

Tape 21, Side 2

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 February 9, 1993, and this is Tape 21, Side 2.

Well, I noticed in the paper today that Peg Jolin resigned her senate seat in the state legislature, and I guess the thing that I was wondering about was, do you miss the fray, do you miss the political fray, getting in there and battling with other people over issues?

VA No. When I left office, I was asked, you know, am I going to miss it. My answer was, and it turned out to be very true, that I won't miss the process, I'll miss people. What's going on now is process, and I got really quite cynical about the whole process, not only in Salem, but in Congress. You know, can you really do something, do we have the kind of people that will make decisions, all that sort of thing.

I would say what's occurred has not helped the legislature or the senate, but basically the legislature. Everybody gets swept into this thing, because the senate seated her, and the senate president gave her a committee chair. Now, they didn't take it away, she resigned from it, and so they really have not absolved themselves from having done that. They seated her, and they gave her a committee chair. Now, I get into "they," because I'm not sure - you know, I've heard lately about Gene Timms, the senate Republican leader, and he was honored, but certainly they had to be a part of seating her. They didn't vote - at least I didn't read where they had voted all no, that is, the Republican caucus. But the fact is, now, it's not only the senate, it's the legislature. The whole legislature has been tainted, and they

cannot really back out of it because - if they'd kicked her out or if they had kicked her off the chair, then the senate responded to it, but that isn't what happened. The senate did it, and she resigned from it.

I'm in the process of drafting a letter to Gene Timms. My letter basically is saying to him, I'm not going to really get into Jolin affair, but only by way of example. It should be an instruction. Because the senate - and I've been close enough to get a feel what's going on - felt it was pretty much of an internal affair, and they were going to be gentlemen and gentlewomen, you know, and they weren't going to rock the decorum boat of the senate, and we'll seat her. And even Bradbury, the senate president, thought, well, nobody's really going to care; we'll give her a senate chairmanship. But all of a sudden they found out it wasn't internal, it was external, and the instruction, really - and I've talked about this many times before, about getting trapped by that building, by Salem, Oregon, and that they've got to remember there's folks out there, and they've got some real strong views, and don't forget them, because you just left them. You campaigned and you're out there, that's your district, and don't forget, as you deal with other pieces of legislation, that the folks are out there. That's really why I just - I was aware of it, and I think I mentioned it once before, about being trapped by the building, and why as a governor I really worked hard at getting out and talking to people. I mean really talking to them, not electronically. God, that's awful. The governor gets a big play about this electronic conversation. But anyway, go out there. I got a lot of attention as governor for making overseas trips, but I did about a quarter of a million miles inside of Oregon while I was governor. That, I'm very proud of. So what I was trying to say to Gene Timms is, Don't ever think these things are internal.

It's external. I wasn't getting into the case itself. She was convicted, she was convicted of fraud. Now, the fact she's appealing, who knows what'll happen. But the fact is that she was convicted, and she was convicted of fraud, and it was done by a jury. That's something that's in her district. So, that should be sufficient.

CH What would you do if you were in the situation, or what do you think that the senate or the legislature should do to try to change the atmosphere?

VA Well, there's nothing they can do now. It's all done, it's all done. She's resigned - you're talking about the present situation?

CH Yes.

VA It's all done. There's nothing they can do to change it. They seated her, the senate president appointed her a committee chair; she resigned, they didn't kick her out. So really she maybe is out of the picture now, but they really haven't solved their PR problem. They're still at fault for having done all of that, and they can't escape, and there's no way to - you can't retrace it now. You can't say, well, we're going to kick her off the committee and kick her out of the senate, because she's off the committee by her own volition and out of the senate by her own volition, so she's already done whatever they could do. Too late.

CH Will there be a challenge to Senator Bradbury's control of the senate?

VA I don't think so. I think they've gone through enough, they don't want to really - and I don't think anybody feels strong enough about it. They say, Okay, now, good, bad, or indifferent, it's in back of us. Let's not revisit this thing. Now Kerans is talking about one of the elected senators. I don't think, really, there's anybody that really wants to get into that sort of thing. I can't believe that they do, they want to spend some more time investigating each other. They talk - that's part of my cynicism. We've got to get about the people's business. Those are great political words, you know, but - I guess I was supposed to - I've been asked, What people? What are they talking about? Which particular lobby are they speaking to [laughter]?

CH Well, hopefully they're referring to constituents.

VA Hopefully. But my cynicism hasn't gone away; it really hasn't. I guess it's because - as a matter of fact, I know it's because when I started out in the process - and we talked about this before - the salary was \$600 a year, and we really had people that wanted to make a contribution, had the courage to make decisions. They didn't vacillate, they didn't - oh, a few did, but not too many. You didn't really kind of see which way the wind's blowing. They were down there to make decisions, so they made them. And then I watched that gradually change. And the legislature drags on because ^{many of} the elected officials don't have the capability of making a decision. They're not really sure which ^{way} the wind is blowing. And obviously, there's different winds, because it depends on which subject you're talking about, so you've got to try to figure out which way the wind is blowing. If you deal with that kind of a thing, it slows the process, it just immensely slows it. And things aren't any more complicated.

I keep hearing it's more complicated; we need to have annual sessions. That's nonsense. It's not any more complicated than it was before. Maybe the figures are larger. And the subjects - I think I recall saying that they're passing laws on subjects that we didn't even talk about when I first went down; you know, this whole matter of gays and lesbians and condoms and all that sort of thing. One of my favorite cartoons, because I am a smoker, is a Signs of the Time, where a fellow walks into the drugstore and in a very bold voice says he wants to buy some condoms, and then he leans over and whispers to the druggist, "And a pack of cigarettes."

CH Maybe you also saw the cartoon that Oman drew for the Oregonian last week, I believe, referring to the legislature getting back to normal, and then it shows this scene of chaos in the senate floor, or the legislature floor.

VA Yeah.

CH Well, to indulge your cynicism a little bit more, last week we ended with Kelpy the coyote and Sasquatch and a couple more of the issues of that session. I think that we were still in the '77 session. A bill was passed to make the square dance the official state dance - we talked a little bit about this off tape - and a bill failed to make the rain beetle the official state insect.

VA Well, my comment before we started is that Oregon's process is open. That means that anyone that has an idea that can get a legislator to sponsor that idea, it's available to them. We don't have a rules committee that kind of filters bills. And I kind of like that; I think that's good. But the penalty you pay,

of course, are for some silly legislation. But I think that's worth the price, I really do. It's worth the price to get those silly things. It doesn't help the image of the legislative body to be doing things like that, but in terms of the process itself, I think it's good, and I wouldn't want to see it changed.

CH There was also a law that was repealed mandating nine-foot bed sheets for motels and hotels. Do you know what that was about?

VA [Laughing] No, I don't.

CH I guess a lot of speculation could...

VA I can't remember. Well, you know, there are some silly things that did get through and were statute and then somebody found them. I don't know, I don't even know where it came up, but the law was probably broadly violated, because I don't know about nine-foot sheets. But I guess he was cleaning out the statutes. I don't know.

CH Well, what was your assessment of the '77 session in general?

VA Well, we're getting a little closer to memory, but...

CH It would have been right before the...

VA I don't know, it was just, I would say, a generally ordinary session; not great, not bad, just...

CH This was your last session in the legislature.

VA This was my last session.

CH Well, in the news media there was the assessment of - there were a few people that made statements, and one was that the power struggle in the Oregon house during May, which Speaker Phil Lang was stripped of his power by the coalition, put a very serious snag in the legislative process. That was the view of Representative Katz. Did you feel that it did?

VA Incidentally, I remember the name. They were called the Hornets.

Oh, I'm sure it did slow things down. Who's to tell, though. It's very hard to make a judgment that all by itself added one, two, three, four, five, six, whatever days, because, you know, you've got committees that are at work. Remember we talked an inability to make decisions. It may have filled a gap that was - it could have ended up with the same length of a legislative session. It was disruptive to the house, and I'm sure a little painful to them to go through that kind of a process, but I - I kind of take it in the long view. It's one of those things that happened, and they did get about doing what they needed to get done. I don't think anything was laying on the table that should have been in.

CH She said that, It's well to talk about diffusing the power of the house speaker, but if you're going to do that, you should give the power to the elected representatives from your own caucus rather than self-appointed leaders. I presume she's referring to that coalition, the Hornets.

VA Yeah. I wouldn't even make the double statement. I think I talked to you earlier about the fact that I do believe that we

ought to retain the powers of the speaker and the president. Although I served as a minority member my entire career in the legislature, I still believe in the process itself. And you've got somebody now to blame. He did a good job - or, he or she did a good job or he or she didn't do a good job. And so now you've got a focal point. And I believe in responsibility, and the process fits my view of how things ought to operate.

CH She was saying that, As soon as the special interests found they had a captive audience in the Rules Committee, we began to see everybody trying to stick a foot in the door and to set the legislative process backwards. Is that - did that really happen?

VA That's her view. I'm not sure. Some things are over-dramatized.

CH Ron Blankenbaker of the Statesman had an interesting comment. He said, By the 177th day the legislature has been described in this column as a mirage, a wooly mammoth with three hooves caught in the tar pit of indecision, a military unit practicing dispersement for a rifle drill, and so forth.

VA Ron Blankenbaker is quite a guy. Actually, as it turns out, I think we're pretty good friends, and I think he kind of likes me, but over the years he enjoyed taking shots at me, and particularly as a governor, which never really bothered me nearly as much as it did Dolores. She got quite indignant about it. But Ron, I figured he was the gadfly. He's a columnist, and I never objected to that. I always objected to writers, you know, reporters editorializing. But he's a columnist, and that's different. I mean, they can do what they want, and they don't need to necessarily hold too close to the truth, just whatever

sounds right. And he was a gadfly. He filled that role, liked it, and did a pretty good job at it. He's very good with words. I wish many times I could do better with the words, but I guess some people have it and some don't.

CH Well, actually, the Statesman felt a little bit differently than Vera Katz about the six-pack. They referred to it as a six-pack leadership there.

VA Could be.

CH The Oregon Statesman said, The six-pack leadership in the house failed to provide a sense of direction in those final days. The coalition ended up demonstrating the need for the authority of a speaker of the house to maintain order and a sense of purpose. Well, in that sense, I guess they do agree.

VA I would agree with that. I actually would agree with that very - that was a good statement. You can't really run a legislative body by committee. By that, I mean run it by committee. Obviously, you need committees. And the administration part of it, you can't really do it by committee.

CH But in systems that have the strong rules committee, isn't that, in effect, what happens?

VA Yeah, when you have a strong rules committee, sure. The state of Washington has one of those things. We never have had. At a certain point in time - I can't recall, but there's plenty of leeway in terms of freely introducing bills, and at a certain point in time that's cut off, and from that point forward you have to go through the rules committee. But there's plenty of

time to get anything in; Sasquatch and square dancing and whatever. Plenty of time to get bills in. So if for some reason you're late - and usually there's not much problem. You know, you've got a good reason for it. The Rules Committee isn't what you'd call a, quote, powerful committee like it would be in the Washington legislature.

CH The Statesman also referred to some of the work that the legislature did. They said the community corrections program creating local centers for the housing of low-risk inmates was a major accomplishment. Do you feel...?

VA Yeah - well, major. It was one of the better accomplishments, yeah.

CH And the timber taxation system was revised in the direction of encouraging rather than discouraging the planting and growing of trees.

VA Yeah. That's all good. However, they didn't have to do too much of that. During my tenure we wrote the Forest Practices Act, which mandated reforestation. But even before the mandate of reforestation, I can recall - it actually started by industry. They used the word "Trees Forever," a sustained yield. Those were words that we knew about. If you go way back in our history, I suppose there was some pillaging going on, but for most of my career it was industry that really realized that if they cut all the trees down, they don't have anything else to cut, there's no future out there. So you've got to grow for the future.

CH Did the companies vary much in their reputations?

Weyerhaeuser compared to Georgia Pacific or Champion versus Crown Zellerbach?

VA No, I don't think so. I think they were uniformly accepted as good neighbors.

CH Well, just to ask you, then, a few general questions about the legislature, some of which we've talked about earlier, but maybe a few things we've missed. Did you have any formal way of contacting your constituents during the time that you were in the legislature?

VA No. For a while I would have what we would call newsletters; in other words, sent back to the Hillsboro Argus and the Forest Grove News Times, Beaver Valley News. It was always a chore. You always had to think of what are you going to write about today. It's not something, really, that I worked very hard at. I told you, certainly after a session, particularly during a campaign, I would work very hard at getting out. I certainly would go whenever I was invited during a session, but never created a weekly or monthly - what in the world do they call them? Some legislators would have breakfast, and anybody that wanted to come could come. I never did anything like that. I tried, I think almost abortively, this weekly newsletter thing. But a lot of people do that based upon a run again for office, and I was pretty busy, as you noted, with committees and things like that. Anyway, it was not a high priority with me in that context.

CH Were there any groups that you worked with over that period of time, and were there organizations, especially within your own constituency, that you had a very close relationship? We've

talked a little bit about this in terms of other people like Berkeley Lent, who was close to labor, and Ted Hallock, who was close to environmental groups. I know you had a lot of legislation concerning handicapped and retarded and things like that. I was wondering whether were specific groups that you, all the way along, met with and kept in contact with.

VA No. I think there were groups that understood my general feelings and I was compatible with, and they would come to me with their kind of legislation. We spoke about traffic safety. Everyone knew where I was coming from in that regard, so anyone that had an idea would think of me. In terms of seniors, I do recall, vividly recall, probably being one of a very few, if [not] the only one, that voted against a mandatory retirement age of sixty-five, and I was a long way from that. I started at age thirty-five, so when I left I was fifty-five or fifty-six. But I just thought that was discrimination of the worst kind. I knew that there was a tremendous amount of talent out there. Why do this sort of thing? At that time that was the thing to do. As you know, that's been reversed, and gratefully so.

The whole matter of human resource, how you feel, who are you, I've never - you know, a lot of people kind of - I'm trying to figure out what I want to say - they clutch these things, you know, and beat their chests, and they make big demonstrations. We talked about it earlier. I'm only interested in what's going to work, what I think is going to work, what's - I have a great sense of - and we'll get into in my governor's years - of the value of pride and self-esteem and how important that is and how that has to be protected. A lot of people don't think about those sort of things; they just don't think about it. It's just not something that's important to them. To me it was very important that we don't take that kind of thing away. So that

gets me involved in the legislation that I think fits that category. I would be very closely identified with business and AOI, but it doesn't relate to any influence that they would have on me.

CH AOI?

VA Associated Oregon Industries, the business lobby. It wasn't a matter that they were influential to me. I was a businessman; I understood all these things. As a matter of fact, I would be accused of it, and I'd get up and say, I'm not embarrassed by it; I am. But it wasn't - I was not coming from the side of benefitting business, I was coming from the side of providing jobs for people, and that's how you get there. If you don't have a business, you don't have a place to go find a job. So it was always from that direction that I was coming. But I was identified as such. Every once in a while they'd refer to me as the boy scout. I wasn't defensive about that either. What's wrong with that? That's pretty good.

But in terms of meeting regularly, being part of the inner crowd, like Berkeley Lent and labor, not really, not really. I enjoyed - very much enjoyed Oregon truckers. I wasn't very much involved - obviously a voter - but it - I mean a voting member of the legislature, but neat people. I enjoyed it. They'd invite me to their annual meetings, and I would go, and I just liked the people. I certainly liked their lobbyist very much. He became a good personal friend of mine, Bob Knipe, who's since passed away. And I really felt very close to cities and counties and mayors and all of that sort of stuff.

CH Did you keep your same secretary during that time?

VA Yes. I actually - while I was in the legislature I had two secretaries. One was Marian Carr ~~NA~~. That was very interesting. How do you get - you know, you get elected. So now what do I do? Among the things you do is get a secretary. Marian had worked in the legislature for legislators for a long time, and I can't recall exactly how long. She was my secretary. Then, Glenna Hayden ~~NA~~ became my secretary, and Glenna also had worked in and around the legislative body. Incidentally, these people oftentimes - they worked full time. You know, they'd work during the legislative session, and when the session is over, it's over, although when I became senate leader and we had a senate office, then Glenna was there full time. And those two were my secretaries. Actually, Glenna came with me to the governor's office. She retired during that period of time, and I got the third secretary, ^{Robin Shepherd} ~~Robin Shepherd~~, who actually came with me when I opened up my business. So it's - I had a long-term relationship with those that assisted me.

CH Do you still keep up contact with any of them?

VA Oh, every once in a while I dash off a note to Marian, yeah. I exchange cards with Glenna - I just wrote her a little note the other day - although it's not frequent. The third person that I mentioned, but she came to me while I was governor, not in the legislature, is Robin ^{Shepherd} ~~Shepherd~~ [sp?], and I keep pretty good ~~touch~~ [incredible] with her.

CH I happened to notice an analysis of your voting record by the press.

VA Yes.

CH I hope you don't mind if I...

VA Oh no, I don't mind at all.

CH It was said, quote, He has been known to rise up on the senate floor and tear a piece of legislation apart just to get his views on the record, then vote for the bill for a variety of reasons.

VA Who said that?

CH This was - I'm trying to see who this was that they quoted, but it was...

VA What paper, then?

CH I believe it was in the Statesman.

VA Oh, I may have done that. I don't - that's not one of my memories of my - that would be their observation.

CH I guess a dilemma that a lot of people see legislators in is a bill that has something good and something bad in it, from their point of view, and whether you vote it down because of the element that's bad, or whether you support it because it's good. Is this a case of something like that?

VA It's hard to tell what they were referring to, but yes, you're right, there are times in which there may be some smaller things in a major issue that are difficult to deal with, so you weigh in your mind, do I vote against the whole thing or do I just kind of hold my nose and vote because the major issue is the

important one and the subsidiary issue is less so. That could be the case. I've certainly done that. I think I may have mentioned to you - again, it's hard to recall from all our tapes - but particularly when I was in the house and Frank Roberts was reading clerk, he came up to me and he said one time, "Vic, it would make it a lot easier if you just tell me when you're going to vote yes," because I'm voting no an awful lot. And I was. I was voting no. As a matter of fact, I voted no as a governor because I vetoed a lot of bills. It's hard to flyspeck - you can prove anything if you want to look at a few issues, the legislator does this and the legislator does that. It's hard to judge at all.

[End of Tape 21, Side 2]