

VICTOR ATIYEH
July 23, 1993
Tape 48, Side 1

C.H.: 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 July 23rd 1993, and this is Tape 48, Side 1.

Going on to some of the other issues that were before the legislature in 1985, and I believe that these are still issues that were passed, there was legislation that required state colleges and universities to establish grievance procedures that meet minimum state standards. What was that about?

V.A.: That was a - I'm trying to think of the word - There was a woman that was being - that is, the higher education - was not being promoted because she was a woman. I'm putting it rather crudely. She may even have won her case, I'm not sure. But that's what it related to, the - what is it, equal employment? I'm trying to remember the right terminology. But anyway, that's what created that piece of legislation.

C.H.: There was also a bill establishing a holiday for Martin Luther King. You supported that.

V.A.: Well, there is a story about that.

C.H.: Okay, go ahead.

V.A.: You got it somewhere?

C.H.: Go ahead.

V.A.: Actually vetoed the bill to start with, or indicate - yeah, vetoed the bill to start with. My problem was that it didn't relate to whether or not we should recognize Martin Luther King.

I had no problem with that. The core of the problem was that the Public Employees Union wanted another day of vacation, and that's what I had a problem with. I said we can't afford it, a paid vacation, and that if we could work it around where that would not be the case, that didn't mean that we would not make that a holiday, but there were some other holidays that we'd take away, you see what I'm trying to say. That was my argument.

C.H.: Wasn't the plan to combine Washington and Lincoln and a few other presidents?

V.A.: Yeah, and I find that most distressing. I really do. And we do that at the national level too. What they call Presidents Day. When I say distressing, I think that Abraham Lincoln and George Washington deserve their days. But they don't have a day. They have this anonymous Presidents Day. But Martin Luther King has his day. It's not that I'm demeaning Martin Luther King, I'm saying that Washington and Lincoln certainly deserve their day. And that's my problem.

C.H.: Was this before or after the controversy that arose on this issue in Arizona with the governor there.

V.A.: This was before. The governor of Arizona really dumb. I mean, he was saying there ought not to be a Martin Luther King day. That's not what I said. I had no problem with that whatsoever, because this man really did something that I felt was very important. We talked about, you know, the discrimination against blacks which even continues today. So I thought he was a great person and did a great job in what I thought was a very important field. But the governor down there, he just didn't think there should be a Martin Luther King day. Well, that's a difference of

opinion. I certainly don't agree with him. That's how these things become misinterpreted.

Again, when I talked earlier about divestiture in South Africa, my problem wasn't trying to do what we could to eliminate apartheid. My problem was a problem of using public employees' savings, if you will, and deciding what's going to be done with it without the public employee being involved. And that was the problem. But those things become misunderstood. "He's against blacks," or "he's against Martin Luther King." But you have to face up to those, you know, you have to say, some might say - Gosh, I don't want to go through this, you know. And so they would do some things that really shouldn't be done. I was willing to do it. I know ahead of time it could very easily be misunderstand.

Let me divert for just a moment. My Affirmative Action officer was Kay Touran, and we had several discussions. She did a good job for me, and we had several discussions. Kay, I'd say to her once in a while, it really is a shame. She got the job because she deserved it, she was qualified for it, and she did do a good job. But a lot of people would look and say, oh, oh, I know why she's Affirmative Action officer. First she's a female, and second she's black, that's why she got the job. That's the unfairness about it. She realized that it's one of those things you have to live with. But she got the job because she was qualified to do the job. But so many people would look at it because she's female and because she's black. And so we get back to my discussion on Martin Luther King day and the apartheid thing. I know how the perceptions are going to be, but what's right is right, so you just go with it.

C.H.: That eventually didn't get resolved the way that you wanted it to, did it.

V.A.: Not entirely, no.

C.H.: And they did combine the presidents day. And is Kings holiday a paid holiday, or not?

V.A.: Yeah. It's an official paid holiday.

C.H.: At what point did you decide not to veto that then?

V.A.: Well, you know, you finally get it worked around where you could really negotiate it the best where you know how. I told them I couldn't afford it. The government can't afford it, another paid holiday. I can't remember the exact details. I remember the discussion, I remember what my concern was, how we finally came down to it I can't recall.

C.H.: Did the media present that issue in a way that you felt was acceptable?

V.A.: I think we got through it. The people that did understand what I was doing. That's all you can hope for. Made the separation between the issues.

C.H.: Going on to another bill that passed the legislature but you vetoed which deals with exactly the same topic was forbidding the investment of state funds in banks making direct loans to South Africa.

V.A.: We've already pretty well covered that, yeah.

C.H.: Also there was a bill extending the prohibition against cities adopting rent controls? And I don't know which cities were doing that, whether that was a Cannon Beach issue or a Portland issue.

V.A.: I have no recollection of that.

C.H.: And then finally on bills that passed, you signed legislation making gallery owners responsible for damage or theft of artworks they display and requires a list of sellers to artists and consent for the use of arts for promotional purposes. We've discussed a little bit of this.

V.A.: A little bit, but not a great deal. That was actually a lot more controversial than it sounds, only it was limited to the art world, but quite controversial. This was a matter of art galleries taking advantage of artists. So what we really had was artists on one side and art galleries on the other, and the artists depended on art galleries. A tough one, tough for the artists and tough for making a decision with respect to it.

I came down on the side really of the artists, and I had some prominent art gallery owners that I knew that were not very happy about the whole thing. Yet it all worked out. It all worked out because there was some taking advantage and we can understand that. An artist is yearning to have a place to show their art, yearning to sell their art so maybe they would become famous some day, and so that was the hammer that the art galleries held over the artist. I don't know if we could say from time to time take advantage of them, of that situation, and so you had to kind of level the ballfield a little bit.

C.H.: Do you feel that the art community appreciated your stand in that?

V.A.: I tell you, I think that the artists didn't really understand it. Many of them didn't understand it probably and didn't quite care about it, probably maybe didn't even know about it, but the art community in the sense of galleries knew about it very much. So if there's a remembrance of it it would be by those

who didn't like what I did more than those who would like what I did.

C.H.: That must be frustrating for you too at times, to have to deal with something like that.

V.A.: Yeah, yeah, but you see, if you start counting votes you're getting in trouble. What's the right thing to do? So you do these things, that's how all this misinterpretation can come about. You do all these things - heck, you know, as I told you before when I vetoed that bill - remember we talked about the wine and no central warehousing, and all my friends were on that side. I mean, these are people I knew that supported me, that gave me money, and they were friends, people that I actually knew, and I'm going south on them. But you know, if you say okay they're my friends and so I'm going to violate what I think is an appropriate philosophy of government, no I'm not going to violate what I think is the appropriate role of government. I'm going to go the way I think is the right way. So I sleep at night.

C.H.: We're going on to bills that didn't pass and these are 2,200 bills introduced to the legislature that session. There was a bill requiring separate smoking and non-smoking areas on the job that didn't pass. That eventually did pass though, didn't it?

V.A.: Yeah.

C.H.: But it didn't at this point. And we've discussed ...

V.A.: We've discussed smoking, yes.

C.H.: As you're putting out your cigarette.

V.A.: As I put out my cigarette.

C.H.: Need we say more?

V.A.: No. I think we've covered it pretty well.

C.H.: And I think that we've covered this as well, but there was a bill that didn't pass making the use of seat belts mandatory for adult motorists.

V.A.: Yeah, that didn't pass, but as we know it's now Oregon law.

C.H.: Right. And a bill banning field burning. In 1985 was that an outright prohibition of field burning?

V.A.: That's what they were getting at. And remember we talked about returning field burning back to how you treat everybody else. And that's air pollution, and turned into what we call smoke management. I did really want to stay away from that whole - you know, do it in an orderly way, the way it's been done with everybody else, every other industry. This industry happened to be agriculture rather than a building with a smokestack.

C.H.: Another bill that lost was forbidding state funding of abortions. So having lost then you didn't have an opportunity to either veto or sign it.

V.A.: No, but I think we covered that pretty well earlier when I was saying my position was not acceptable to either side. And just to restate again, I am opposed to unrestricted abortion, that's who I am, and I do truly believe that. But as governor I did fund abortion and my rationalization was that it is legal. I don't happen to like it but it is legal. So why should just those who could afford it get an abortion? That doesn't please anybody but that's how I came down.

C.H.: Another bill was trying to ban plastic [indiscernible]?

V.A.: Yeah. I laugh. I really have some strong feelings about plastic in the fact that it doesn't biodegrade and all the rest of it, and we're filling up our - I think way back then I've

already told you we've done a pretty good job on air and water but we've done a lousy job on ground pollution. And we continue to do a pretty lousy job.

C.H.: So did you support this then?

V.A.: I would but it didn't get around to me.

C.H.: And also they wanted to add wine coolers to the bottle bill.

V.A.: Yeah, same thing. They keep wanting to add things.

C.H.: And did you support this?

V.A.: No, I wouldn't do that.

C.H.: Why wouldn't you have supported that?

V.A.: I guess basically my problem is that it goes way back to the time of the bottle bill and I think I mentioned it way back in the tape that the one real fault with the bottle bill was that we didn't compensate the collectors and the collectors are the grocery stores. You know, just add another burden just because you feel good about it. And actually it's working out just as well on the recycling program here and that's the best way to get about doing this job. I put my stuff out on the curb on the recycling, although I was telling my wife that what would help recycling is some of these manufacturers would put their labels on so you could at least wash them off. They put them on with stick'em stuff.

C.H.: Absolutely. You have to soak them and even when you do it's hard to get them off.

V.A.: That's right. And you know if the manufacturers would just put labels on like they used to that will come off I think that will facilitate.

C.H.: Some of them do but some of them don't.

V.A.: Little things like that. It was interesting because I think there's a lot of non-recycling because it's too much of a nuisance to get those labels off so they just through it in the garbage can.

C.H.: I saw just recently that the recyclers were not requiring that you take off. For a while they were requiring that you take off the labels. I still try to take them off but now I've noticed that in the last literature from Metro or somebody that said you didn't need to take the labels off.

V.A.: Well, that will help. That will help immensely. And I wonder about that because obviously they're going to heat this stuff to recycle it. It's gotta burn. So you know I thought to myself there's a lot of people that don't recycle because it's a nuisance. There's even a nuisance in terms of cans because they want you to cut out both ends and flatten it out. And a lot of people aren't willing to go through that. Labels are a little easier on cans because most of those will come off but you know then you have to wash them and cut both ends off and stomp on them. You know we've got to make it as easy as we can for the people who're going to do the recycling. Anyway.

C.H.: There was another bill that was trying to push up the date of Oregon's May primary. I remember this has been an issue off and on in terms of where Oregon fits in with the rest of the Northwest, with California, and respective to the rest of the country.

V.A.: You know that's just merely a matter of getting attention. It had nothing to do with the election.

C.H.: Is getting attention a good thing?

V.A.: I don't know what good it does.

C.H.: In terms of getting our issues, the issues of Oregon, out into the national attention?

V.A.: You don't really get your views, they're only paying attention to who won the primary. We're talking presidential primaries, that's really what we're talking about. The world is not waiting to see who won the third legislative district. It just doesn't hit national news. So it's really mostly presidential, once in a while senatorial, but you know on the national level. It didn't make any sense to me, you know, let's do it our convenience, not because we think we want to get some national attention. Because it doesn't really make any difference.

C.H.: For getting the attention of the candidates of those issues?

V.A.: That is true. Actually the candidate that comes in and targets Oregon has a good chance. We lost Oregon - Republican - we lost Oregon both times through George Bush. Both times George Bush did not target - targeting means ^{spending} ~~signing~~ money to put on a real campaign. The opponents - Dukakis and Clinton - did and so they had a good campaign going and we couldn't crank one up because we just couldn't put enough money together to get that job done. So that's what targeting means, I mean, you know, if we think it's important.

C.H.: Wasn't there an effort during the same period to have a joint Northwestern primary?

V.A.: Yeah. Yeah.

C.H.: How did you feel about that?

V.A.: Again the same thing. Let's do what we want to do. All this was to get attention. That's all it was and I'm not interested in doing things for that reason. We just do it at our

convenience and if we like what we're doing let's stay with what we're doing.

C.H.: Do you think there is a time that's better to have a primary in terms of where it falls in the election campaign?

V.A.: No. There are some that want to shorten the period between a primary in general. I'm saying it doesn't make any difference. Washington has a primary in September and the general in November. But don't tell me those people aren't campaigning in January. Because they are. So again for what purpose are we doing all of this, to shorten it? You're not going to shorten it. You may shorten the period between elections but you're not going to shorten all of the TV ads and all the rest of that stuff that people get tired of.

C.H.: There was another bill that tried to legalize prostitution.

V.A.: Yeah. That's really interesting. I'm not really quite sure about that. On the one hand, you could think okay. You legalize it. The prostitutes have to have physicals, you know, you have some kind of control over at least the health standards. It's going to happen. You waste a lot of time and money by making it illegal. And yet you still weigh that against that prostitution really is not a good societal goal. I think I would probably end up in the latter area although I see some sense in legalization.

C.H.: Actually that surprises me. I would not have thought you would see any benefit in legalizing it.

V.A.: Oh. I can see the benefits of it. I just still come down to terms of moral standards and that's where I would probably end up. But I certainly can see how one would rationalize and I think these are acceptable arguments.

C.H.: Somehow I have a hard time seeing that fit with you.

V.A.: Well, you always have to figure out what - you know, I'm always willing - I'll tell you another story that relates to what I just told you. Vern Cook is my example but there'd be others that I call Vern Cooks and they'd get up and he had his position and he didn't care about anything. That was his position and that was it and there was no other thing. I got to admiring people like that and I go back to the time when I took a philosophy class in college and I often said Gee, I wish I hadn't taken that because you begin to see both sides. He didn't see both sides and so he didn't have any problem with the other side.

C.H.: Vern Cook is still around isn't he?

V.A.: Oh yes, yes.

C.H.: And he's running for the ...

V.A.: Chair of County Commission. I don't think he's going to make it.

C.H.: You don't think so? Are you supporting one person or another in that?

V.A.: No. I'm not involved because I don't even live in the county.

C.H.: Right here in Washington County?

V.A.: I have to tell you - I'm not sure the tape really deserves this, but I'm not sure it would be winners in either case.

C.H.: Vern Cook has always had very strong opinions, hasn't he?

V.A.: Yeah. Yeah. But when you say to me you're surprised that I could see another side, then I have to laugh because I remember saying God, wouldn't that be nice not to be fettered with

looking at both sides of things? God, wouldn't that be nice, comfortable, you know.

C.H.: But in a way you have said that before, haven't you, about your set of principles and a little common sense.

V.A.: That's right. That doesn't mean however that I don't see another side of another view and when you ask me how history's going to treat me then I guess I've pretty well said it. That somebody else is going to have a different view and I know that. I'm not sure what it's going to be but they're going to have a different view. I just went through something which kind of relates to it. I was reading the Oregon Historical Quarterly. This was an interview with Ted Halleck, Hector McPherson, Henry Richmond, Stafford Hansel, pretty much like we're doing.

C.H.: On land use.

V.A.: On land use. And Ted Halleck made an unequivocal statement that I was opposed to land use and then later on that I was going to kill the bill. And I wrote a pretty nasty letter to the Society because I consider the Quarterly is really part of history and people are going to look it up and that's not what my position was at all. And I hate to leave it just like that. Now I don't know what could be done about it. It's in the Quarterly, it's printed, and they don't write letters to the editor in the Quarterly. But I was offended by that.

C.H.: Couldn't you write an article about land use yourself?

V.A.: I could. I don't know. I sent it to the editor of the Quarterly. We'll see what happens. That's been a few days ago. But I was very indignant about it because that's not my position at all. Matter of fact I said anybody that lives in Raleigh Hills has got to be for land use planning. I lived there when the Bertha-

Beaverton Highway was a two-lane mostly residential street. Now it's a four-lane commercial. There was a dairy farm across the street from where I was living.

C.H.: Over where the Fred Meyer was?

V.A.: Where the Fred Meyer is now. So you know when I first moved down to Raleigh Hills there was two Greek grocers, a service station and a tavern. That's all that was down there. Of course, anyone that knows what Raleigh Hills is like - So anybody who lives in Raleigh Hills has got to be for land use planning. And then to have this statement so unequivocal. I mean, it was very unequivocal. It wasn't like I think he was against land use planning. I was. That's what Ted Halleck said. I was going to kill the bill. That's what Ted Halleck says. That's not my position at all. Incidentally it becomes very interesting because it shows you the paranoia that goes along. There were things in there that I could not philosophically accept. I could not philosophically accept a regional government doing land use planning. Remember we talked about that. It's just not in me.

C.H.: The council of governments, the COGS?

V.A.: The COGS. It's just not in me and I know the sensitivity of land use planning. I know about that. And we're westerners and that's why people came out here for land and they put high stakes on their ownership. I know all of that, I'm sensitive to it. So you know I have to get rid of some of that. Well, when you start tinkering around, that means ergo you're against it. I'm not against the bill. I'm against some of the things in the bill. But there it is. You see another person's interpretation of history.

C.H.: When SB 100 went through, and I guess I could lift this up right now. You go to which way?

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V.A.: Fort.

C.H.: You go to fort. I can't imagine anybody doing responsible research on that issue that would not look at the vote and then also look at your record as governor in terms of that.

V.A.: I would hope so. But you know that's something I can't take a chance on because I feel very strong about it. I actually used the fact that we had statewide land use planning as one of my pro arguments for why people ought to come to Oregon. I mean, that was part of my package.

C.H.: Isn't that generally known?

V.A.: It's hard for me to tell. I don't know who knows all of that. But that was part of my package. It was part of the package that related to the productivity of Oregonians and their loyalty and transportation and all of these things, available power, these were all part of my bag of tool for trying to tell people why they ought to come to Oregon. And land use planning was one of them. But first of all, you know Ted. And he does kind of take off a little bit. I used the word paranoia in my letter, there's a kind of demonstration of the paranoia. You know, don't touch a hair on my chinny-chin-chin. But if the hair's out of place I gotta. Even when SB 100 was first introduced would allow the state to transfer it's land use planning to a regional planning body. I mean, we're getting further away. It isn't just a matter of a region within the state, it would be a matter of like a region ten up in Seattle could do land use planning in Oregon. Well, you know, I'm going to go off like a rocket because I can't have something like that. And I don't happen to believe and I've said to many people, you know, show me the rape and pillage. We didn't have SB 100 until 1975. Now show me all the rape and pillage in

Oregon. Yes, 82nd Avenue. Yes, Raleigh Hills. But where's the rape and pillage anywhere else? I don't see it. Some of these things can get real hysterical. In Portland or Multnomah County, I've forgotten, it had a sizable lot which was a pretty good-sized lot.

[End of Tape 48, Side 1]