

# Victor Atiyeh: Charting a Course for Oregon's Energy Future

By Judy Van Rest

**"Among the observers who have been in a position to watch him most closely, Gov. Vic Atiyeh rates high for his first year in office. The Oregon Statesman puts itself in that number."**

Governor Victor Atiyeh, using a three-C philosophy of "conciliation, communication and credibility," has quietly made a tremendous impact in his first year as Oregon's chief executive. He is a man whose 20 years of state legislative experience have taught him that government needs to be managed in such a way to avoid crises, to "diffuse" situations before they get out of hand. He is a man who believes in working calmly and closely with his fellow citizens in coping with the problems facing Oregon, particularly in the area of energy. He is a leader, who in applying his three-C philosophy to the variety of crucial events that occurred in 1979, may turn Oregon and teamwork into synonymous words.

**"Gov. Atiyeh listens. He is not easily aroused to anger. He doesn't respond in kind to criticism, justified or not. He can, and is, influenced by argument, modifying his position when the facts appear to warrant."**

Gov. Atiyeh's handling of the gasoline shortage that gripped the nation last summer is a prime example of his style of leadership. In an interview with *First Monday*, the Governor noted that the gas shortages of 1973 and 1974 had made him aware of the need to appeal to more than the consumer—that the gas companies, distributors, suppliers, and service stations needed to become involved in finding solutions to the state's gasoline shortages. So when the gas lines began to appear in Oregon, Gov. Atiyeh called in these various members of the gas industry. "We got them together," he said. "We sat down and said, 'Look, we've got a problem. Now, how can we work it out?'" Together they devised a plan to cut down on potential hysteria and panic.

Then Gov. Atiyeh turned to the people. He described the problem, told them what it was all about, and that it would only be solved by Oregonians working together to reduce consumption, avoid hoarding and topping off their gas tanks. The citizens of Oregon answered their Governor's call for help

and were able to avoid the long, frustrating gas lines that confronted the other states. Today, Oregonians' gasoline consumption has dropped by more than six percent, compared to the 4.1 percent target the Department of Energy set for the state.

The Governor firmly believes that energy is the most important issue in today's world. Under his guidance, Oregon may well be leading the U.S. in voluntary energy conservation and working to discover alternative energy sources. His continuing promotion of voluntary conservation has not only resulted in Oregonians' reducing their gasoline consumption well below federal standards but also home insulation efforts in 130,000 households through state and utility-sponsored incentives have saved enough energy to heat and light some 13,000 new homes. In addition, state employees have lowered energy consumption in their office buildings by 10 percent, and 450 solar heating systems have been certified in Oregon by the Department of Energy this year—compared to less than 12 a decade ago. "By 1982, we expect several thousand solar systems to be operating in our state," Gov. Atiyeh noted.

In an effort to find other sources of energy, under Gov. Atiyeh's direction, an Alternate Energy Commission was created in 1979, a commission comprised of various task forces to recommend specific uses of available energy, including wind, water, sun, and gasoline. This is a voluntary program, and out of some 400 Oregonians who represented industry, labor, environmental concerns, education, and local government, 80 were chosen. These volunteers have been working to research and prepare "can-do" reports on alternate sources of energy.

Gov. Atiyeh's concern with the energy problem has also reached beyond the boundaries of Oregon. He explained that while Oregon "will do what it can do" to find solutions to the energy problem, one state cannot do it alone. Because "the power problem is getting so wide, particularly in terms of cost," the Governor resurrected a dying regional power bill. Atiyeh, working with the Governors of Washington, Idaho, and Montana, came up with the Pacific Northwest Regional Power bill which "covers some hard and very sensitive questions concerning future power needs



and future economic development" for the northwestern states.

**"Gov. Atiyeh doesn't make the headlines with provocative statements.... But he has gained the confidence of the managers and directors of the scores of state agencies which are at the heart of state government."**

"When I leave office," Vic Atiyeh said, "I want the people of Oregon to feel a great deal of respect for and confidence in their state government... that they have a really good feeling that government is in fact listening to them, responding to them, that government is working the way they want government to work."

He emphasized, too, that he hopes that when Oregonians look back on his term as Governor, they will see that the steps taken during his administration to cope with the energy problem have "charted a course" for the state's future.

**"But because much of his good work doesn't produce headlines, it is fair to create an opportunity, at the end of his first year, to emphasize a job well done and the prospect of more to come."**

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*This profile of Oregon Governor Victor Atiyeh is the sixth in a series of profiles on the ten new Republican Governors elected since 1978.*