

# Governor tests his freedom

The 1972 constitutional amendment that freed the governor to travel out of state without the threat of a palace coup gets its first major test as Gov. Vic Atiyeh goes for more than a month in search of his roots in Syria.

The amendment provides that the governor remains the governor, officially in charge and responsible for state government, wherever he may be.

Previously, whenever the person elected to the office crossed the state line, the president of the Senate, as next in line of succession, became governor. Not acting governor; governor.

The 1972 amendment was based on the recognition that in an age of instant communications and jet airplanes the governor is never out of touch to the point that, in effect, he has to abdicate office when leaving the state.

Considering Atiyeh's differences with Senate President Edward N. Fadelley, D-Eugene, through a stormy legislative session and its aftermath, Atiyeh might have skipped his journey under the old constitutional provision. That was part of the trouble with it. The governor was a virtual prisoner, especially if he were out of step with the Senate president. The governor might return to find unwelcome appointments to office or pet programs dismantled.

Even when the governor had no reason to suspect the actions of the Senate president, the situation was awkward when the governor's staff was called upon to serve a different master. The state went through such ridiculous contortions as having four governors in a single day. Or, as former Senate President Harry Boivin once said when the governor was out of state for a few minutes when he landed at an airport across the river for an appearance in The

Dalles, "I slept through my whole term."

No matter how brief the service, the fill-in governors were entitled to be paid for it, and they learned simply to accept the small fee with good grace after finding what it cost the state to crank up the bureaucratic machinery to enable them to reject payment.

The governor's executive assistant, Geraldine C. Thompson, will be in the public eye more than usual as she keeps the governor's office running while Atiyeh is away. But she does not become governor, or even acting governor. Indeed, her position does not change, just becomes more prominent in the boss's absence. Whatever she does is Atiyeh's direct responsibility.

Atiyeh intends to be in touch with his office daily. Given the present state of American-Syrian relations, he may put the theory behind the constitutional amendment to its ultimate test. Modern communications may make it possible for the governor to stay in charge when out of state, just so long as there is no breakdown. For Atiyeh's sake, that means that Syria and the United States had better keep their lines of communication open in the weeks ahead.

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