

CH This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland, Oregon, at Atiyeh International. The interviewer, for the Oregon Historical Society, is Clark Hansen. The date is February 9, 1993, and this is Tape 22, Side 2.

So you were talking about your years in the legislature.

VA Now, understand this is my perspective.

CH Of course.

VA Remember, you were quoting some newspapers, in their view what it would be, or in their view with another legislator. I mentioned Willamette Week. I do have a clipping. They were picking out, I'm not quite sure whether they called it outstanding or the better legislators, and I was surprised that I was among them out of Willamette Week. They weren't totally complimentary, but mostly complimentary in regard to being one of the, quote, as they would call, a leader in the legislature. I'm sure I had some influence with Democrats as well as Republicans.

CH Do you feel that one news organization was better in the way that it covered the legislature or covered you, better journalism than another organization or other organizations in general?

VA I wouldn't boil it down to that, and, mostly later on in my governor years, it got to be more an admiration for good journalists. Some are good and some are lazy, and I did sort out not too many that I thought were quite good. I never was indignant with the media that might not agree with my position. That's their view. I felt - now, I'm thinking back and kind of

making it up as I go in terms of what's in my mind. I always felt pretty darn comfortable. I dealt with a lot of controversial issues, a lot of them. I'm talking about land use, very controversial; bottle bill, very controversial; timber tax, way over in the early years, very controversial; equal rights amendment, very controversial.

I don't know if I told you this story about equal rights. One of the advocates called my office - I didn't talk to them, but told me about it - and said, Well, now, what's Senator Atiyeh going to do on this? And the answer was, which indeed was true, He's thinking about it. And I was. I talked to Dolores, I thought to myself. You know, you wanted to make sure you weren't taking away some rights as you were going to this equal rights thing. And this advocate was very indignant that I was thinking about it. How come? This is terrible! She got mad at me because I was thinking about it. I ended up by voting for it, but the point was that I thought about it, I made my decision, I was comfortable with it. I didn't look back and say, Gee, I should have done this, I should have done that. I thought about it, decided, felt comfortable with it. And that's pretty much my career. [I'm] very comfortable with what I did and when I did it and how I did it.

I loved to be - they used to be alphabetical in roll calls, and then, as I told you earlier, Jason Boe began to roll the roll call. He'd start with Atiyeh, then the next time it would be whoever a B was, and then they'd start with C, and I'd have to wait, and I didn't like that. I knew what I wanted to do and wanted to vote and get it done with. I wasn't listening to anybody else, I was just voting who I was and what I wanted to do. I always felt sorry for legislators that didn't have that comfort level. Most of them campaigned on what they thought they wanted the constituents to hear, and it varied before their audiences as they were campaigning, so when they got down there,

they didn't quite know what to do. They didn't know which way to vote. They were very uncomfortable, very uneasy. At the same time, they were running for reelection, so it compounded their problem. For me, I was who I was. I didn't pretend to be anybody else. I'd go out and tell people who I was the best that I could, voted the way I thought I ought to vote. I'm very comfortable with it. Mine was an easier life than a lot of other legislators.

CH Because of your constituency?

VA No, just because of my own comfort level. I wasn't running for reelection, I felt free to do the kinds of things I thought were what I ought to do. I had this set of principles of my own and the common sense that I kept trying to hold on to, and so it was not a hard task, even in controversy. The bottle bill, very controversial. Was it right for Oregon or wasn't it right for Oregon? It wasn't a matter of who was for it or against it. If it wasn't good for Oregon, it wasn't good for Oregon. Land-use planning, a lot of people against it, a lot of them, and very controversial. If you get mixed up in all of that, then you begin to wonder, Which way should I go. I'm saying to myself, is this good for my state or isn't this good for my state. Yeah, it's good for my state. As I told you, there was things in there that violated my own view of what a democracy was all about, and that, I tried to deal with in amendments in a committee. And I knew when we were asking some citizens to make contributions and others not, and we described that earlier.

CH Would you very often - and I know we did talk a little bit about this - make comments for the record as votes were being taken?

VA Not too often. I did, but not too often.

CH Would you do that in the case of, say, a bill that you had problems with but you wanted to support, or a bill that you liked some elements of but you were actually going to vote against because of other things and wanted to clear that up in your record?

VA Probably, but you'd find very little of it. Earlier I told you that there was - we used to refer to the Journal as Fadeley's Journal. He was forever explaining votes. You'll find him many times in the Journal. You won't find me very many times in the Journal. Specifically, the sales tax. I voted to send it to a vote of the people. That time I recall was in the Journal. Once in a while, but not - you know, it was a rare instance, and I can't remember too many, if any.

CH How do you feel - you're referring to your comfort level on making controversial decisions or hard decisions. How did you feel about criticism towards you? Do you consider yourself sensitive?

VA No. I could take it. What I'm saying now for the tape, there's some degree of egotism. I don't really mean it that way. If I came to - I would think about something, I'd come to what to me was a logical conclusion with which I was comfortable, criticism didn't really bother me, because at the same time, I always knew there was somebody that had valid reasons to be on the other side. I didn't happen to agree with them.

CH But what about if it was directed to you personally?

VA If you're comfortable with yourself - and we'll get to, when

we get to the governor years here, a classic of the question that you're asking right now. And as a matter of fact, the story that I will tell I'm going to write to President Bush about as well. What it does, so we won't have a mystery here, it relates to, am I comfortable that I'm doing a good job or aren't I comfortable that I'm doing a good job. It's the degree of my own personal satisfaction, and that's what I'm talking about. We'll get to that when we get into the governor's term. It's just a matter that, can I sleep at night. I slept every single night. I never had any trouble going to bed. I didn't have any trouble going to sleep, other than normal; you lay there and - but as far as revisiting what happened or worried about what's going to happen - worrying about what's going to happen, I always say to myself, Well, I can't do anything about it tonight, so I'll go to sleep. To fret over what has happened didn't - I didn't, because it would be a matter of thinking. Oftentimes I'd think ahead of time, knowing that this is going to be an issue. Some things are very apparent that they're coming up, and I'd think about it; Okay, now, what am I going to do about that. This is why it's cool before the heat comes on. And I'd kind of get my hands around what the subject might be and come to a conclusion. If you're not sure, if you don't really know, if you don't have the set of principles and common sense that I referred to, it's hell, it's a pure hell.

CH What about people that can really see another person's point of view? I mean, they do have their set of principles, but they can easily see somebody else's logic even if it's different from their own. For instance, were there people on the floor that, when they would get up and they would talk about a specific bill and you disagreed with this bill or they were on the other side, that they could sway you? Were there people in particular that you listened to that when they had something particularly

intelligent to say about something you would reconsider your own point of view?

VA There were very, very few votes changed on the floor out of debate in all the years I was there. Very few.

CH For you or for anyone?

VA For me or for anyone. Some would come down - remember we talked about that generally some would come down, they wouldn't bother their heads about what the bill was, what was on the calendar today. If Atiyeh is going to vote yes, they'll vote yes, or if Atiyeh was going to vote yes, they'll vote no. They would pick somebody and just kind of glide through in that manner. Obviously, those over in the committee had views on their particular subject and would be supportive or not, but - certainly not on controversial bills. Those were so thoroughly discussed in the media and in the committee and by lobbyists that almost everybody had an opinion and a decision. In all of the period of time, I think that one would give credit to somebody who would change a vote on the floor. This goes way back, and I don't know if I finally recalled his name, but this was the lawyer from Newberg, I think it was, George Layman. Very articulate, very - he wasn't pounding the table. He would give good, valid arguments and would demonstrate why his position was taken. Then, there were others who had their philosophy, and to my way of thinking they were coming from their philosophy of what government's all about, and I didn't agree with it and strongly disagreed with it. I would respect them for the fact that they held that position; I just didn't agree with them. And it would relate to, oh, basically, how much government interference there ought to be in the lives of people. And, as we mentioned earlier in the tape, Democrats believe that government ought to do all

these things, and that's not where I was coming from, that's not what I believed in. Vern Cook was a good example. I always respected him; rarely agreed with him. But I said, Okay, now, here's a guy that's been thinking about this subject. He believes in what he believes in. I'll go for that. It's those that don't have any set of principles or don't have any common sense, I don't have a great deal of respect for them.

So anyway, that's - you asked the question that - it's as you deal with the people you deal with, and you do your own. As I look back - obviously, I was going through the process. When I look back at what happened, not only in the legislative, but governor's years, I was always comfortable. The media asked me, as I was leaving governor, which probably kind of finally closes the door on your question, "Now that you look back, Governor, would you do anything different than you did?" My answer was no. I didn't even stop to think about all of the things that I did in eight years as governor because I knew what I did. I would think about what I would do, then I would do it, and I never second-guessed it. Gee, maybe I should have. Once I passed the point of making a decision as a governor or the decision of voting as a legislator, I never went back and said, Gee, maybe I should have, because I would pretty well think it through and come to a conclusion, and I would vote, and I was comfortable with it. Obviously, everyone disagreed with me, and very obviously, I was oftentimes the only one in the legislature. Eighty-nine yeses and one no. That didn't bother me. That's the way I felt.

CH I guess, in terms of personal challenges to you, one incident was recalled where somebody referred to you as a liar and that you were pretty upset with that.

VA That's right. And it was interesting, particularly with the media, because they knew my - the pressure points. You know,

they could call me a lot of things, but if they called me a liar, that's a matter of my personal integrity, and then I get real mad. If you wanted to get me excited, that's how you get the job done. All the rest are just words. You know, the SOB's and the rest of that stuff, those are just words. I know that's not true. But when they get around to calling me a liar, that get's to be my personal integrity, and then I would get very upset. And, when we talk about criticism, as a legislator as well as governor, doing things for your personal self-interest, that would really get me. I'm saying to myself, If I really was working toward personal self-interest, I wouldn't be where I am; I'd be doing something - I'd go back in business. So the things that related to me personally, liar, personal self-interest, that sort of thing, that would get me.

I've saved some letters. I think they're funny. Not very many, but a few. I recall one letter, which I have somewhere in a scrapbook, and I don't know whether it was Dear Senator or Dear Representative, but anyway, that was the nicest thing that they said in the letter. It was just really mean. And then - well, I have to tell you that Very Truly Yours was the other nice thing he said, but then wiped that all out by, P.S. You stink. I've got that, but that - I kind of laugh at that one. I think it's kind of funny, and I've saved it. And I may have said to you that I would get letters from people that were particularly nasty, and I got into the practice of sending their letter back: "How would you like it if I sent you a letter like this?" And I never heard from them again. But that's what I would do, because I didn't feel that being an elected public servant, representative or senator, entitled anyone to take shots at me. I don't have to take that stuff. They'd say, Well, you're - my tax dollars paid for you. Hey, wait a minute, I'm doing a lot of work for my - so I just never said that was a franchise for them to take shots at me.



So going through it all, after all those years, at twenty-eight now including governor, I go through it all and say, Okay, I feel comfortable with what I did. I didn't say I always did the right thing by any - you know, it's just that I did it, I at the time believed what I was doing, I thought about it, I voted, I'm comfortable, and I don't second-guess it. I worked with some good legislators, and I worked with a whole bunch of bad ones, and some are very close and dear friends today, some Democrats, mostly Republicans, but you work closer with your Republican colleagues, and it was a grand experience, and I enjoyed it.

CH Well, when did you first start thinking about running for governor again?

VA After the session.

CH After the '77 session?

VA Correct. Then I began to analyze, because - I think I may have said to you earlier, the whole thing is that I said to myself, If I think Bob Straub can be beat, I'm going to run; if I don't, I won't. It was that you don't run just for the fun of running. It's difficult work. So I had to wait till it all washed down and take a look at it and decide, do I think I can beat him. So I had to give that some thought, finally concluded yes, I think I can. That doesn't mean it's going to happen; I just believe that he's vulnerable. If I recall, it was the latter part of October of '77 that I announced that in fact, yes, I'm going to run again. I think it's something like that.

CH And there wasn't anything that precipitated that, though?

VA No.

CH Well, when you were reflecting back on the '74 election and the situation surrounding that, what differences did you see between those two circumstances?

VA Well, to begin with - and again, I don't recall if I said this - in defeat in '74, I firmly believed that I was where Oregonians were. I really believed that they didn't see it or I didn't campaign correctly or whatever reason. I didn't feel it was a rejection of me or my philosophy. It's just that - well, I was overcome by a candidate that had run many times statewide, was well known statewide. Drop in there Nixon resigns, Ford pardons him, a whole lot of things, and maybe not as well organized, you know, the knowledge of how you organize and what you do. It could be a bunch of those things. But in terms of, am I where Oregonians were, regardless of how they're registered, I felt perfectly satisfied that I was exactly where they were, or with most of them. And so in running, it was just a matter of doing a better job of getting that out, plus the fact that Straub had a record, and it was not especially admirable. That's the reasons that I decided to run.

CH Do you think that his incumbency hurt him or helped him in general?

VA Well, I think it helped me. Well, I guess it would hurt him in that respect. The margin was about the same between us between '74 and '78, they were just reversed. Bob Straub really was not permitted by his staff, which is one - incidentally, one of the weaknesses - as a matter of fact, very early on, one of the signals that I thought about later on, he made, I thought - he appointed Keith Burns as his chief of staff. Oh, I said to myself, that's a major mistake, and obviously let it go by, but when I started it analyzing it later on, that came back to mind

again, plus some other things.

CH And why was appointing Keith Burns a major mistake?

VA Well, Keith was not, as an administrative assistant - as a matter of fact, with his staff - his, Governor Straub, and I would say now with Governor Roberts - there were an awful lot of people that had their own agendas, own personal agendas. I've said many times if - and I think I said it before - if Bob Straub was allowed to have been Bob Straub, he'd have been a lot more difficult to beat. But there were all these political minds that said, You should do this and you should do that, and he let them do it. So again, a matter of advice. If somebody's thinking political, that isn't really always the best way to go. Clearly, Governor Roberts's staff is thinking political in the hardest way, and that, in my opinion, is not good advice. In any event, I just felt he could be beat. I said to myself, He's an incumbent governor, so he's going to be able to raise a lot of money. I am a candidate that lost; it's going to be tougher for me to raise money. I'll work real hard to raise as much as I can to match his, but I'll beat him with my volunteers, and I think that's pretty much what happened. I would say to you, when he announced he was going to run, he got himself a consultant from Washington, D.C., I applauded that. I applauded it in the sense that this consultant really doesn't know beans from buckshot about Oregon, and he's not going to be very helpful to Bob Straub in the campaign. [I was] also aware that his modus operandi was to sell his candidate via the media, so I knew that, and all of those things gave me a leg up in terms of my campaign.

CH Well, when you were announcing - at what point did you announce that you were running for governor?

VA As I said, I think it was in October of '77.

CH And at that point, were there any other people that had announced that they were running?

VA I don't recall when Roger Martin announced. I do recall - and again, I don't recall when - Tom McCall came along later.

CH In your...

VA Incidentally, there were seven candidates, but I can't recount them all for you.

CH In the primary?

VA In the primary. There was Roger Martin, Tom McCall, Vic Atiyeh, and four others.

CH Is that how the...?

VA Well, that's my definition of it. They were nice people, but not major contenders.

CH Well, when you were trying to raise support and raise money, did McCall and Martin pose a threat to that?

VA Oh sure. They were all out raising money. Let's now take it to the stage where it's very clear [it's] Roger Martin, Vic Atiyeh, Tom McCall. Actually, it became somewhat difficult because at that time everyone presumed that Tom McCall was going to win the primary and we're going to get back to another Bob and Tom show, because they'd run against each other twice before, and Tom had beat Bob Straub each time, and here we're going to have

another Bob and Tom show. There was a lot of people that I was going to raise money from that they didn't like Bob Straub, but they disliked Tom McCall even more, so they were kind of saving their money for the general election, which they presumed it was going to be Tom and Bob. I can recall some that were very good to me in my '74 race, and I just couldn't - it took me a while to figure out what's going on that they weren't coming forth with any money. But we worked hard at it and began to build our campaign.

I did have a consultant. His name was Paul Newman. He called himself the real Paul Newman. That's an interesting story. Hank Crawford, who was a lobbyist, said to me, during the session, "Vic," he says, "if you want to run again, you really ought to talk to Paul Newman." I didn't know Paul Newman, but Hank Crawford represented the...

[End of Tape 22, Side 2]