

Tradition Favors Senator

Atiyeh Takes Over Key Chair

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SALEM (Special) — If Sen. Victor Atiyeh and his fellow Republicans believe in fate or chance or even superstition, then he's a cinch to become the next president of the Oregon Senate.

It's only a matter of time. Or, in this case, a chair.

The chair is in the middle of the front row on the left side of the Senate floor. It is a simple, brown-covered swivel chair. At least, it looks that way.

Actually, it is a chair of presidents. Senate presidents. Past, present and maybe future for the 48-year-old Atiyeh.

The chair currently is occupied by Atiyeh, the popular GOP leader from Washington County. Before it was the possession of Democrats Harry Boivin of Klamath Falls, E.D. (Debbs) Potts of Grants Pass and John D. Burns of Portland.

Occupant Doubtful

Boivin had the chair before he was elected Senate president in 1965. Potts sat in it prior to being elected Senate boss in 1967 and 1969. And Burns recently relinquished it when he took over the presidency of the 1971 session.

Is Atiyeh impressed with the fact that the last three occupants have come out of the Senate pack to win its top job?

"Not much," grinned Atiyeh. "I never wanted the darn chair in the first place."

Senate seats usually are assigned upon a solon's request. Seniority often plays a key role in chair assignments.



SEN. VICTOR ATIYEH polishes up his chair and hopes some of good fortune of past occupants will rub off on him. Last three owners have become Senate presidents.

Senators usually consider a certain chair "good luck" — particularly if they keep getting re-elected — and ask for the same one every session. Most chairs and their locations thus become available only through a vacancy.

This session, Atiyeh wanted an outside seat — the one next to his present chair. ("I move around a lot and like the freedom"). But Potts also wanted the same outside seat and got it on seniority.

Atiyeh then put in for several other seats but failed to get them either. He then settled for one just behind his present chair which was occupied by Burns. But when Burns was elected president, Atiyeh was

asked to move up one row, and he did so because he now had an outside seat.

Atiyeh was a leading candidate for the Senate presidency this session and an early GOP choice. But the long voting deadlock forced the party to try Sen. Lynn Newbry, R-Ashland, as a compromise candidate.

When this also failed and the deadlock continued, the entire 14-man GOP delegation then threw their votes to Burns who, supported by Potts, split off from the regular Demos to win a GOP-dominated coalition victory.

Many of Atiyeh's friends now say: Wait until next time. After all, he's sitting pretty — if you believe in chairs.