

Tape 14, Side 2

CH This is an interview with Governor Atiyeh. This is Tape 14, Side 2.

What happened to your business while you were down in Salem?

VA Well, that's a very interesting question. Of course, the business continued, because it's still here today. My brother Richard would be responsible for the retail part of it, my brother Ed was on the cleaning plant side. That was very difficult on me because I realized that they were working and I was down in the legislature, and so I'd come home on a Friday after being down there all week, I'd go over to the Lloyd Center to work at night, because we were open nights at the Lloyd Center, I'd work all day Saturday, you know, and I'm away from my family, besides. When it would come vacation time, you know, I really wouldn't take two weeks of vacation - I might take a few days or a week - just because I had this guilty conscience about being down there. I'm sure my brothers weren't particularly excited about the fact that I was down there; not that they weren't supportive, certainly later on, but at the time I'm sure they weren't very excited about that. So I had this guilty conscience, and I would come back, and I'd work Friday nights and I'd work Saturday, and, then, Sunday afternoon I'd go back to Salem and - but the business continued. Then, of course, after the session was over, I'd come back and would work.

CH Was it hard on your family?

VA It was really hard. I guess if I had a lament, and I do have, you know, I missed a lot of growing up of my children. My wife had a large responsibility that I should have had certainly some of it, and I didn't. It is hard; it's very hard. And

people speak of that point, and indeed it's true, you have to have a pretty supportive and - although not always - mainly understanding wife. She didn't always understand this, and I can, looking back, fully understand why she was not thoroughly into this whole thing.

CH Some legislators have told me that it cost them their marriage in some cases.

VA It could be, yes.

CH Year after year of that kind of...

VA Yeah, that's right. But you know, it's interesting. When Governor Goldschmidt divorced his wife and the media was lamenting over the fact that it's tough on family life and all the rest, they called and interviewed me, and I said, yeah, it is, it's very tough on married life. The one thing I didn't say, which I thought was a great deal of restraint, was, it's true, it's difficult, but Mark Hatfield and Antoinette are still married, Bob Straub and Pat are still married, Audrey and Tom McCall ~~are still~~ ^{were} married, Dolores and I are still married. So it's something besides the strain. Margie never did like public life, so I'm sure it really was that. She just didn't like it. I don't think any of the wives really were just thoroughly enchanted with all of it, but they kind of went along. Anyway, it's tough, and I really do, I think to myself, now, that was really selfish on my part. I missed a lot of growing up of my children, put an awful lot of responsibility on my wife, so I lament about that, but that's water under the bridge.

CH In 1973, what - or, actually, between '71 and '72 or '71 and '73, what were your interim committees that you were on?

VA I can't remember.

CH Any interim work that you know of that you were doing during that time?

VA Well, now, wait a minute. Yes. I was chairman of the Interim Education Committee. I don't know if you have that down, but that's...

CH Were you working on specific legislation that would be coming up in the next session?

VA Yeah, several things, I think, but the thing I can remember, and being very proud of it, as a matter of fact, the - I was chairman of the Education Committee in '71 and chairman of the Interim Education Committee leading up the '73 session. We developed - and a lot of people still remember, as, of course, I do, too - I mean other than legislators - Senate Bill 1 and Senate Bill 2. Senate Bill 1 - I don't recall which did which, but one of the bills was describing what was basic education, and so my thought was, we will describe what is basic education. Then, in the budgeting process, the state will say, We will pay for basic education. We encourage you, we suggest that you do whatever else you want, but we'll pay for basic education. Or, if we couldn't afford it, we'll pay two-thirds of basic education, whatever that might be. But we had a measuring stick. And the other bill was ^{GOALS} for every school - and we took it in large form: all of higher education, all of secondary, all of primary, but it actually had to be by institution. For example, Beaverton High School is part of School District 48, so actually I even perceived it to be a goal in the classroom, a goal in Beaverton High School, a goal for School District 48, and a goal for Southern Oregon College, a goal for Western Oregon College, a

goal for University of Oregon. They all had to establish goals. Seventy-three, the Democrats - there was too many Democrats. They didn't have to even worry about a coalition anymore. They took over, Ed Fadeley became chairman of Education Committee, OEA didn't think this was an important thing to do, to describe basic education. The whole thing went down the tube. If I recall, I think recent legislatures have actually gone back and described basic education. But if we had done that at that time, both of those things, I think we'd have been on a good road for where we were going and what we were doing in education, and I think it had a lot to do with an extraordinary increase in property taxes; controlling it, that is.

CH How did that have an effect on controlling property taxes?

VA Well, we were paying a certain amount, and you have to pay the rest. And then, of course, you have to - to your constituency. It isn't a matter of - I heard this expression a number of times, and it did come up when we were voting in the school elections: If you vote yes on this, the state's going to pay for part of it. Oh, well, they're going to pay for some of it; we'll vote yes. There would be greater constraints on school districts and an argument - not persuasive argument on the part of the voter. In any event, it would have been good, it would have been good for us to do that. You talk about lament and sorry things didn't happen. I certainly am very sorry we didn't pass Senate Bills 1 and 2. I would jump now, because I don't recall - let's see, '73, '75. I don't recall which year. Jason Boe asked me - and Ed Fadeley continued to be chairman of Education - what committees I wanted, and one of them, I said, was Education, but if Ed Fadeley's going to be chairman, then I don't want to be on it. And Ed Fadeley was chairman, so, for the first time, I was off education.

CH I thought you were on that - this is in 1973?

VA No, no. I'm talking now further - I'm jumping on you.

CH I see, because in '73 you were on Education with Dick Groener and Wally Carson, Hartung, Roberts, and Thorne, I believe.

VA Seventy-three?

CH That's what I have down here for 1973, yeah. Is that right?

VA I don't recall it that way. Maybe the story I told you related - no, it was '71, '73, '75, '77. I don't know. Maybe I told you the story ahead of time. Maybe it was - what do you have there for notes?

CH Well, in '75, I don't have you down for Education.

VA All right, okay, I was not on Education Committee. Then, okay, it was '73. But Fadeley would have been chairman, Fadeley would have been on that. I don't know why he isn't.

CH He's on the one in '73.

VA Well, he was chair of it then. Maybe it was at that next session I said I wanted to be on Education, but if Fadeley's going to be chairman, I don't want to be. I told you I remember - you know, I don't try to be unkind to anyone, but I told you I recall that he was not one of my favorite legislators, and my concern really was that he was really very brusque with the people that were coming and appearing before the committees. I didn't like that. I don't like treating citizens that way.

Oh, I will tell you something about the Interim Education Committee. It's certainly - you're full of frustrations, but I remember there was one man who really was an outspoken critic of education. He didn't always get his figures and facts straight, but in his mind he was perfectly clear, and he was very critical. So he was going to testify - and I happened to know him, I knew who he was, he'd been there before. And so he's going to sit down and testify. Well, I like to run meetings - I don't like to spend a lot of time running meetings, and so he sat down, and I said, "Now -" and I can't recall his name - "we understand from your view that education is all wrong in Oregon, that you don't like it and it's all wrong, and so let's put that aside. All I want to know from you is how we can improve it. Well, that cut his testimony down to about five minutes. He was a whale of a critic, but he didn't have many answers. I always chuckle to myself about that. I always thought that was pretty clever to, you know, kind of get this guy through the testimony rather rapidly.

CH Well, that's actually an interesting subject, and I had planned on asking you - I don't know if the subject has come up thus far or not, but how you ran your committees. And this is a point to that fact. I mean, there must be a lot of people wanting to testify, a limited amount of time. What kind of ways did you have of running things?

VA Well, I would really try to get everyone who wanted to testify the chance to testify, but I was very, very firm on let's not have duplication. In other words, if you've got something new you want to say, please do it. And if they'd start on the same subject again, I'd interrupt them, nicely, and say, "Look, we've already heard that. Please, we have a lot of people that want to be heard, besides yourself. Just tell us what new

information can you give us." So that kind of speeds it up. Now, you can't always always hold - well, you could if you wanted to be really mean, but I was never that way, but you could do a lot of work and get things done more rapidly. You kind of hold a tight rein on what goes on. First of all, you do start on time. There's a propensity down there that if there's a one 1:00 meeting, that doesn't mean 1:00, it means something in the vicinity, somewhere between one and one-twenty. I would run it on time, and if I was the only one there, I'd start the meeting.

CH Wouldn't you have to have a quorum?

VA No, I'd just start the meeting, and pretty soon the committee members learned that 1:00 means one o'clock, it doesn't mean 1:02. So we would start it on time. And, then, so often, like in the case of this gentleman that I already knew about, you can say, Okay, let's not go through the whole litany of why you think schools are bad. We've heard that. You just tell me where you think we can help it. And I know that he couldn't, so we didn't.

I will tell you that I always had great respect and regard for my fellow committee members and would give them latitude, but still, in all, again nicely, just keep things moving along. And I even do it today. I'm chairman of the board of governors of the Oregon Golf Club, and here I'm dealing with my peers and adults. You know, these are bright, intelligent people, but after they've talked something to death, I just say, That's enough of that. Let's go on to something else. And so I - well, as a matter of fact, I remember - since I left, I've gotten into all kinds of charitable things, and I came in and told my secretary one day after a meeting, "I'm getting tired of going to meetings I don't run." You know, some of the things that happen, you just have to stay on top of it. I recall an event in which

we - now, again, I'm dealing with some very bright business leaders - I mean presidents of companies, large companies - and we were talking about a capital investment and whether we should make that capital investment. And so the motion was we should or we shouldn't, and that passed. And, then, the next motion related to how we were going to raise the funds for it, and there they got into all kinds of discussions, and finally I said, "Whoa, wait a minute. This discussion we're having now is what we should have had on the vote we just took. We've already made that decision." But here these intelligent business people, they're talking about discussion on a subject we'd already passed on. So it happens. I guess I'm a little impatient, but, you know, it's not a matter of - you know, you kind of go along and you know it's there and you kind of - but at a point you finally have to say, Whoa, wait a minute. Stop.

CH What about the discussions that you often hear about the chairman's ability to be able to be able to control the agenda and where items come up.

VA That's right.

CH How would you use that to your advantage?

VA I wouldn't. Bills would - I had bills in my committee as they'd come up. I'd push the committee. You know, Is this something you want to hear? Is this something you want to put at the back of the book, as I described you earlier? Do you want to table it? I wouldn't do that to all bills, but bills that looked patently not of much consequence. But if the committee wanted it, even if I thought it was a lousy deal, it came up. Some chairman wouldn't ask that question; they just wouldn't bring it up. Now, there was always a rule in committee that the committee

could call up a bill, and it was used once in a while, but not too often. So, you know, you always had that opportunity. But I told you earlier I had great regard for my committee, and so I would - they would be more or less - they would be involved, really, in what I was doing. They knew what bills were in their book, and I'd say to them, Look, we've got this bill. What do you want to do about this? meaning, we ought to really get rid of it. At least, that's what I'm saying. And most often we'd just dispose of it, either table it or just put it to the back of the book, and they knew it was back there. In other words, nothing would happen. The session would end, and that's the end of it.

CH Was that - did the chairman have more leeway in doing that than other people? Was he able to - were you able to, or other chairman able to, get rid of legislation that way?

VA Well, it depends on the chairman. The way I just did it - I don't know how often it would happen. It's hard for me to judge. Not too often. You have to respect your fellow members in order to do something like that. But I can give you the other extreme. There was one senator, after he had left the legislature - and he always had a committee, chairman, and he was a Democrat, and always had his committee room, which really - the only ones that had an office were committee chairmen. All the rest of us didn't, until they built the wings. Anyway, they were cleaning out the desk. They found bills in the back of the desk. He just stuffed them there, and that was the end of it. They would just never appear anywhere. One time he got up - let's see if I can quote this correctly - and he was leading the discussion on the bill, and he said that this bill - this was the opening sentence: //This bill passed out of committee unanimously by a majority of the members present.// Well, he was the only one present. No one ever questioned it. Here's the bill on the floor. He just

brought it up, and he said, This bill passed unanimously out of committee by a majority of those present.

CH Were there other activities like that that you were...?

VA No. I'm giving you extremes. Certainly, I'm sure, a lot of them operate somewhat similar to me, some would be rather dictatorial about what went on, and, then, the others - like I say, this is the other extreme of having bills in the back of the drawer a couple of years later when they were clearing out the desk.

CH Well, was there any other interim activity that you can recall during the '72...?

VA I want to tell you one other about the Interim Education Committee, because it demonstrates to me some of the frustration I had. I recall a teacher came before the committee - I'll tell two stories.

CH When was this?

VA This would be in the interim committee - and she was talking about this very innovative remedial reading program. If a student in this school where she was, was having problems reading, they would move that student into remedial reading. They wouldn't leave their class, they would just go into remedial reading, and as they improved, they would go back into their class. Now, that's the quick of it what - you can see what the theory was. And it was operating very successfully. I said, Well, was this great program now transferred to other schools? Well, no. Why? Well, somewhat reluctant, but education is the worst bureaucracy of anything I have ever seen in my life.

You're talking about the government and business bureaucracies as terrible, but it wasn't their idea. So the transfer of good ideas really didn't take place, and that's the frustrating part, to me, about education. There's so many innovative things that could happen to improve education at less cost, but it just doesn't happen. And they have this mind set a second grade teacher is better than a first grade teacher, eighth grade teacher is better than seventh grade teacher, high school teachers are better than grade school teachers. Actually, it should be reversed. The number one teacher should be the first grade teacher and/or kindergarten. That should be the numero uno, but that's not the way their mental bureaucracy works.

CH Well, kindergarten was a major issue, too, wasn't it?

VA Kindergarten was a major issue. Betty Roberts - I think it would have been in '71 - she had a bill that she wanted to lop off the senior year in high school and pay for kindergarten. Her argument was that the last year in high school wasn't meaningful. I said to her, "Betty, there's one or two things you can do, one of which is what you're doing. The other, of course, is to make the last year in high school meaningful" [laughter].

CH Right. Well, what about the other concept on making kindergartens mandatory?

VA That had been a long and drawn-out discussion. It was a good idea, but, you know, sometimes - it really was a political answer, and, yet, it wasn't a political answer. It was, in fact, true, the way I believed. For example, people said you ought to increase basic school support. My answer was always, Yes, we should, if we can afford it. The same thing with kindergarten. Yeah, it's a good idea, if we can afford it, and with knowledge

that we probably couldn't afford it. So it was sort of a political answer, but nonetheless, that's the way I felt about it.

CH What was your relationship with the OEA during that period?

VA Well, I've kidded - they never supported me, but I kidded them. I think it was after the '59 session, or maybe it was the session after that. The Washington County OEA gave me a plaque, and I said to John Danielson ~~VA~~, "I suppose you want me to give that plaque back that I got." But I don't know, they are sort of like AFL-CIO. They come up with some funny things that really don't improve the quality of education. And, you know, whether they endorsed me or not was unimportant. I was going to do what I thought was the right thing to do, and so that's what I did.

CH Was there anything else that came up during the '72...?

VA Oh, the interim - the other statement which a teacher made in the interim, and I've quoted it since then, and she is a teacher, and she says, "You know, no where but in education have I seen the ability to turn off young people." We listened to that, and then she said, "Well, can you imagine the youngster getting on the school bus on the first day, on their first school day, and how excited they are and how happy and how wonderful this is, and, then, you give it two or three years, and they're not happy and excited anymore." A very good statement.

CH What was your 1972 election like?

VA Not particularly memorable, as I can recall. Pretty much like the rest.

CH Do you recall any of your opposition or primary or general election?

VA No.

CH I presume that - I don't have my notes on it here, but I believe that you sailed through that without any problem.

VA Yeah, it was pretty much like I did in all of them. We talked about that earlier, when I had the contest with the mayor of Tigard. That's really the only one I can remember. The rest of them - I would kind of gear my campaign in relation to my opponent. By that I mean, you know, how thoroughly active I would get. But I always did make a point to get out and talk, with the whole idea in mind, Okay - as I told you earlier - you don't really know everything I've done, but you better find out who I am again and reacquaint yourself. But, no, there's - that's the only race that I can really remember being seriously contested, and, as it turned out, even then it wasn't seriously contested.

CH The '72 election brought in a lot of new faces.

VA That's right.

CH It was a pretty big Democratic victory, wasn't it?

VA That's right.

CH But there were a lot of people that came in - I don't have a complete list in front of me, but as I sort of scan over - of course, there were a lot of older members: Cook, Roberts, Boe. Boe had come in when?

VA I don't remember.

CH But he had been there a few sessions.

VA Yeah, he'd been there a while.

CH But, then, there were some newer faces that have since become...

VA Old faces?

CH Old faces, right [laughter]. Was that Vera Katz's first session? And was Les AuCoin and Earl Blumenauer there too?

VA Well, again, you're talking about the house. Vera was in the house.

CH That's right.

VA Blumenauer was the house. Kafoury, I think was in the senate; at what stage, I don't recall.

CH Gretchen?

VA No, Steve.

CH What changes took place in the senate?

VA Well, it was a huge Democrat majority, so the concept of a coalition was just totally wiped out. There was no need to even talk about it. I think '73 was when the Republicans got down to six. I have a photograph of - maybe the Society has a copy of it as well - the six of us in a phone booth.

CH Oh right, I remember your mentioning that. You were elected minority leader that session, weren't you?

VA Yeah - well, actually the session before. But the - I kidded about that. There were six of us, and I went on the fifth ballot. Actually, that's not the way it went, but I just use that as a joke. So yeah, I was Republican leader of six people. The next session it got up to seven.

CH Jason Boe was elected as president that term.

VA Yeah.

CH He was in there for quite some time.

VA yes.

CH What was your impression of his presidency?

VA I think he did a real good job. He was, however, I would call an astute politician, with emphasis on both words.

[End of Tape 14, Side 2]