

Tape 3, Side 2

CH This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office at Atiyeh Brothers in downtown Portland. The interviewer, for the Oregon Historical Society, is Clark Hansen. The date is 12/4/92, and this is Tape 3, Side 2.

In our last session we were talking about some of the associations that you were involved with and you had mentioned the Portland Executive Association. What is the Portland Executive Association?

VA Oh, it's now quite old. I can't remember - well, let's see. It seems to me it started about 1920, or something. What it is, it's kind of a - there are different organizations that we'd call business clubs or ~~lease~~^{LEAD} clubs or something like that. You try to get business for your fellow members. It was very well organized; some fine members in it, the better-known companies of different categories around the Portland area. I was pretty active in that, I worked pretty hard at it.

CH There was an organization - and it skips my mind right now, the name of it. It's quite well known, especially back then - that Republican businessmen often attended and spoke at.

VA You mean Trumpeters?

CH The Trumpeters. Did you ever go there?

VA Oh yeah. Well, I - yeah, I went there. I was invited. They met at 7:00 in the morning. It's a toastmaster group. I never really - I didn't belong, but they did invite me, particularly during political campaigns. There was a - I had some interesting times there. I recall going there - I was elected on Tuesday, and that Friday I went to a Trumpeters meeting. I didn't know, but the year before - that was in

November, so this would have been October of '77 - they had a meeting, and they were predicting who might be elected governor, so they passed ~~it~~ ^{A TAP RECORD} around to all the members, and they cut this tape. So now, a year and a month later, they're listening to this tape, and I'm sitting there listening to the tape, and my name wasn't mentioned at all [laughter]. So we had a lot of fun out of that, because I had just been elected. After I returned from governor, I did join, but I thought 7:00 meetings really aren't my bag, and I'd had all of that stuff I needed. Then, they began to talk about smoking policy, and I thought, well, now, wait a minute. I just don't really need this anymore at 7:00 in the morning, and they're going to have a smoking policy. So that was my tenure with the Trumpeters. But they were a pretty active group. Packwood was very much a part of it. They were Republican, and they worked for Republican candidates, but they were a toastmaster - and they did do the toastmaster thing. I mean, they had - somebody would give talks, and they had table topics and all the rest of it. Ice breakers for the new one. So they were functioning Trumpeters, but they were all Republicans.

CH You also had mentioned the Boy Scouts and some of your work with them. There was also - I don't know whether you were also involved with arms collecting.

VA Yeah. I started the Oregon Arms Collectors, another collector and myself, in 1955, I think it was. Gun collecting has been something that's been - well, actually my full-time - really, the longest hobby. I don't know why. People say, why do you collect guns? I don't know. Why do people collect buttons or whatever they collect? I just was interested. I joined the National Rifle Association, a life member in 1947. I think I'll be interested, so I'll join. Anyway, I just thought it would be kind of neat to have a collectors' club, and so we formed it. It's still going now, today. Kind of had it pretty low - it looked like it was about ready to disappear from sight a couple

of years ago - but new leadership kind of picked it up. I keep a recording - they have monthly meetings, but there's always some reason that it interferes. I'm still trying to get there. But I enjoy it. It's just a hobby, and, incidentally, hobbies are good. As governor, you know, every once in a while I'd pick up a gun book and read about it, just read, or I'd get - not too often, but get a gun and just take it all apart and clean it. You know, your mind just leaves all the stuff that you're doing. Now you're just doing something else. It's good to get a break.

CH What kind of guns did you like to collect?

VA Just, as it turned out, American. If I were to generalize, American and old. But as collectors do, you specialize, and I specialized first - it seemed to me - well, when I first started, it was just guns, any kind of guns. Just guns. Then I began to specialize into what I called derringers, and in that case it would be the small pistols. Deringer is a person by name, and it's actually a pistol itself, but it got a generic name after that, but small guns. Then I started collecting Colts, and Colt was a very - almost everybody is a colt collector. But I specialized even more so in the sense that Colts that were stamped - military stamping: U.S., U.S.N., and I had a very nice collection of that. Then, I shifted gears and went into muzzleloaders. We call them Kentucky rifles, but Pennsylvania rifles, black powder guns, the oldest of which I have is about, oh, late 1700, and - but, then, I'm back now to where I started, just guns. You know, whatever appeals to me, I'll go out. Now I've got Colts, I've got some Winchesters, I've got some Sharps, and I've got a bunch of muzzleloaders. You know, that's the way it is. I've been less active, of course, certainly since 1974 when I was campaigning, you know, and then legislature and then became governor and got my own business afterward, and I just have not been as active as I was years ago.

CH You were also a member of the Multnomah Muzzleloading Rifle Club.

VA Yeah. That was going. A collector friend of mine, he kept saying, "You ought to come out and shoot muzzleloaders." I thought, What do I want to shoot muzzleloaders for? Finally, one day he called up. He says, "I'm going to pick you up -" at some service station, or something, "- at 8:00, and we're going to go out and shoot muzzleloaders." He didn't ask, you know, do you want to go. He says, I'm just going to pick you up. And, boy, did I enjoy that. I really did. I enjoyed it very much. It was a lot of fun.

CH There are special regulations, aren't there, for muzzleloading? There are special exceptions to various rules on - aren't muzzleloading guns sort of a breed among themselves, sort of a separate class?

VA Oh yeah. It was interesting to me, after I'd been in it a while, the - rarely are there cartridge target shooters [who] would switch over to muzzleloaders, and rarely would muzzleloaders switch over to cartridge. And it just - you know, there's a certain breed of cat, I guess, likes each one of those. I've seen some instances of that switching back and forth, but very, very rarely. Muzzleloading is - you just have to be a little bit more patient with it, and it's a lot of fun. Of later years, one of the things you really have to do - well, I'll have to back off just a little. When I began, there were no reproductions as there are today - and, incidentally, I don't say that in a deprecating way. There are some very good reproductions, very well made - so all you had was the old guns. You had to go find an old gun that was in good shape so that you could shoot it. So after having done that, at least I felt obliged to come home and clean it thoroughly, because we're dealing with an original old gun, and I can't let this thing go

to pot. So it would take a long time to clean guns, at least the way I did it. I mean, I'd come home and I'd spend, I don't know, an hour and a half or two hours cleaning the gun. Well, as time moved on, I had less time for that, so I got invited, as a governor, to go to different shoots, and I'd say, "Sure, I'll be glad to, but I'll use your gun," meaning they had to clean it. And we even started a governor's match down in Grants Pass.

CH Really? Who attended that?

VA There was a muzzleloading group down there. They have a great park, [inaudible] park down there. Really a good one. So they have a shoot at Labor Day, and so we just inserted a governor's match in there. Nice people. I enjoyed it. I even won it once.

CH Really?

VA Yeah. Legitimately. Once. But I'd say, "Okay, I'll come down, but I'll use your gun."

CH Did you ever get involved in gun control issues on either side?

VA Oh yeah. That's an interesting thing. Those that they call anti-gun and those like me that are pro-gun, really, we want the same thing. We want less crime with the use of a firearm. I think our view is more realistic, our view basically being, you know, you really punish a person for the use of a firearm in a crime. For example, if there's a robbery with the use of a firearm, that's two crimes, not one, to be served not concurrently. These are two separate crimes, and you serve two sentences. That kind of thing. The anti-gun, you know, they talk about Saturday night special and registering and making it difficult and all the rest, but that doesn't get you there. The

only way you could really get there is to confiscate all the guns and then regulate, and then you know exactly who has them and - there aren't that many, but nobody - even the most ardent are not talking about confiscation. And they couldn't. I mean, there's just no way in the world they could do that. Our position is that all you're ever going to do - if you start talking about registration, the only ones that are going register a gun is an honest person. A crook isn't going to register a gun. [He'll] steal it or do whatever he wants or get it from somewhere, but not going to register it. So the only ones that are going to be really involved in all of this are those that you don't want to get anyway, or you don't need to get, I guess I should say. So, you know, we're going at it the same way, although we don't - I'm thinking we're doing it realistically, and they're doing it what sounds good, politically good, but isn't going to work.

CH What about the more notorious automatic or semi-automatic-type weapons? Military?

VA Well, automatics have been registered for years.

CH Machine guns.

VA Machine guns. That's a full automatic. Semi-automatic means that it's - you don't have to manually do it, it's just bang, bang, bang, bang, instead of holding the trigger and a whole bunch comes out, and so that's semi-automatic. And there's semi-automatic pistols, semi-automatic rifles. They say, talking about these military-type weapons, semi-automatic, you don't really need them. Well, I don't know. They certainly don't need them for hunting. But if it makes somebody feel good, I'm not as - I think the NRA, or at least some of the most devout people in there, they don't want any waiting period, they don't want any regulation. Well, okay, I don't mind a little bit of it. But if they start talking about this general registration and all the

rest of it, I think it's crazy. It just doesn't do anything. It really doesn't do anything. There was a lot of regulations on the books before they started passing all these different laws, already regulations.

CH How do you feel about the current Oregon gun laws? There's a fifteen day waiting period and...

VA Oh, I don't mind. The point is, it isn't going to solve the problem. It isn't going to solve the problem.

CH Some gun store owners complain that they have to follow a certain number of regulations in how sell their firearms, whereas people can go to the gun shows and they can purchase weapons more easily there. Do you think that people - that there should be some kind of regulation of sales at gun shows?

VA Well, first of all, the law is that if you're a gun dealer, you set yourself up as a gun dealer, then, you have to go through the paperwork. Then, there are the collectors, like myself, and I'm not a gun dealer. Yes, I'll sell a gun, most often trade, get a little money or give a little money, but that's where I am. At the present time, the law says that's okay, you can do that. Well regulated clubs, like the Oregon Arms Collectors, you cannot sell to other than a member. You have to be a member. I mean, even a guy like me. Now, that's our own regulation. If I want to sell a gun, you have to be a member, and we monitor that very carefully. So, you know, it's a hobby; it happens to be a hobby of a gun. A lot of people think of guns as being awful things. But I guess hatchets are and knives are, and these chains - I don't know, these oriental art things with - they're all awful. But somehow, people just - oh, they're afraid of them, and they're a terrible weapon, and nobody really needs them, and that's where they're coming from, and that's their view. I have a different view. History is so much involved with firearms. I

can see the beauty in them. Actually, a lot of them are very attractive, even the Colt pistols that would be Civil War, for example. They had some beautiful lines in there; I mean, the way they produced it and the way it was manufactured. So I can see something that's quite attractive, it's got a lot of history involved with it. That's great. I'm not offended by all of it. The bottom line is, what system is going to work.

CH Is there any meeting ground between the two? Is there anyplace where gun control and gun - anti-control people can meet?

VA Not really. When I say not really, you asked me. I'm NRA, a gun collector, have been, really, most of my life. Their system isn't going to work. You know, it isn't going to work. Now, if I thought it was going to work, sure, the answer would be yes. As a matter of fact, I'd be on that side. But it isn't going to work. It just isn't going to work, and I want something that works. Now, when I tell you this, it's no different than my role as a governor. I wasn't interested in talking about something, I wanted to do something. And oftentimes, the popular solution wasn't the real solution, but it was the popular solution. I'm not interested in the popular solution, I'm just interested in the solution. So I guess I'm carrying it over. Whether I took it in or carried it over doesn't make any difference. So it isn't a matter of being stubborn; you know, they're on that side and I'm on this side. The thing is that their system isn't going to work.

And really, the only ones that are going to do any registering - I just made a trade with a gun shop. I had a bunch of old cartridges and lead and my lead pot that I used for muzzleloading, and I had a bunch of odds and ends, and I took them there to this shop. I said, "Nick, here. You probably can do something with it. Tell me how much it's worth." So after, I don't know, two or three weeks, he said, This is worth so much.

He said, "But I'm not in a position to buy it." "I don't mind. I'll go trade you." So I got a Colt automatic .32 caliber pistol. So he had to register the whole thing, which is - I had no problem with that. But it's kind of silly. Now, I did that, and all my friends that I know, they did that. I would ask you, you know - I wouldn't ask you, but I'd ask whoever, these guns that are used in drive-bys, did they go register them? Did they go to a shop and buy them, sign up? No. An interesting story, a true story: a young man that I knew at one time, he went - I knew him when he was in, I guess, either late grade school through high school, but for a period of time, and I met him because he was really ^{INTO POLITICS} - it was almost a hobby with him. He knew more about who was elected in Oregon and when and - I mean, he really got in it, he was really into it. So, then, he became of voting age, and so he registered, and he told me, he says he registered a Democrat. "Jerry, why did a smart young man like you register as a Democrat?" "Well," he said, "the views of Republicans and Democrats." "Like what?" "Like gun control." I said, "Jerry, I'll tell you what. You guarantee me that the crook won't get the gun, and I'll go along with you." He said, "Well, I can't guarantee that." "Okay. Then, what's all this all about?"

CH Well, do you show your guns?

VA I used to, but not anymore.

CH So are they displayed, then, in your house, or are they just tucked away?

VA Oh, I have some on the wall, but most of them are tucked away.

CH Is there something that you're most proud of?

VA Oh yeah, I have some favorite guns, yeah. I don't know if I'd pick a favorite gun, but I have some favorite guns. This old one I mentioned that's pre-1800, a very good looking gun. It's what they call from the golden age, and, gosh, they were beautifully done. Inlaid, and the wood was carved. I like that one. I've got a favorite gun that I shoot, which is a muzzleloader. I haven't shot it in a long time. A flintlock. I really like it. Original. Not very fancy, nicely done, rather plain. I have a Sharps rifle that - not very good looking to anybody that would look at it, but clearly, it was used during - actually used during the buffalo hunting. We know that. There's somebody back in Mississippi that has a Sharps record, so you can get a gun and then you give him the serial number, and he looks it up in the record. And it was shipped to a fellow in, ^{KIT CARSON, COLORADO} ~~I think~~ ~~it was, Wyoming or Montana, one of the two,~~ who was a buffalo hunter, and also represented Sharps and sold Sharps to people who were buffalo hunters. And this is what they call the Big 50. It was .50 caliber, is what it was, and it's very well used. So I know it was used at that time. But if you wanted to look for attractiveness, it's not attractive at all. And some guns that I've - I've got another Sharps that's just beautiful. That was a target one. It is in beautiful condition. And a muzzleloader that's just superb. But, you know, it's hard to pick out one. There's a lot of guns I like that I have in my collection. And having collected that long, you know, you end up with some fairly nice things. I don't have a great number of them by terms of a collector. If I were to tell anybody else, they'd say, Ooh, that's a lot. But in terms of collectors, it's not a lot, and I never have had a lot. And I have trouble understanding how anybody could be a collector today. I mean, I see the prices in these gun magazines, and I don't know how anybody - you know, I feel sorry for a new collector. I don't know how they can even get started, because when I was dealing with it, we're talking about 25-, \$30, you get way up to \$75, you know. And now, my goodness, you can't even buy a part for that kind of money, let

alone a gun. So I say, gee, how can a young guy get involved in this. I don't know.

CH Are there any other organizations that we haven't touched on that you belonged to?

VA We talked about the church.

CH Yes, we did talk a little bit about the church. We talked about - well, a little bit about the St. Barnabus Church and the fundraising and the vestry and how the women had goals.

VA They did, that's right. While we talked about money, they went out and did it.

CH Well, when did you first become associated with the Republican Party as an organization?

VA In that sense, when I registered when I was twenty-one. In terms of any activity at all, it was 1958, which was the first time I ran for office. That really was the first, you know, overt, political, Republican Party kind of thing I did.

CH Were you ever involved in helping anybody campaign?

VA Not really, no. When I say that to you - I'm trying to think of his name right now. Anyway, he was running for city council. Bill ^{BOWES} - I'll think of it in a minute. He'd been there a while. He was a good friend of my close friend Jim ^{CAMPBELL'S} father. Anyway, he was running again, and my friend Jim brings by these match covers. You can't do that today. You can't give anything of value, including matches. So he said, "Why don't you hand some of these out." "Okay." So, then, I was kidding him: "Now, if Bill wins, have him stop the gravy train here on Tenth and Alder," which is where we were at the time. So you see, I didn't

take my politics all that seriously. So I can't say I really did anything political until I decided to run for office.

CH And when did you first start thinking about that?

VA I didn't really think about it. Actually, it all came together just so suddenly. I was vocal and voted every time. My friends and I, you know, we'd all talk about it, and finally one of my friends said, "You ought to run for the legislature." And I said, "Well, yeah," which had no meaning. None at all. Let's go to the moon some day. Okay, let's go to the moon some day. And, as I since discovered, the central committees get together: Who are we going to run for office? And another - he was older than I was anyway - gentleman, he was there at the meeting in Multnomah County, and somebody brought up my name, and he said, "He lives in Washington County." So they dropped it, but then he called me up on the phone. He said, "Are you thinking about running for the legislature?" I said, "Oh, some day." He said, "Why not now?" "I don't know why not now." So that's how it started.

CH Who was that?

VA His name is Dutch Brummer, R. C. Brummer, B-r-u-m-m-e-r. He recently passed away. I think he was in his nineties when he passed away. I told him since that he can either take all the criticism or all the credit for cranking me up. The interesting thing is, I had never been in the state capitol building in my life, and in those days - in those earlier days, when I was going to college, we'd drive through Salem on our way to Eugene, 99E, and I was never in the capitol building till I went down to file for office. I'd never been inside that building. My friend Brummer - we parked the car, and we're trying to - you know, where do you go? Where's the front door. And then, of course, I had no idea what you do. How do you campaign. Today there's all

kinds of sophisticated help, and the house committees help you, and there's training sessions and all kinds of things. In my - you know, you just go run for office. What do you do? How do you do this? I don't know. Incidentally, that was interesting, because I can recall it so vividly. And I'm standing on the corner, again with my friend Jim, and we were talking. As a matter of fact, it was the corner of Sixth and Alder. Well, how do you - you know, do you go out and tell the folks what you think they want to hear, and then, when you get there, do all the good things you think? Well, that was just sort of an academic discussion because there was no question between us. No, you go out and tell people who you are, what you believe in, and then - now, that carried for the full distance of twenty-eight years.

[End of Tape 3, Side 2]

