

## Atiyeh trip opens doors to compassion

Governor Victor Atiyeh's recent trip to the Middle East sheds some new light on old stereotypes.

The Arab world, as a rule, does not have a good public image in the United States today. In the confusion and controversy surrounding Israel vs. the Arab countries, the United States, with its primary support of Israel, generally is caught in mistrust and misunderstanding with the leaders and people of the Arab world.

And frequently, those persons are viewed as hostile, irrational, terroristic. Stereotypes change over time. It used to be Jews, but fear tends to spring from the unknown, and the United States now seems to know and incorporate Jewishness thoroughly.

Our knowledge, our contact, and our acceptance of Arabs is much less. And yet, both Arabs and Jews are by definition "Semites." Perhaps anti-Arab sentiment is a new version of anti-Semitism, a term traditionally associated with Jews.

The image, of course, is part and parcel of the political realities. The United States, even while it asserts that it strives for peace in the Middle East, accrues much hostility from

Arab countries because of its Israeli support.

So Atiyeh stepped into the Middle East and the middle of the most currently "politically delicate" area there for the United States last week when he traveled to his father's homeland of Syria.

It was a trade mission, months in the making, which included visits to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel. Several Oregon businessmen accompanied the governor. The results, Atiyeh reports, include "impact and sales" for Oregon business.

But the most important result may be the increase in human understanding and the decrease in the usual uncongenial prejudice with which Syria and the rest of the Arab world is seen.

Atiyeh had to overcome obstacles to make the trip plans a reality. Initially, Syrians were not willing to meet with him if he was planning to visit Israel. But he successfully walked a fine and important line, maintaining his independence and getting across national borders as well as across barriers of belief.

Syria was seen in a different light as the Governor embraced his cousin and

### THE PROBLEM WITH STEREOTYPES:



held friendly business meetings with officials. For the viewer back home, legitimacy and acceptance replaced at least a degree of suspicion and estrangement.

Oregon could certainly benefit from business and trade agreements. And everyone benefits from that which increases humanism and lessens hatred. (SD)