

Tape 12, 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 December 28, 1992, and this is Tape 12, Side 1.

Also under environmental issues in this session there was a bill regarding the blocking of construction of Trojan. Now, is this what you were referring to that came up before you...?

VA No. What we'll get to is bills, both in '73 and '75, but especially in '73, a moratorium in nuclear power plants. Stop; no more. This would be preceding all of that. They didn't want them, they didn't want nuclear power plants, so let's do whatever we can to prevent them from being built. So this wasn't a head-on moratorium, this was one of those side issue things that - the intent was exactly the same, but it wasn't head-on.

CH Probably the most notable bill in, perhaps, the whole session, at least in retrospect, was the bottle bill. And that came out through this session.

VA Yes.

CH Did that come through your committee, the Environmental Committee?

VA No.

CH What can you recall about the movement of this bill through the legislature and how...?

VA Well, I knew its presence; I was aware of the enormous pressures. There were a few bills during my career in which there was huge pressure applied. Way back, first session, the

timber taxation bill. I can recall that one as being very heavily lobbied on both sides. The bottle bill, and, of course, later on, now, when we get to Senate Bill 100, land-use, these were very heavily lobbied bills, and very emotional. We had one of the can companies here, we had labor, who was working for them; and this was going to ruin an industry, and this has never been done before, no other state had it. So, you know, all of this was very heavy-duty stuff. When I say it didn't come through my committee, I don't recall what the committee name was, but Betty Roberts was the chair. She's the one that brought the bill to the senate floor. And at this point, now, I have the recollection, and it later got involved with my campaign, that is, my campaign with Bob Straub. But you recall I said earlier that the one thing I do which is very unusual is I read bills. So I'm reading this bill, and I know it's going to be controversial, not only if it passes, but, once it becomes law, there will be an attack on the bill, and so we better make it as good as we can make it while it's going through.

CH But you were supportive of it?

VA I was supportive of it. So having read the bill, I saw a defect - I don't recall what it was - and, then, I talked to Betty, who was chair of the committee, and I said, "Betty, this is a problem. Really, we better -" It came on the floor, you know, everybody knew it was coming on the floor, and everybody's all geared up for a vote; that is, the lobby and the legislators, and the whole thing. Well, Betty agreed, and so I got up and pointed it out and made a motion to send it back to committee. Later on, it became an issue when Bob Straub said I moved it back to committee to kill it. Well, obviously, I didn't do it for that reason. And you can usually be successful, and you can only be successful in a case of this highly controversial bill, if the chair ^{agrees}, because everyone presumed that the chair was in favor of the bill, and she was, but if I didn't get her

acquiescence, there was no way the bill was going to go back to committee, because the senators just wouldn't vote for a move back. So they moved it back, I think they took care of it that afternoon, and brought it back the next day, so, I mean, it was - it wasn't a matter of a great amount of time. The one thing - it was a good bill. It's a good bill, it's been a good bill, it's something that was good for Oregon, but the one thing we didn't do that we should have done is that we didn't really treat the collection points correctly. The collection points are the grocery stores, supermarkets. We really didn't treat them right. They're the ones that were our collectors, and they're - I've talked to others in other states around the nation, and they were asking about the bottle bill, and I always tell them, Look, if you're going to do that, we didn't do a good job in terms of the collecting points. If you're going to do something like that, you ought to take that into account.

CH What were you suggesting to be done to the collection points?

VA Well, I think we need to reward them a little bit better, or we should have had some other collection points, although I'm not sure that would have been - if it was inconvenient, it wouldn't have worked as well. But some way - and we should have - they get something for it, I think a penny or - I don't recall what it is, but not nearly enough, because these are bulky items, and so at best it takes a lot of space. At worst, you know, there's still some pop left in them, or whatever, or somebody puts something in them, and, you know, they could be not healthy. And, then, they have to have extra people to deal with it, maybe to sort them, and we didn't pay them enough for doing it.

CH Has that been rectified?

VA No.

CH In the same session there was also a litter bill and a pollution control bill. I don't know if those actually came through your Environmental Committee or not, but they were environmentally related. Do you recall anything about those?

VA No. We made some changes. You recall some time back when we passed the first of the antipollution laws and we gave a tax break, property or income tax break, and we - first for, I think was, two or three years. Another short time frame. We had to extend that period of time. That may have been it. I don't know.

CH The bottle bill was - that was originally sponsored by Paul Hanneman?

VA Paul Hanneman. That was his idea that Tom McCall embraced mightily, although he really - he was opposed to it at the beginning.

CH Tom McCall Was?

VA He was opposed to it, yeah.

CH Why?

VA I have no idea. Who knows?

CH For how long was he opposed to it?

VA Until he found out it was good to be for it. It's one of those things that we mentioned earlier that Tom was just great in getting somebody's idea and embracing it for his own. A smart man in that respect.

CH A lot of administrations are compared to the McCall

administration. Do you think that's justifiable?

VA What's that?

CH A lot of administrations - and I noticed later on when I read about Governor Straub and your governorship and almost everyone else, that they compare it to - well, how was it compared to Tom McCall's administration.

VA Well, that was a burden for Bob Straub. It was never a burden for me. People would say, But Tom McCall wouldn't do it that way, and I'd say, I'm not Tom McCall; I'm Vic Atiyeh. I was never burdened with that. I'm going to do what I want to do the way I want to do it, and I'm not going to try to emulate Tom McCall. He was a great governor, a great governor, but I'm not Tom McCall. I think everyone, of course, knows that. But it was a heavy burden for Bob Straub. He kept thinking that somehow he should emulate Tom McCall, and that's not Bob Straub. He's a real nice guy, and I like him very much, but that's not Bob Straub. And I wasn't even pretending. Early on, I made it very clear to the media and anybody else, just forget it. I'm not even pretending to be Tom McCall. I'm who I am. But Tom had the skills. The bottle bill was good. It was a success for Oregon, and I think it's a good thing that we did.

CH Some of the other bills that you had in that session, one was a Senate Bill 679, at the request of the Traffic Safety Commission, in regards to administration of justice.

VA I can't recall that specifically, but I was big on traffic safety. Big. And very much against the drinking driver. Always, very strongly. That continued on through my whole career as a legislator. If we really went through it, you'd find traffic safety bills with my name on them, because I just am very keen on traffic safety.

CH You had a Senate Concurrent Resolution Number 4 in memoriam to Eliza Roseanna Barchus ~~(sic)~~. What was that about?

VA She was quite a woman. She died when she was a hundred and something, a hundred and one, or something like that. I knew her daughter; I'd been in their house. Eliza Barchus was a very prolific painter. She - and I have samples of her little brochures. She was quite a self-promoter. She had paintings at the Lewis and Clark Fair in 1905; was not highly regarded by the art world. I don't know how many paintings of Mount Hood and Mount Jefferson and Mount Rainier and the Columbia River, Multnomah Falls, some large, some small. But I really admired her. I now have several of her paintings, some of which I bought from her daughter, some I acquired before she became now known and well known and better respected than even then. She had a house built; she painted paintings for the workmen that built her house. A lot of her house - her home had pieces out of the Lewis and Clark Fair, because they dismantled it, you know, and, of course, there's all kinds of things of wood and one thing and another. And she raised her family painting paintings. I just thought she was a neat woman and should be properly identified in our history.

CH You had Senate Joint Resolution Number 12, which admitted Section 6, Article 11 of the Oregon Constitution relating to the investment of certain money by the state, which was tabled.

VA I don't remember that.

CH And on special committees, you were part of the Permanent Organization and Order of Business with Tony Yturri and Don Willner?

VA That's another one of those - like the per diem one, it's just one of those...

CH What do they do? What does that committee do?

VA I'll be darned if I can remember. It's just sort of a - I don't know. It's just a pro forma kind of thing. You sign papers or do something. It was just part of the ceremony, I guess.

CH Some of the issues that were before the legislature that session, one is on school financing, and apparently Governor McCall made this his top priority. He wanted \$53 million for schools, and the legislature actually voted for less than half of that. Was this something that would have come through your Education Committee, or would that be a Revenue and Finance...?

VA Probably Revenue, and I'm trying to recall - Tom McCall made a major effort in a tax bill. I don't think that was it. It was a sales tax bill. Oh, it may have been about '74. I'm trying to recall what year it was that Tom McCall had a major bill, and it was a sales tax bill. I don't think that was it. I can't recall what that is.

CH Another education issue was the superboard, which we had talked a little bit about. You had opposed that concept.

VA Yes.

CH It was a result of student dissidence in reaction to it, or there was some student dissidence over that?

VA Could have been. Again, my theory was big isn't better. Stafford Hansel was the major promoter of that idea, superboard. Again, coming back to efficiency, and you recall we talked about my view of a democracy is not an efficient form of government. Yeah, I was an opponent.

CH We've talked a little bit about teacher tenure, and there was a property tax relief program that was geared to income and was the first in the U.S., apparently. The governor wanted it only for old and poor people, but wanted it tied to taxes on cigarettes, hotel, churches, and not by income tax. That's what I have down here for a summary on that. Do you recall anything about the...?

VA No.

CH I'm surprised that - I mean, this was a - I got this from a summary of issues that particular session. I guess I was surprised that it would have been considered the first in the United States geared to income tax, but was property - I would imagine property tax would be a big issue all over the country.

VA Always. It always was, and it still is today. As long as I was in the legislature, and, as I say, it still is today. I'm not sure - part of the problem we have is timing, and I'm trying to recall what happened when. You know, eventually we passed home-owner renter relief, which is called circuit breaker, and circuit breaker meaning at a certain income you trigger into it. That's what that means. But I don't think that's it. As a matter of fact, I'm sure that's not it. Part of my problem is what session something happened, and I can't recall this in that time frame.

CH There was one issue, and I think that we've mentioned this once before, but it came up during this session, about the constitutionality of the Vietnam War. It was in 1971, and it was whether or not the war was declared and whether Oregon men should be sent to an undeclared international conflict. How did you stand on that issue and in general on the war?

VA I have a little - I've got a collection of things that I

saved - somebody said something or I heard something or I read something - in what I call a speech file. But in there I've written down that the war was wrong, but not the soldiers, or something like that, and that's pretty much my feeling. I didn't know why in the world we were over there, I really didn't buy that domino theory that we kept hearing about, personally. Vietnam really first came up earlier than that. Actually, I can even recall at a time when I think Mark Hatfield made up his mind - I was there - in his opposition the Vietnam War, which he was opposed to, and that came while he was governor, the latter part of his governorship. But my view was pretty much like I just told you in this paraphrase, that to condemn the soldiers I thought was wrong. It was, however, a war in which we were involved. I was not going to be a party to make our cause any weaker than it was, and the demonstrators, really, I thought, and those opposing it violently, I think weakened our ability, and I think a lot of soldiers were killed because it gave the Vietcong heart. If we just keep making the thing messy, we've got a lot of allies in the United States that are going to help us. That's generally my view on that whole subject of Vietnam.

CH Do you recall what happened to this amendment?

VA No, I don't.

CH Was it a pretty hotly debated issue?

VA Well, yeah, there was some. I can hear Ted Hallock. I don't know if he debated or not, but Ted would be one on that side of that issue, and a few others. Maybe Ed Fadeley and a few others.

CH Apparently Betty Roberts gave a fairly emotional speech because she had a son over in Vietnam.

VA I'm sure she did, and I can understand why someone who had a relative or a friend or a son - I can recall a young man that I still think of from time to time got killed over in Vietnam. It was a part of our history that should never have happened, and a lot of young men died because of it. You know, you'd think that someone would perceive that this was a quicksand in which the United States was involved with, and we should have unstuck ourselves a lot sooner. But there was a great feeling about this domino business, and - I've said that hindsight is an exact science, and hindsight is an exact science. Look back, and you probably wouldn't have ever gotten involved with it, but that's not the way it worked out. You look at the French, and the French got bogged down. Why do we want a piece of that action, is something I've never quite understood. But I suppose it's somewhat like even Japan, although we don't have what you'd call the war lords, there were those that had the mentality, and they were respected. Maybe Japan and our Vietnam is not quite the same, but there were those that wanted war, and they kind of, in Japan, at least, pushed Japan finally into World War II, but the Manchuria and China and all the rest of it was - those people were kind of persuasive or - well, in Japan they were pushy. Here, they were supposedly persuasive. We just sort of got sucked into Vietnam. There was the idea of domino. If we don't stop them here, they're just going to pop, pop, pop all the way down the line. And it was wrong. It was just wrong.

CH There was a debate also about whether highway funds should be used for mass transit. That was in the '71 legislature as well. Where did you stand on that issue?

VA Oh, I've always had kind of mixed reactions in regard to mass transit. There were those that actually prevailed, and that everybody's going to get out of their car and get into a bus. I know that's not going to happen. I'm going to give you kind of a mixed-reaction answer to it. And, yet, when you want to deal

with increased automobiles, with the traffic, the cars that we have, you've got to plan in advance for it. You can't just say, Oh, we're crowded now. Let's put in mass transit. It doesn't work that way. I look at - I remember, growing up, there was a great mass transit system in streetcars, and, then, all of a sudden that was passé, and we dug up all the rail and destroyed all the streetcars, and now we've got to pay ten times the price for the same thing, and maybe not as good. I even find it kind of almost silly today that we've got a Council Crest streetcar running the street, now, today, 1992.

CH That's more of a tourist item, though, isn't it?

VA What?

CH Isn't that more of a tourist attraction?

VA I don't know what it is. I call it a cute deal. It just doesn't make much sense. You know, we're not San Francisco with cable cars, and I can't see us spending money for that. They were going to actually run them down Park Street, which is a complaint we've had with Blumenauer. But kind of a mixed emotion. I know everybody isn't going to get on a bus, yet there ought to be some - I kind of worry myself through 80-, 90-, 100-, 200-, 300 million dollars to do something. They're going to put the light rail now up Canyon Road. I said, If they were going to put it up the middle of Canyon Road, they're going to run over my body, because I've been driving Canyon Road for who knows how long, and I've seen the changes, and I don't think you ought to make anymore. So the tunnel won out. So you're not getting much of an answer. It's just sort of a mixed-reaction view I have on the whole question. I will tell you this, that Goldschmidt, abetted by Bob Straub, stopped the Mt. Hood Freeway, which I resented greatly, and as governor I tried to reverse that, but it was impossible to do it. Now, today, we're spending more money

to complete that ramp that Goldschmidt and Bob Straub stopped.

CH Is that the one that goes from the Banfield over to Burnside in Gresham?

VA No, it was supposed to go about - I was going to say Division, but out that way. That was going to be the new artery. What actually occurred, while I was - actually, before I was sworn in, we did some negotiation on the budget. Goldschmidt wanted \$16 million state share of the mass transit money, and I said that, well, I would put that in my budget - this was my first budget - but I wanted to have all the money that was set aside for the Mt. Hood Freeway that was killed, which was designated for Oregon, and I wanted to use it for downstate projects as well as doing something about Banfield, which really sorely needed to be done. He came back, he was going to offer a little bit of it, and I said, No way. I want all of it. So he finally agreed, and I put the 16 million in my budget, my first budget, and we did fix Banfield now so that it is a better freeway, because the Mt. Hood Freeway was closed, and we had congestion on the Banfield. We're jumping ahead of ourselves, but when you ask about mass transit, that's part of my life with mass transit.

CH Well, I have more to ask you about that a little bit later.

The Department of Human Resources was created that session, in 1971. It created the Children's Services Division, and I was wondering about your feeling on that and how you stood on that piece of legislation.

VA I was supportive of the whole idea.

CH Was it generally supported?

VA I think so. I don't recall that as being any real

it. Welfare always had a deficit, and again, when I became governor, I told Leo Engstrom, I don't want to hear that anymore, ever again. But I can understand the problem. The problem is that you have to guess how many welfare recipients you're going to have to have. You don't know how many.

[End of Tape 12, Side 1]