

Tape 23, 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 February 16, 199[3] - seventeenth?

VA Fifteenth.

CH And this is Tape 23, Side 1.

In our last conversation we were talking about your election in 1978, and you had started to mention Paul Newman, who was a consultant on your campaign, and you were going to tell me something more about him.

VA Let me get the timing, because Hank Crawford - I mentioned his name. He was a lobbyist. Among his accounts was the Oregon Medical Association. He talked to me during the session. He says, "Now, if you're going to run for governor, I suggest you use Paul Newman." I said, "Well, I don't want to think about it now," back to where I was before. So afterward I thought about it. Well, okay, we've got to start thinking whether I want to do it or not, and, okay, let's talk to Paul. Well, he began to warn me about Paul. He was a little nervous. He said, "Now, Paul really is very, very good," but he described, then, the - Paul was representing, or at least speaking to, the American Medical Association, and here was this guy with a beard and frowzy hair and a T-shirt and beads and stuff, and he was talking to the American Medical Association. What really impressed Hank was that when he finished, here was this scrungy-looking, hippy-type guy, he had the doctors standing on their feet, cheering. So he was pretty impressed by that. Then Hank got nervous again because Paul had - after we had made arrangements to fly up there

to meet Paul, Paul said, "Well, I've got a surprise for you." Now Hank is real nervous. What kind of a surprise does Paul Newman have, you know. And he repeated about, Paul's really very good, you know. Anyway, we landed, and Hank's looking for Paul. And pretty soon Paul shows up. He's clean-shaven, his hair is combed, and he starts showing his Brooks Brothers credit card. That was the surprise [laughter].

Incidentally, I sent him a letter a while ago and just got an answer not too long ago, and, boy, he's really with it. He belongs to Rotary and all kinds of things like that. But anyway, we ended up with Paul. An extremely bright man. I wished really I had a tape recorder, because by the - you hear a point that really is a smashing point, and by the time you try to write that down, he's got another one. You know, you just can't keep up; you've got to tape it and slow it down a little and write it down. But he was very bright. I'll give you kind of a quick recap of the thing, because after we got going and we designed the campaign and all the rest of it and had been going a while, Paul Newman, who has been used to - he did work with some governor's election and congressional ones and I'm sure senatorial races and things of that kind, and he said to me - I don't recall at what point - "Vic," he says, "you're hokey. Well," he said, "maybe hokey's in this year." So I was, I guess, a different kind of candidate than he was used to.

CH He was from where?

VA State of Washington.

CH But he was familiar enough with what was going on in Oregon that you felt comfortable with him?

VA Yeah. And not only that, he was very good on strategy,

particularly good on ads, how you put this thing together. He visualizes it very easily. We had - again I'm jumping a little because I don't recall the time, but one of the ads we had we were calling the scratchy-pen ad, and Paul Newman was describing this to us, and the whole idea is that here was a guy that's pretty thoughtful, and that he thinks about things. And so the camera was going to kind of go around, you know. In the meantime, I'm there at this - you know, it's kind of darkened a little with just a light on the desk, and I'm supposed to be writing with a scratchy pen. Well, ballpoints don't scratch. So anyway, we did run the ad, but it wasn't - you know, he wanted to get the sound of a pen scratching. Well, we had to scrap that one because that just doesn't work.

I think I told you earlier, recognizing first of all about the race, did I want to get in? Yes. And that Bob Straub had a consultant from New York. I don't recall what his name was, but he was well known. And we realized that, as I mentioned earlier, that this fellow, he tries to sell his candidate via ads, the media. That was his style. We knew that too, and we knew we had to raise money and try to match him with our - beat him with our volunteers, as I told you. Well, I wish I could remember. I think maybe Roger announced first, Roger Martin. I announced that I was going to run, if I recall, sometime the latter of October, and, if I remember correctly, Tom McCall announced, oh, I think the first of January. Anyway, after. And I might add there was also four other candidates that were in that race, so there were seven of us, but the ones that got all the attention were Tom McCall, Roger Martin, and myself.

One of the interesting sidelights of all of this was that there was a theory, accepted, incidentally, by mutual friends of Roger and myself, that we would split the vote and that Tom McCall would thereby win, and that one of us ought to get out. There was some hint in the newspaper about this kind of thing

going on. We actually met, Roger and I, in Woodburn at somebody's home. Now, it's interesting. I was kind of testy about the whole thing because in my mind always was that Roger was going to come in third. I didn't know who was going to come in first or second, but I knew Roger was going to come in third, but there was a whole speculation that I ought to get out of the race.

CH Because you had run before?

VA Well, because I had run before, and that Roger probably could - was a better - I don't know all the reasons. And we met subsequently with some mutual friends of ours who had been involved in politics, and they actually suggested that I get out of the race. I told them I didn't plan to do that. But there was that discussion going on, that one of us ought to get out of the race, and the one that ought to get out of the race was me. Anyway, the campaign proceeded.

I do recall down in Newport they have their Loyalty Day parade - it's still going on - so candidates are down there for the parade. Well, Tom McCall, being a former governor, he had his own car all by himself. The rest of us guys had to be on a flatbed truck. That means candidates for governor and county commissioner and sheriff and city - whatever. We had to be on a flatbed truck. Tom McCall's slogan was "The Best is Yet to Come." That was his slogan. My secretary then, Glenna Hayden, was standing on the street there, and Tom comes by with his car and his sign that says "The Best is Yet to Come," and she yells at him and says, "That's right. Vic Atiyeh is right behind you" [laughter].

Incidentally, my slogan in '74 was "Oregon's Next Great Governor," and I suggested that the campaign slogan in '78 should have been "Oregon's Next Governor. Great." Well, they didn't go

along with that one, but I thought it was kind of funny.

The highlight of that campaign - well, I should tell you that there were a lot of people that made the same presumption that Tom McCall was going to be the winner, running against Bob Straub, and it was difficult raising money.

CH Wasn't there a threat of McCall possibly running as an Independent?

VA Oh, there's always some talk about that. He had talked about the third force, and that was Tom.

CH But hadn't you said earlier that it was his great mistake, not running as an Independent, that the primary would have been harder for him than the general election? Somebody had told me that.

VA Oh, I don't know. That's a matter of judgment. He wouldn't, of course, run in a primary. It would have been Tom McCall, Bob Straub, and myself. You know, it's hard to tell what would have happened out of that pile. When one looks at the result of the general election - no, excuse me, the primary election, with seven candidates and - including Tom McCall, Roger Martin, myself, and four others, and I ended up with 47 percent of the vote, almost 50 percent of the whole vote out of that whole pile, you know, it's hard to tell. If you try to - if you say okay, that's what happened in the primary election, Tom would have stood by himself in a general election, you know, how does that convert on the Democrats and Republicans and Independents voting, I don't know. I guess you could speculate that, but...

CH McCall and Straub, being very similar in their ideologies, probably would have a good chance of splitting the liberal end of

the ticket with the liberal voters.

VA Yeah.

CH You had Denny Miles as a press aide during the campaign, and he later joined your staff.

VA Right.

CH Maybe you could tell me a little bit about him.

VA Denny came from Oregon State University and joined me, when I was senate Republican leader, as a press aide. He took a, I don't know what you'd call it, leave or whatever they call it, and spent the session with me. Of course, I knew Denny, and as we began our campaign - I'm chuckling now because - I have to step back a little bit, and I'll get more into detail of it. Punch Green was a mutual friend of ours. He had a terrible time - by that, I mean Tom McCall and myself - and finally decided to stay out, which was very tough for Punch Green to do, but he just didn't want to choose between Tom McCall and me. We started off with a real, oh, I suppose some would call it an amateurish thing. We did have Paul Newman. I had a campaign coordinator, not a campaign manager; sort of an ad hoc finance committee; I did have a treasurer, which of course keeps track of all these things, the mechanical things that one does in a campaign; I had a volunteer for my volunteer group, counties and those kinds of folks, but it really wasn't what you'd call highly sophisticated as it developed later on in the campaign. But anyway, Denny came. At this point in time, he sort of abandoned ship. In other words, you can only do that so many times, leave and go work for a politician. And he was in the, I'm not sure what you'd call it, communication department or something at Oregon

State University. He was a professor there and teaching radio, television. That was what he was doing at Oregon State. But when he decided - I asked him, and he decided to come aboard, that meant he let go of the umbilical cord of OSU and just see what happens in the future.

Denny, incidentally, as it all developed and over the years, because, as you know, he was with me until I left office, I called him my in-house cynic. I'd say, "Now, Denny, where's the landmine out there? What's about to happen?" He's a very bright guy. Now he's in his own consulting business, doing fairly well, quite well, I guess, and not just necessarily political. There's a lot of corporations that really don't know how to handle the press, how to establish a media contact, so there's a lot of businesses that need the kind of talent that Denny brings. He's very bright, learned a lot over the years in our campaigns, and I like him very much. We were quite compatible, and keep close touch today.

Well, we began to establish the campaign. You start off with a plan, and that has to be central to any campaign if you have a chance of winning. Now, you have to really - you know, the plan can be a successful plan or an unsuccessful plan, but you have to have a plan. And in order to give yourself a chance of winning, you have to stay with that plan. Now, that may not sound like too much, but when you get into a campaign, and you've got all your friends, and they all call and say to you, Now, if you just do this one thing, you're going to win, which doesn't necessarily match your plan. And so you have to have a plan, you have to know what you're going to do, and you have to stay with it. Now, you may take some side roads, but that's okay as long as you're on the road and on the plan. Incidentally, by comparison, four years ago is when Bush was running against Dukakis. Bush had a plan, I could tell that, and he was very consistent with the plan, and he stayed with the plan all the

way. Dukakis never quite had a plan. He was changing it almost daily or weekly and also trying to decide who he should be, so he never really hooked on. He really never had a good, cohesive campaign. By contrast, I have a feeling that there wasn't really a plan with the Bush campaign this time, and Clinton had a plan and he stayed with it. That's what I mean. Now you can begin to see what I'm saying.

So with Paul Newman's advice, and we established a budget which sounded awful high, and we had - you know, began to put a team together. I didn't have a whole set of highly professional people, it was just a bunch of dedicated people. I'm thinking of Sharon Page ~~LSM~~, for example. She was our volunteer coordinator and did one whale of a job. As a matter of fact, she did such a good job and had such a good plan together that when the campaign was over, Paul Newman, who really complimented her highly, when I say took the plan, obviously he didn't steal it, we knew all about it. He said, Now, this is something that all campaigns ought to have. So he used the format that Sharon put together. We had a large number of volunteers.

Anyway, we're still in the primary. The thing I knew - remember I told you Roger was going to come in number three?

CH Yes.

VA I also knew that Tom McCall could not match his image and that he was going to come down. He'd been very high. He was, if I recall correctly, sixty-some-odd-plus percent and I was under thirty; 27-, 28 percent or something like that. And I knew that he was going to come down, because the image of Tom McCall could not be matched by the real Tom McCall. The only question was, was he going to come down fast enough by primary day that I could catch him.

Earlier we talked in the '74 campaign about conservative and

all the rest. A big opportunity came when the three of us were going to debate. The first of them was at the City Club. We had one in Portland at the City Club, one in Eugene, and one in Medford. And really, I wasn't trying to make myself something I really wasn't, but the whole idea was designed that here would be Tom on the left and Roger on the right and Vic Atiyeh in the middle. Now, I don't mean in terms of where you're sitting, I mean philosophically. And really, if we had written the script and said, Now, Roger, you say this, and, Tom, you say that, they couldn't have done a better job at it. And it was so interesting to me as I went to the debates and then I'd read about it in the paper the next day: Roger said this and Tom said that, and, oh, by the way, Atiyeh was there. But, you know, I knew where we were trying to position ourselves in the eyes of people. Actually, it was finally capped by the time we got to Medford, and Roger really took off on Tom, and Tom came shouting back, and I'm just sitting there holding their coats, you know. So that worked out extremely well.

But the campaign was difficult in the sense that people that had given me money in '74 were holding back, and I think I mentioned that earlier, because they presumed it was going to be McCall-Straub. As a matter of fact, about a week before the election the timber barons, so-called, in Eugene had an appreciation dinner for Bob Straub, and I was really ticked off about that because, again, they were - I mean, it was going to be a Bob Straub-Tom McCall, and they were just jumping on board of Straub, and I was really put out. It's interesting how quickly the cat can change the spots, because about a week after the primary I had a meeting with the same people, and they abandoned the Straub ship rather quickly.

CH Which people were these?

VA Oh, I'd have to do some remembering on it. Certainly, I think Stub Stewart had to be a part of it, [inaudible], ^{Quisina} ~~Justin~~ [so?], probably Aaron [so?] Jones. Those folks. Aaron Jones was very good. He loaned his airplane and was quite helpful. But anyway, that's how those things change, and change rather quickly.

I really had a feeling about the campaign. I really felt good about it, how things were going, and on - again, it's hard - it seemed to me I covered this, but on the Saturday - not the Saturday before the Tuesday, but a Saturday, oh, let me say ten days out, something like that, there was a poll, and it was an Oregonian poll. I remember they called me at home to get a response, and the poll said something like McCall was 38 percent and I was 31- or 32 percent, something like that, and they wanted my reaction. And my reaction was, Great! I've won. Now, here I am, six or seven points behind, but the point - I could tell the trends, and the trend was moving in the wrong direction for Tom and the right direction for me. That's the value of a poll. You want to know what's the trend, what's going on. And as I told you earlier, I won by almost, it seemed to me, if I remember, 47 percent of the whole vote, something like that. So when things sort of slide sometimes, they really slide, which, incidentally, happened in '82 as well, but we'll get to that.

CH Were there specific incidences that caused it to slide for Tom McCall?

VA I think it was mainly - well, I'm going to have to do some guessing. First of all, I think he thought that he was invincible. You know, I can't lose. Oh, I described it many times like he just - you know, that the curtains parted, and he went ta-da, and everybody cheered, you know. That's the vision that he had in his mind. He probably didn't campaign as hard

because, you know, why do I have to campaign too hard? I'm saving myself for the general election. That could have been part of it. He couldn't believe that Oregonians would reject him. You know, a highly popular - which he was...

CH What kind of platform did he have?

VA I can't remember.

CH Was he just basically campaigning on his reputation, or did he have specific...?

VA I think so. I don't think he had anything particularly new. The best is yet to come. You know, we've done all these neat things, but we've got more things coming. But when you ask me, I can't remember. I'm just so intensely involved with my own that I just didn't pay any attention. I knew what I wanted to do and what my plan was, which didn't relate to anybody's plan. And the funny part of this whole thing was that Tom McCall's victory party was at the Benson Hotel; my victory party was at the Mallory. Did I tell you about this? Well, it won't hurt to repeat anyway.

CH Please.

VA Isn't that the one by the Masonic Temple?

CH By the Masonic Temple, exactly.

VA The media was no different than anybody else. They presumed that the action was down at the Benson where McCall was, so the first team was down at the Benson, and they had the second team up by my - you know, at the Mallory Hotel. Well, it became very

evident this is not what's going to happen, and it was the funniest scramble in the world. I tell you, it was really funny with them trying to get to where the real action was, which, of course, was at the Mallory. It was really something. It was funny to see this all happen.

Roger Martin was very good. He didn't call or send a note, he came up to my headquarters - I mean, came up to the victory party, and he said, "That was just a great victory." I mean, he was just really very good about the whole thing. I kept waiting for Tom McCall to call, which is the standard thing which had happened. I got a call from Mark Hatfield congratulating me. I said, "Mark, what do you do? I'm waiting for Tom McCall to call," because it was clear that he was not going to win. I don't recall I got much advice. "I'm thinking about maybe going over there myself." I don't recall what the discussion was, but anyway, I concluded after a while, I'm going to go down and see him, which is very unusual for the winner to go down and see the loser, and I was most concerned that we talk to each other privately because I knew that Tom McCall losing was - you know, if I were to lose, it was like jumping out the second-story window; for him to lose, it's like jumping off the Empire State Building. Well, unfortunately, when I got to the Benson Hotel, he was in the lobby, and the media was talking to him at that point in time. Well, now there's no escape. And there is some tape on this, and he was pretty petulant about the whole thing, and you could see that if you see the tape and Tom McCall talking. But then we left and went to his room, and he was - well, it's a good thing that the media didn't catch the display in the room. He was really on his campaign manager, Kim ^{Skullis} ~~Secret~~ [SUN]. Now, I know her by her prior name before she got married. A nice young lady. Really on her case pretty bad. I had Steve Young with me as well - he was then the state chairman of the party - and he had Steve in tears. Now, this is an adult male,

and he had Steve in tears. Well, you know, it didn't affect me that much because I already knew this was going to be a terrible blow to Tom McCall and his ego, and I just remember the event. I didn't feel hurt, I didn't - I wasn't in tears, I just knew that's, unfortunately, Tom McCall, and that he'd calm down after - he wouldn't ever get over it, but that it would be - he would have his emotions a little more in check, as much as Tom McCall can put his emotions in check. But that was kind of a rough night for him, and he was kind of swinging pretty wild at that point.

CH Do you remember things he said at the time?

VA No. I remember that he turned to Kim and said to her it was her fault that he lost. I remember that. Beyond that, what led to the tears, I can't...

CH What were the nature of his comments to you?

VA All I can remember is down in the lobby: Well, we've just given the governorship to the Democrats. Something like that. Something about negative campaign, or something. But, you know, I was really wanting to stop the conversation. I didn't want to get into it in the first instance, so I wasn't really anxious to spend a lot of time debating that with him in the lobby of the Benson Hotel, not for myself, mostly for him.

CH What was the context of the conversation you had with him?

[End of Tape 23, Side 1]