

Tape 10, Side 1

CH This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland, Oregon. The interviewer, for the Oregon Historical Society, is Clark Hansen. The date is 12/23/92, and this is Tape 10, Side 1.

As you were saying?

VA Well, in talking about how bills get in from the executive side, in my case I wanted to know what the bills were they were requesting. Some bills I would not let them put in, but some of the bills I'd say, Fine, okay. Then they would go get - they would say...

CH They being who?

VA The agencies...Senate Bill 1 at the request of the Department of Human Resource, and put in by a legislator, but it was something that we approved ahead of time. Then, there were bills that were my bills. They would be at the request of the governor's office. And these would be selected bills of my particular interest, whatever that might happen to be. And so they would come in as the request of the governor's office.

CH Are there bills that are at the request of a particular agency which are actually for you but you are using them as the conduit by which the...?

VA Well, I suppose governors could do that. I didn't.

CH You did not?

VA No. No, if I had a bill that I was interested in, I made sure that I was there. And oftentimes, you know, that creates a barrier. You know, We're not going to do anything for Governor

Atiyeh. They might do something for Human Resource and Leo Engstrom [~~Sp?~~], but not - I just wasn't interested in playing those kind of games. If it was good, it was good; if it wasn't, it wasn't. Okay. But it's - well, we'll get into it. I keep jumping into the governor years. But I think it would basically - by and large, bills came in on kind of the basis that I just described, that agencies would put them in and get legislators to sign on, and, then, there were bills that were identified to a governor.

CH There was one issue that - you know, I notice a lot in the paper, but I haven't heard much from legislators about the issue, and that was to lure \$140 million for an aluminum plant at Warrenton. Legislators approved allowing port authorities to issue tax-free bonds to build the industrial plants, but there was a very heated debate about that, and it nearly died in the house, and there were suggestions that it was unfair competition with existing industries. Do you know anything else about that issue and how it evolved in the house?

VA Well, there were two issues on that one besides the one you mentioned. One was the block of power, and there was a block of power available, it was floating around.

CH A block of power?

VA A block of power. There was power available for - a block of power that could have been used industrially, so how much are you going to let an aluminum plant take of this available industrial power.

CH Is this a block of power that's being generated from...?

VA Yeah, from our utilities, from the dams, from what the utilities were doing.

CH It's an amount that's assigned to the state?

VA Yeah. It's an amount we knew was there, and it was available power that was - it was available power unused. To just briefly get into that in terms of power, you have all the various power supplies. In our case, nuclear power plant, hydro dams; we even have coal-fired, which I don't think has been used for a long time. But those kinds of things. So here is an available power, and you've got people using it, but it could be producing more power than you're actually using. That's your growth power. And, then, you get to a point where - like if we close down Trojan, we're closing down a huge chunk of power, and so now all of a sudden you've come to a point where you really don't have any excess power for growth, and, then, you have to build something. That's what the utilities are always dealing with, both public and private utilities, of making sure you stay ahead, because you can't say, okay, next year we're going to need a hundred megawatts. You can't go build in next year, it's going to take you about five or six years to do it, so you've got to figure out into the future. That's the general thing that's always been going on historically, and it's continued.

Now, back to the aluminum plant and how - okay, here was a block of power. Do we want to use that just for one aluminum plant? Of course, it wasn't going to take all of it for one of them. And the other was the matter of environmental: you're going to ruin the environment. Because, you know, during this period of time and since then there's been a big push on the environment. And, of course, Astoria has always had great need for industrial development. And with that argument, remember the bridge that was supposed to do something. Always some reason to try to develop Astoria, because they had a great need for it, for industrial economic growth. So there's - then, you have people on both sides of all those issues. There's a lot of people that don't want anything to happen in Oregon, today and then too. So they don't want anybody using the power, they don't want any -

you know, they just want to shut down everything. So they had the - those that just want to shut down the state, that was their rally cry. So there are a lot of arguments there, and some of them get pretty heated.

CH Was that ever authorized, then? The plant? It was never built, was it?

VA No, never built. And there was a real press on in later years for a plant up in Hermiston, and that never happened, and, then, they wanted to put well-drilling manufacturer down there, and they threw up - down there meaning Astoria - all kinds of arguments against it, and the company finally said the hell with it and never did anything. So there's opportunities, and Astoria always kind of felt left out.

CH There was legislation in reference to counties to authorize birth control programs. Do you remember anything about that?

VA No, although I'll tell you that in later years, both legislatively and as a governor, we had bills on subjects we wouldn't even talk about when I first started.

CH Like what?

VA Oh, you know, we started talking about condoms and all that kind of stuff. You know, it would just be bills on subjects we would never discuss publicly. Now, that's only in a short span of time.

CH And was that - that's interesting. I mean, was that a - that was just sort of a tacit agreement that you weren't going to...?

VA No. Who talked about condoms? You know, nobody talked

about - well, of course, you're young. You wouldn't know about it. But, hell, you'd sneak in - you wanted to buy some condoms. I remember the story of recent years. They said the way the country is going, the joke was, the fellow walked into the drugstore, and in a fairly loud voice said he wanted to get some condoms, and then he leaned over and whispered to the druggist, And a pack of cigarettes [laughter]. So that's the way things have gone.

CH Well, there were bills to expand abortion laws and require sex education in the public schools, and they all died in the senate.

VA Yeah, sex education was up there all the time. And the big argument was that people say they should not teach sex education, and there were some who wanted to have sex education taught.

CH How did you feel about those two issues?

VA I had a very strong constituent in Washington County, and she was, of course, opposed to that, and I told her that - I said, Now, look, I'm going to vote against any bill that dictates curriculum. If you said that there - those that want to have - this bill was in not to teach education in the schools. I said, I'm going to vote against it. But I said, The same thing would happen that said they had to teach sex education. Back to philosophy.

CH So, then, you would have been one of the people that would have voted against the bills when they came up?

VA Yes. But you see, someone - here again, politics. He's against teaching sex education, or, quote, he's for teaching sex education, whichever it happens to be, and my point was, neither one. My point was, we shouldn't mandate what the curriculum

should be. We shouldn't be fooling around in the legislature saying what curriculum should be.

CH We've talked about most of the other things. The Department of Commerce was made permanent in this session. Was that a good idea?

VA Yeah, I think so.

CH And Portland State College failed to become Portland State University.

VA Well, they got to be a university long before they should, but there you have power politics again, very much like the bridge across the Columbia. The Multnomah County legislators - of course, all colleges want to be called universities. It just gives the professors there greater status. I can go on a great length about the status building and bureaucracy higher - of all of education, not necessarily higher education. But anyway, they did finally get university status, as we know, probably before they were entitled to it. Oregon State and University of Oregon weren't very excited about that.

CH What would make them entitled to it?

VA Well, universities become universities when you have different schools - I guess that's the word you'd use - and so it's a university. A lot of different schools instead of the narrow - let's say just one science, one education or something. You've got a lot of different schools, and when you have a lot of different schools, then you become a university.

CH And in this case there weren't that many schools?

VA I don't think so. I think they got it ahead of time. But,

you know, what the heck.

CH How were they able to get it ahead of time?

VA They just had a lot of legislators that did a lot of lobbying, and, I suppose, some swapping.

CH Do you feel that Portland State should be under the auspices of one of the other two main educational institutions in the state, like some people are arguing, either University of Oregon or Oregon State?

VA No. Oh no, no. You mean like UCLA at wherever?

CH Well, you know, both of the major institutions of higher education in the state, Oregon State and the University of Oregon, have been vying for control over Portland State University to have it as part of their institution.

VA There are fights worth fighting. That's not a fight that's worth fighting. Yes, my answer would be yes. But you'd spend enormous time and emotion, and it really isn't that important. As long as you have a board of higher education and as long as they do a reasonably good job at coordinating what goes on - and they're not necessarily doing that, but the opportunity for doing that exists - then, there's really no need to make the change. I think it would be good, but, having just said that to you, you'd use up an awful lot of time, a huge amount of debate, a lot of emotion, with no result. It's not worth that much.

CH Well, what was your impression of the '67 session, and how would you summarize it?

VA I can't necessarily recall it. It was just a good enough session, I guess.

CH After the '67 session, were there interim committees or interim work that you were involved with?

VA I don't think so. I can't remember.

CH I didn't find any, but I wasn't sure whether there was any. What about the - you were up for reelection, then, in '68.

VA Yeah. That's right, '68.

CH And what was that reelection like?

VA Nothing in particular.

CH Was there anybody running against you in the primary?

VA I don't recall, but again, I really didn't have what I would consider memorable opposition over the years. I was generally accepted as being a good legislator, they liked, generally, what I was doing. I would go out and communicate with my constituents, and it was one of those tough races for anybody else running against you. So I don't recall anything.

I don't know if you're ever going to get into it, because now we're going to step into some other politics, which includes 1968 national Republican convention in Miami Beach, Florida.

CH Well, I had planned on...

VA Is that in there?

CH Well, I had planned on asking you about that sort of in general later on, but since we're at that point right now, why don't we go into that, because actually there's some interesting things that occurred there.

VA The only thing I would say is memorable - well, of course, Nixon was - then he was not the - he was contesting for it. Not like '72 where he was then the president and there was no question who it was going to be. It was my first convention, and in those years - and it's since changed - it was a winner-take-all thing, and Nixon had won Oregon, so we were - Nixon knew that he had our votes. There were some delegations, we used to envy them because they were uncommitted, so, boy, they got wined and dined and everything else, but nobody wined and dined the Oregon delegation because there was no other way for us to go.

The memorable part was that I was on the platform committee, and the way that one worked in those days was that the subcommittees would have public hearings, and the subcommittee would draft their own section, and, then, we went into executive session, and we'd go through the whole document. Everett Dirksen was the chairman of it, and two things occurred during the course of that. One, I was just - you know, I'm elected, I'm a platform committee member, there was a whole lot of big shots, senators and congressmen and, you know, those kind of folks on the platform committee, and, then, a bunch of us guys. Men and women, of course. It was one man, one woman. And what I - you know, I'm there, so I'm going through the documents, like I did in the legislature. I'd read what was there, and if I thought there ought to be some changes, I was more than willing to make proposals for changes. The way that was done is that you'd find the page, the paragraph and what amendment you want, and you'd send it to the desk, so as the chair would get to that page and, then, to that paragraph, they knew that somebody wanted to make a proposal, and your name would be on it. So I stand up, and Dirksen would have a tough time [stuttering] A, A, A - and I'd say Atiyeh. Well, this went on. I mean, I'm up on my feet, you know, fairly frequently, and I can remember late one night, and I stood up again, and he goes [stuttering] A, A, A - and I said Atiyeh, and he said, "I don't know how you can make Atiyeh out of that." That, I remember. I remember...

CH Was he sober?

VA Oh yes. You probably remember - do you remember his voice at all?

CH Oh sure. I grew up in Illinois.

VA A very sonorous voice.

Then, I also had some interest in what was going on in the Middle East. There still was that unrest in the Middle East, and so I thought, well, what I ought to do is propose an amendment to our platform that if we're going to arm anybody over there, we would arm them equally, meaning Israel and the Arab countries. My thought was, if they're all equally armed, then no one's going to be attacking anybody else, and that would be a great step forward for peace. So I proposed that. Jacob Javits, from New York, just chewed my ass out something awful. Just terrible. And so much so that shortly after that there was a recess for whatever reason, and we got back together, and Dirksen apologized for Javits to me, because he was vicious, and there was no need for it. And I've said many times, you know, oftentimes, particularly in those executive sessions, what wasn't done would have been great news. During one of the recesses, and a bunch of us regular folks, and we were talking, and we said, We ought to have a plank in our platform that there should be a provision for no deficit. We have it in our state. Yeah, well, we have it in our state. Yeah, that's a good idea. So why don't we do that? We'll propose that the federal government not operate at a deficit. It will be a plank in our platform. This is 1968. So we made the proposal. The only thing I can guess is that all these big shots there, senators and congressmen, thought, you know, this is so ludicrous, nobody's ever going to vote for it, because there wasn't a great deal of debate on it. And the vote was taken, and it passed. Well, now they all came to life. And I can still remember Roman ^{Hruska} Rusk [sp?] from Nebraska.

Conservative - you know, conservative U.S. senator, old-timer. I thought he was going to have a heart attack. And I'm looking at him, and I'd say, You're one of us. You're a Republican. You should be for this sort of thing. I couldn't believe it. I could not believe the congressmen and senators just went absolutely bonkers that there should be a balanced federal budget, or a no-deficit federal budget. Anyway, they blew down all these folks, and, of course, they can't blow me down. I've been facing all that stuff and - but they had a reconsideration of the vote, and they turned it down. Nineteen sixty-eight.

CH So what if that had been in?

VA Yeah. That was the convention.

CH Well, what affect does the platform really have on things, either the candidates or the party or - I know it's what the party is meant to be representing, but what effect does it really have?

VA Well, platforms, first of all, hardly anybody reads. Maybe some people writing books or historians, but nobody - you know, politicians don't read them. But things like a plank on a no-deficit balanced budget, that would have gotten a lot of attention. You know, you had maybe another hundred pages of stuff, like at the most recent conventions the Republicans have a plank being opposed to abortion. They've got a lot of other things in there, a whole lot of other things in there, but that's all anybody knows is in the platform. So when you ask about it, most of what's in a platform nobody reads, but if there's something like that, abortion or this matter of balanced - but, then, that would have been newsworthy.

CH How were you chosen to be a representative to the convention, and, then, how did you get on the platform committee?

VA Well, first of all, the election was interesting. I guess I should have started there instead of going to Miami Beach, Florida. In those days you could run statewide or you could run within a congressional district, but there were certain numbers allotted. I think there was ten statewide, and I don't recall how many we had, how many votes we had, but let me say that there were thirty votes - I can divide it easily - then there's then four congressional districts, so there would be five for each of the congressional districts, and that would come up to thirty. So I said, I think I'll run statewide just to see how it goes. I just recently was going through some stuff, and I ran across the list of people running for delegate, so I started counting. Well, they'll get elected, they'll get elected, they'll get elected, and so I thought - I just filed. I didn't think about the fact that I might get elected. And Dolores and I began to plan our vacation, because, you know, I wasn't going to go to the convention. By George, I won, statewide. And so that's how I got to go there.

Then, we had a meeting, and we chose our various platform committee, rules committee, different committees, members to serve. The platform committee members, we went there a week early and did our work. I really lost a lot of sleep during that platform week. We went till late at night, and it was a long, tedious affair. But anyway, I remember that from 1968.

CH I guess one thing that a lot of people, especially Republicans, remember from the 1968 convention was that newly-elected Senator Hatfield nearly became Vice President Hatfield.

VA Ah yes, yes, yes, yes. You mention that, and I've got...

CH When you mentioned the convention, that's immediately what I thought. You must have been right in the middle of all that.

VA I was. We sat there in Mark Hatfield's room at the hotel,

and he was. He was right - he was - there was cameras down in the lobby all night into the morning because they didn't know who was going to be chosen. And we kept waiting for the phone to ring. It was that close. When I look back on it, just imagine what if Hatfield would have been chosen as vice president, not Spiro Agnew. So, then, there would not have been a vice president to resign and Gerry Ford having been appointed in his place, but Hatfield would have been there, Watergate would have come, Nixon would have resigned, and Mark Hatfield would have been president, because there wouldn't have been any scandal in terms of Mark Hatfield. He would have been there. There's a what if. That's how close he came to being president of the United States. But it didn't happen, and they picked this guy Spiro Agnew. How they did that, why they did it, who knows. I don't know.

CH You have no idea.

VA I have no idea.

CH Was there any speculation in the room of anything that was going on?

VA No, no, it just didn't happen. But Dolores and I, and, of course, several friends, we were in the room all night long waiting for that phone to ring.

CH Were you there when Mark Hatfield spoke with Billy Graham on the phone?

VA Yes. He was supporting him. Yeah, we were there all night long waiting for that to happen, but it didn't happen.

CH Well, was there anything else out of the convention that we...?

VA No. You have to wait till we get to '72 for the next convention, because I had some things there too.

CH Okay. Well, let's move on.

After your election, and as we go into the '69 session, Debbs Potts was president of the senate at the time. Was there anything notable about that election?

VA No. Another coalition election.

CH So being a coalition election, did you vote for Debbs Potts?

VA I think - now we're into '69, right?

CH That's right.

VA No, I don't think I did. I still was opposed to a coalition. I think that was the year that I was selected as the Republican leader in the senate, and that was the year that my never - no, no, no, no. Excuse me. I'm ahead of my time, because John Burns was the time my name never came up. Debbs Potts, no, I didn't vote for Debbs, but that was because - not that I didn't like Debbs, I didn't like a coalition.

CH And Bob Smith was speaker of the house. Did you have occasion to work with Bob Smith?

VA Oh yes. Bob was one of the Turks.

CH That's right. You had mentioned that.

Were there other changes or other significant things that occurred in this particular session that - in terms of the leadership that was...?

VA No. Your committee assignments included, again, Air and

Water Quality Control, and you were chair at this point. Was there anything in this session regarding air and water quality that you recall having gone through your committee?

VA No, nothing.

CH Let's take a look at these other - you weren't on environment - was there an environment committee at the time?

VA Well, the name was changed at some point. It was Air and Water Quality Control, and the senate had it first. It finally became the Environment and Land-use Committee, and I'm not sure when that happened.

CH Well, the thing I was leading up to was that, you know, the beach bill went through the legislature, and I was just wondering what committee that would have been in.

VA That probably was Judiciary or somewhere. It was a very technical bill.

CH You were on Education, and some of these people that we've talked about already, Flegel, Bateson, Eivers, and Roberts were on that committee. You had one resolution. It was Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 1 that was at the request - here we go [?] - of the governor's committee on children and youth - now, I don't know whether this was through the governor or just through that committee - for claiming youth recognition week, and it was signed by the speaker and the president. First of all, what is the purpose of a concurrent resolution or a joint resolution or a memorial?

VA Just a statement. It doesn't have any effect.

CH It doesn't affect anything?

VA No.

CH It doesn't need to be signed by the governor? In this case it was signed by the speaker and the president.

VA No. It's just...

CH It's just a proclamation?

VA It's just how we feel.

CH Was there anything significant about this, or was there any reason for...?

VA Not that I recall. Nothing.

CH You were vice chair of Taxation, along with some of the same members of the previous session, and you...

[End of Tape 10, Side 1]