here was a sign "We hope you enjoyed your stay." It was too much of a ring of "Come visit but don't stay."

So we're in my, what do you call it, cabinet meeting. Again, we don't call it a cabinet. And we had the Department of Transportation, and I said - oh, I guess what triggered it was this picture in the Medford paper that I saw. That really triggered me. I said, "I want to go down there and blow up that damn sign."

And they said, "Yeah, yeah, okay, governor."

"No! I want to put dynamite under that thing and blow it up."

They said, "You can't do that, governor."

"Yes, I can. I want to blow that thing up."

Well, of course, it's right by the highway, you don't want to use dynamite there. But I really wanted to blow it up. What I was really trying to do was to make a rather dramatic gesture that somebody would pay attention to.

What we did finally was to change the sign, and I got Tom McCall to go with me. His last really public appearance. Incidentally, he was hurting but he really enjoyed it. He was back in his element again, you know, people around him and he was using all the fancy words, and it was good for him. And we went down there and we changed the sign. And at least we got some notoriety out of it. But it was a much warmer sign.

But I just had gotten my fill of "Aren't you the ones that want us to come visit but don't stay"? Or, during open house, "Where are you folks from?" They'd pause, and "Well, we're from

California." You know, embarrassed by the fact that they're from California. And that's not what Oregon's all about, that's not who we really are, and I just got tired of it. And so this was my - he said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." We got laughing. I said, "No, I'm not kidding, guys, I want to blow it up."

C.H.: There was also some comment about a couple of other advertisements you were in. One was a "Hey baby, drink your milk" ad.

V.A.: Yeah.

C.H.: And then an NRA ad.

V.A.: Yep. Yep. Incidentally, the "Hey baby, drink your milk" - this is interesting how these things develop.

C.H.: Didn't that come from Telly Savalas or somebody that started ...

V.A.: It was the milk industry. The one that got the biggest play was - who was that Trailblazer? Very popular. Not a particularly good ballplayer, but neat guy. Anyway, he was one of them. But I was, too. I can recall they did it in my office. They put one of these tracks on the floor, you know, and the camera would - I mean, it was really quite an operation. And we went through it. "Hey baby, drink your milk."

Now somebody's snooping around for some scandalous things. And it was interesting. Well, Atiyeh got paid for this commercial. And then the media went, "You get paid for this commercial?" And my answer was, "Well, they offered to pay me, and I said, 'Well, why don't you just have an ice cream party at Fairview and pay for that?'" Which incidentally did happen. And oh, that just you know it was like putting a pin into a balloon. They thought they had a real juicy deal here. But it turns out, they didn't want to bring this one up at all.

That incidentally I remember because we were out there at Fairview, and a lot of these patients are really out of it, I mean they genuinely are. They're mentally handicapped and many of them are physically as well. And we had this ice cream party outside at Fairview. And they were there, and it was kind of quiet and they were kind of eating their ice cream, and we had this combo of two guys. Oh, I should remember their name because they were neat young men. I asked them if they'd come out and play and sing. And they came out, and the minute they started singing and the music was playing, you could just see all of these patients, they lit up just from that music. It was wonderful for this to happen. You know, they heard the music and you could just see it in everybody there. Wonderful. But that was fascinating.

Of course, the NRA. That incidentally really got absolutely no negative mail from Oregon. That doesn't mean I didn't get some, and it was very minimal, from outside of Oregon: "How can somebody like you do this?" The ad of course was the way I feel. This was an ad by the campaign by the National Rifle Association that said, "Hey, all these people aren't crazies, you know. There's some pretty good people here." That was the intent of that particular ad. But they didn't put in necessarily a sports magazine. I don't know, Time magazine, I know it was Reader's Digest, you know, those kind of magazines. Hunting and Fishing.

C.H.: Sort it got pretty big coverage.

V.A.: Yeah. They put it in those kinds of magazines. It was a good campaign, I thought.

C.H.: ^{LRV}~~Herb~~ Fletcher, who at the time was president of the AFL-CIO, had an interesting comment about the plant closure issue. He said, "Atiyeh has admitted to me personally he thinks it's unconscionable for a company to close down a plant with only a few

hours notice like Georgia-Pacific did in Coos Bay, but now he's trying to use the plant closure to club the hell out of Ted."

V.A.: He's talking about two different things, but he is right. You know, there's a matter of public conscience which I believe is a standard that business and anybody else ought to operate under. And in the sense that I felt of that instant closure and you're gone kind of thing, I do think it's - companies know well in advance when they think they are in trouble and they might close. And in terms of being really concerned about those who work for you, you should tell them; you know, "We've got a problem here," forewarn them. I believe that. But I don't believe we ought to pass a law that says you've got to warn them a year in advance. That's basically what this law was saying. In order to cover your tail so that you won't be in violation of the law, at the beginning of every year you tell every employee you're going to close. Now, you may not close for 120 years, but you don't know that ahead of time. So you say, "We might close."

Well, you know, if you go through that charade, it's going to make, you know, your people that are working for you, they're going to be nervous or they'll go find some other place to work, and it just isn't going to work. But what's ever worse - we're talking about the companies that are here - somebody's thinking about coming to Oregon, you know, they get enough licenses and permits to go through and all the rest of it to get here, and a lot of things they have to sign for taxes - "We don't have to sign up for that; we'll just go somewhere else. Oregon is one percent of the entire population of the United States, and we don't have to go there to sign up for that kind of thing, we'll just go somewhere else. We'll go to Washington, go to Nevada, we'll go to Arizona, we'll go to New Mexico, we'll go to California, we don't have to go to Oregon."

And that's the kind of thing that they just don't have to come in and buy, you know, buy into that sort of thing. That's what the Ted Kulongoskis of this world don't understand, and ^{IRV} ~~Herb~~ Fletcher's. They don't understand it. They don't understand it takes capital to create jobs. It does take capital to create jobs. Labor doesn't create it all by themselves. I've already told you my view on that. Without capital there's no labor, without labor there's no capital. I believe that. But ^{IRV} ~~Herb~~ Fletcher's right, I was indignant about that. But that doesn't say I'm going to call for the bill. You see, that would be telling Ted Kulongoski's reaction. That is not my reaction.

C.H.: Going back to the whole thing on Kulongoski is dangerous, David Broder of the *Washington Post* even got into the act. You've probably heard all this before.

V.A.: It's interesting to go through it again.

C.H.: He said, quote, "The new doctrine seems to be get the opponent's name known first, and unfavorably. The message of the Atiyeh ads is that Kulongoski is dangerous to Oregon's health. The word is used over and over. Denny Miles, Atiyeh's campaign manager, explained that the ads made lavish use of Kulongoski's name because Atiyeh's polling found voters did not know much about the man. Rather than wait for Kulongoski to arrive with favorable information about himself, the governor filled the vacuum with his own version of Kulongoski's record." How would you respond to that?

V.A.: Yeah, we're telling the truth about ^{KULONGOSKI} ~~Kulangowsky~~. And he's exactly right. In other words, rather than have the perception of who Kulongoski might be, Kulongoski isn't going to tell who the real Kulongoski is. Well, what's wrong with me telling who the real Kulogoski is? You know, I don't see the evil in that. Now

David Broder is a neat guy, I like him. Every once in a while I bump into him, we have a great conversation.

C.H.: Really.

V.A.: Oh yeah. I like him, he's a great guy. But he's more inclined to go on the Democrat side than he is Republicans. He rarely says anything really nice about Republicans.

C.H.: I think the gist of the articles I recall now was that there was something different about the campaign, that there was an element - not necessarily just you - but that there was an element of negative campaigning that hadn't been apparent before, and this is the reason why he was commenting on that.

V.A.: I don't see that. There's different ways to campaign, I understand that. Again, just to remind the tape: This ad was designed just for - when I say one week, I'm not even sure it was on seven days. I think it was on less than seven days. But it was designed for a seven-day period of time, or a one-week period of time. That was it, from beginning to end, that was the whole thing. It did not come, it never appeared again. It wasn't because we were driven out to take time off the air, it wasn't that at all. It was all part of our phased plan. We wanted it to say it at certain periods of time.

But yes, it is true, I knew that the people didn't know much about him. And there was absolutely nothing wrong with me telling people who he is. He is a labor lawyer. That's not a lie. That's who is he. It's not a lie. It's the truth. He did put in the plant closure bill, which had been terrible in terms of economic development for the State of Oregon.

What made it even worse, though - this is his fault, not mine - he first claimed he had nothing to do with it. And yet his name is the chief sponsor of the bill. In other words, he could have said, "Yeah, I did, and this is why I did it and I believe ..."

You know, that kind of thing. That would have been a positive response. He didn't do that.

So if that's observed to be negative, I have to live with it. I can't change that. But to me it's public record. Public record, as I told you, is perfectly legitimate. There are some obviously irritated by the fact that they liked the guy, they don't want to see anybody say anything that might be harmful to him. I can understand that.

C.H.: Going on, there was a Western Governors Conference at Salishan Lodge, so you were the host of the Western Governors Conference at this point. Foster Church, who you've mentioned before, referred to that occasion as, he said, "Atiyeh played the role of aggrieved litigant in the case of Oregon versus Ronald Reagan, and he played it to the hilt."

This was at the time that you were having some difficulty with some of Reagan's policy, isn't that true? Particularly over the deficit and things like that. Were you concerned that there'd be some kind of backlash from the voters that would perceive you as being an extension of Ronald Reagan's ideology or philosophy or policy, and somehow this would affect the vote that you might get in the fall?

V.A.: No. That's the way it's perceived. But that's because it happened at a time during the course of an election. I could never say something I don't believe in. I just can't do that. It's just not in me to do it.

First of all, I will acknowledge the perception, I will acknowledge understanding why it's perceived that way, and I'm saying to you it's because I'm running for re-election. And then obviously that's why I'm doing what I'm doing. But I'm doing what I'm doing because I'm aggrieved for Oregonians. I really felt really very strongly about the plight that they were in.

C.H.: Did you feel betrayed?

V.A.: No, no. By Reagan? No. Not betrayal in a sense of - I'm saying to him, "Hey, that's not the way to do this." You know, after all, I'm someone that's been in public life, I'm someone that deals with budgets, you know, maybe not the size of what he's doing, I'm someone that deal with bureaucracy, I've gone through it all myself, I understand all of that whole thing, I've been in the legislature. I'm doing it out of my own observation of what's going on at the national level and how it's affecting Oregon. I'm not governor of Washington, I'm not governor of North Carolina, I'm not the governor of Maine, I'm the governor of Oregon. And so I'm concerned about Oregon, and I'm going to do whatever I can to make sure that Oregon survives.

And so it comes - and this is at a period of time in which Reagan is dealing with the budget, the budget deficit and how he's going to spend money, and I'm saying, "That's not the way to do this. You're hurting us" - meaning Oregon - "You're hurting us. This is not the way to accomplish this job." So my motivation obviously is different as someone perceives it. I understand how they perceive it.

As a matter of fact, you and I are talking now on giving it all, you know, what's going on. What I'm doing right now is going to write history. Maybe somebody will look at it and say, "Well, that's what Vic thought, but this is the way it really was," in their view and from their perspective. So you've given me at least a chance to get my side in on it. But I understand it. I know about it. You know, if this had happened the year before or the year after, it probably wouldn't get nearly the attention as it did during the course of an election year.

C.H.: You said that you wouldn't say anything that you didn't feel is true, and yet at the same time you also have the choice of when to say what you feel is true.

V.A.: Yes. That's right. You're right about that.

C.H.: And during a campaign, you have to be very careful as to when you say what, and how you phrase things and how you do things, don't you? Because everything reflects on your ...

V.A.: But I was never that cautious. Go way back to our very early beginnings in 1958, standing on a street corner, and the question was: Oh gee, do you tell the people what you think they want to hear, then go do your own good things after you get elected? No, you go tell people who you are.

You know, so this has never changed from that day to this day. Timing is not just my timing. By that I mean it isn't, okay, this is a campaign and I'm going to say it now. The timing also has to relate to the timing in this case of what Reagan's doing. You see what I'm trying to tell you? So if Reagan hasn't done anything, I obviously can't say anything, even if I want to say something. So you see, my timing has to relate to his timing.

Now, your observation is very interesting because, you see, others - whoever's going to write about Vic Atiyeh - I talk from my own perspective. So when you read a history book, obviously you read your book and my book and somebody else's book and somebody else's book, and maybe between the four or five books you can figure out who Vic Atiyeh is. You don't take your book or my book and say that's who he is, I mean, if you really want to study history.

And so there are things that say that Vic Atiyeh did this, and Vic Atiyeh did that, because one of two things. I observed other politicians doing the same thing, the Foster Churches or the David

Broders of this world, or that's what I would do, that's the way I would do it, therefore that's why he did it.

Well, but I'm telling you why I did it. And so, you know, I think things through, as I told you earlier. But I do what I do because that's who I am. I am no different. I told the press, I don't know how many times, you know, what you see is what you get. Don't read anything in between these lines. Everybody does it. ~~Delores~~^{DOLORES} does it to me, my wife does it to me. Don't read anything, I'm not saying anything, I'm just saying what the words are saying. So that's, you know, that's a normal human reaction.

But I don't know how many times I told the press during my media availability, don't read anything in the middle of this. Just listen to what - I used the words before George Bush: Read my lips. That's what I just said. What I just said is what it is. It isn't anything else. But people have an awful time accepting that. They just cannot. "Oh, that couldn't be what he means, you know, what he really means is..." And that's a game we play.

C.H.: Going on to some of the other campaign issues, there was one that was dealing with offshore seismic exploration, and you were supporting at the time Packwood's plan to use offshore drilling funds to provide block grants to coastal states, weren't you?

V.A.: There was a lot of opposition to exploring for oil off the Oregon coast. A lot of environmental concerns about the effect. They're going to use these dynamite explosions, and all the rest. Again, they became pragmatic with me. Oregon is not a good place for fossil fuels, here or off the coast. And as long as there's speculation that there might be, there's always going to be those that want to run out there and do something. My particular motivation was to go out there and find out there isn't anything, and then we don't have to worry about it anymore.

C.H.: But if they had found that there was something, then there would be that issue to deal with.

V.A.: No, they'd have to go through an entire different process. See, there's two things involved. One is a permit to explore. But having explored, if you find something, you've got to go through a whole new process in order to get out there and drill. And so I have two shots at this thing, meaning a governor. One is, okay go ahead and explore.

[End of Tape 35, Side 2]