



GERALDINE C. THOMPSON

Atiyeh's out, Gov. Thompson's in

By **DON JEPSEN**
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SALEM — With Gov. Vic Atiyeh out of the country for the next few weeks, Geraldine C. Thompson essentially assumes the role as chief executive — without ever being elected to public office.

Thompson is Atiyeh's chief aide. Because Oregon does not have a lieutenant governor, the former OPS/Blue Shield vice president who went to work for Atiyeh in 1981 is for all practical purposes the acting governor.

Her new role initially caused her some sleepless nights.

"I kept envisioning some huge emergency, where we have to call out the state police," she said. "But worse, what if the Legislature should decide to call itself into session? I've had two or three nightmares about that possibility."

When Oregon's founders drafted the constitution they included a provision making the Senate president acting governor whenever the governor was out of the state. In an era of instant communications and jet air travel, voters decided to repeal the archaic section in 1972.

The initiative also made the secretary of state rather than the Senate president first in line of succession, but without authority to step into the office when the real McCoy is away.

Thompson seems singularly unimpressed with her new-found status. "An ego trip? Not at all," she remarked Tuesday, the day Atiyeh left for his Mideast trip. "Actually I'm embarrassed. I have never been a power broker."

She acknowledges she will function in a gubernatorial capacity in a number of areas, including dealing with state agency heads, presiding over cabinet meetings, swearing in gubernatorial appointees, meeting with legislators and visiting dignitaries.

"Basically I am involved in most of these areas already. The only difference is that the governor takes the lead."

She also is getting state police protection. Atiyeh's personal body guard, Lt. Lon

feel this is a fairly common-sense security precaution."

Thompson will be in contact with her boss daily. And in the event of a statewide emergency or should there be a need for a special session, a special courier system has been provided by the State Department to forward any necessary documents.

She said she can also call on the White House or various embassies to gain quick telephone access to her boss. "All this was carefully worked out when the governor was briefed last week in Washington," she said.

Asked if she would prefer having a lieutenant governor to shoulder the responsibility, Thompson quickly replied, "No. I'd be less comfortable."

An elected official with a different political philosophy from the governor could "turn this state upside down. This way there is continuity."

Most states provide for a second in command, among them California where at one point former Gov. Jerry Brown refused to leave the state because of GOP Lt. Gov. Mike Curb's repeated threats to undo some of Brown's programs.

"Communications between the two of us couldn't be better," Thompson says of her working relationship with Atiyeh. "I find myself thinking like he thinks, saying the same things he would say. Sometimes it gets to be just a little frightening."

Atiyeh is scheduled to return to Oregon on April 17.

Until then, Oregon's first woman "governor" is hopeful things will go smoothly. "I'm praying for a quiet few weeks."

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— **Geraldine C. Thompson**

Holbrook, is accompanying him on his Mideast trade mission so John C. Williams, head of the Oregon State Police, is assigning a trooper full time to Thompson.

"I asked John if this was really necessary," said Thompson. "He said it was and I guess I can see his point," she said.

Williams said the trooper's job will be protection for the office in general and Thompson in particular. "In her role filling in for the governor she will be subject to some of the same exposure," he said. "I