

## Norm Smith interview on Atiyeh

An interview of Norm Smith regarding Oregon's Governor Victor Atiyeh, recorded on Apr. 28, 2015. Smith served as a Republican in the Oregon House of Representatives from 1979-1983. The interviewer, James Moore, was as professor of political science at Pacific University and was Atiyeh's biographer.

The interview includes discussion of: Atiyeh's rise to prominence in Washington County and his tenure as governor; his approachability and legislative skills, particularly during the 1978 session; Atiyeh's 1982 gubernatorial re-election campaign against Ted Kulongowski, emphasizing the strategic importance of debates and the need to portray Kulongowski as a risk; Atiyeh's dedication to family and his later involvement in philanthropy, including his interest in joining the Ford Family Foundation board.

Note on the text: This transcript was made through AI in 2025, with some manual corrections. It has been provided in order to facilitate research, but the text does contain errors and inaccuracies. Users should check the transcript against the recording before quoting the speakers.

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[Recording begins mid-conversation.]

James Moore 00:00

...Just because of the times, yeah, but that's what he wanted. And my gosh, we'll do it [i.e. publish Atiyeh's biography]. You know, Tom [McCall] had one. So, Vic ought to have one. Yeah, gotta have one. Tom had one. Bob Straub's just came out a couple of years ago. Barbara wrote her own. So, yeah, exactly, exactly, great. So tell me how you met Vic Atiyeh.

Norm Smith 00:23

I probably should have thought of this in advance of our meeting, but he was a fixture on the landscape in Washington County before I became active in politics. So he was already through the House and in the State Senate, when I started getting interested in running for the House. On top of that, he was a known businessman in downtown Portland, where my law practice was, yeah, in fact, right around the corner. Oh, great. I probably wasn't a block away from the Atiyeh's. So, you know, you could bump into him on the street in downtown Portland pretty easily. You would see him at every kind of political dinner that might go on in Washington County in particular, one of my favorite stories about an occasion like that was a meeting of the Republican Women of Washington County, and they had an annual chicken dinner and potato salad, and everything was cooked by individuals and brought to bear. And then it was, I think it was a fundraiser, probably, and they asked Vic to keynote the event, and he stood up and he thanked everybody for the wonderful occasion, and said, you know, the special presentation of food, he says, I was really hoping we'd have chicken. And of course, that got a lot of gut laughs, because that's probably what you'd had the last seven nights at seven other events, exactly. But he was, you know, he was a very approachable, accessible kind of politician as well as business person.

James Moore 02:05

Now, when did you first go into politics yourself?

Norm Smith 02:10

So I ran in 1978 and was elected, and that was the year that he became governor, right?

James Moore 02:22

So a board of 74 attempt, yeah,

Unknown Speaker 02:24

and, and I had a,

Norm Smith 02:27

I had a little bit different view of the 74 attempt, because I think that was the one where we had a, well, let's see. I, you can probably help me on this. One of my early mentors in politics in Oregon was Clay. Myers, yeah and Clay ran for the Republican nomination. Yeah, 74 Yeah, when Vic and Tom?

James Moore 02:52

No, no. Tom ran in 78 Okay, Tom was just leaving in 74 so Vic knocked off Clay. Yeah, most everybody's surprised, yeah,

Norm Smith 03:02

Vic's, yeah. And, of course, I was on a campaign team for Clay, not, not so much, because I opposed Vic in any way entirely, because, you know, Clay had befriended me as a student, and, yeah, you know, kind of nurtured and mentored and brought me along. And then so I saw that race, and then then the succeeding one would have been his inauguration and my swearing in on the same, same day. So really, from from that point, and then even on his re election, he and Jerry Thompson and Denny miles and I, and I don't know, not more than three or four other people were invited to kind of be his inner kitchen cabinet around the Capitol to prepare him for the debates with Kulongowski, to

James Moore 03:54

have Jerry's entire notebook. Yeah.

Norm Smith 03:57

And so I remember, you know, sitting with them, and, you know, offering insights to what I then thought were the political climbs.

James Moore 04:08

Yeah, yeah, fantastic. So you're, you come in in 78 the 78 session has been described by Republicans and Democrats as the apogee. It was, and, you know, and in it we come up with, eventually, this money needs to go back to taxpayers. But it's also been described as hanging over. It was the property tax measures that had failed in the fall of 78 prop 13 had passed the summer before in California, and it's just kind of looming. Yeah, so what, what's your sense of do you agree with that assessment? Is it

Norm Smith 04:48

I do, and I've thought of it many times the and for a for a freshman member, it was kind of a heady time, because even even though we were in a the other episode. Code that's going on simultaneously with this is a very close number of the majority minority in the House of Representatives, yeah, and with any strays moving across the line, you could actually get things done in 78 Yeah. So there was this appetite for restoring what looked like a surplus right smack dab in front of what was a looming recession,

James Moore 05:29

right? Nobody knew Paul Volcker was gonna Yeah, get strange yet yes. So yeah, I've

Norm Smith 05:34

thought of it many times. And I, you know, I thought of my own vote for what was then the inaugural of the so called kicker, which been now embedded in the Constitution, and it was,

Unknown Speaker 05:49

it was a time when

Norm Smith 05:52

probably everything peaked. Now maybe there have been peaks since, but it was the beginning of a change, and for Vic it became the beginning of a very important time for a skilled and experienced legislator who understood what both in the House and the Senate were capable of to manage the state as it came through then what was, at that time, the deepest recession, I think in modern times, still

James Moore 06:25

is the one we just went through, didn't, didn't, didn't meet the record. So, so as a freshman, did you have a sense that Vic was someone who understood the legislature and understood that whole process? Did you interact with him, or were you interacting with your own leadership? Yeah, I,

Norm Smith 06:45

I was blessed or cursed with, I think, the only freshman vice chairmanship of a committee, which was energy and environment, and it was the time of the the I'm trying to call the name exactly of the nuclear power plant that was to have been inaugurated in Oregon pebble spring. And that, that episode, one way or another, I think, launched me in visibility my freshman year, because I ended up with a minority report to defend the pebble springs construction at a time when it was pretty unpopular to be talking nuclear power and Jane Fonda was making a movie about China Syndrome, which opened

James Moore 07:36

the same week that The China Syndrome happened.

Norm Smith 07:37

Yeah. So, yeah, yeah, Three Mile Island, yeah. And so I just think I was thrust very early into a visible position. And I don't know whether Vic was paying any attention in particular to me or anyone else, but my sense was that he was the wizened manager upstairs, you know, in the governor's office who had just seen about everything.

James Moore 08:06

Yeah, were you working with Pat Amedeo? Oh, I knew Pat very

Norm Smith 08:10

well, yeah. And I think my own, my own political background, long before I ran for the legislature put me in touch with a lot of people when Eva was the state Republican Party chairman and really just about the emergence of Walter Huss and a very conservative Christian group of Republicans who sought control of precincts and then County Central committees, I found myself as the Acting Executive Director in the Salem office while I was in law school of the state Republican Party, right on the heels of Mike Ragsdale, also, another Washington County figure who then went to the Senate, and he and Vic were very close, you know, and their work together in the Senate. So I think that. And then going way back, my father had been chairman of the Multnomah County Republican Central Committee during the Eisenhower years, and then spent 22 years back when

James Moore 09:14

there were Republicans in Multnomah County. Then, yeah, it was, you

Norm Smith 09:17

know, you think about Republican chairman, yeah. So I just, I kind of grew up in that milieu. And so maybe back to your first question. You know, knowing of the Catia. I can't think of a time when I didn't know, right of the Catia in my adulthood. Yeah, yeah.

James Moore 09:37

So any issues jump out in that 70 night session, I gotta tell you, I've talked to like five people from that session, and nothing really jumps out except that's when Hardy, Myers got his judicial reform started, that then hooked two years ago, and you know that. But yeah, so it's.

Norm Smith 10:00

Hardy was actually Chair of the House Judiciary Committee.

James Moore 10:07

He was speaker in 79 so he becomes chair when he after speakership. So 83 Yeah, he becomes the chair, yeah, basically, to implement things, all of which were vetoed by Vic, and he, to this day, has no idea why, so

Norm Smith 10:24

yeah, and I don't, I don't think I can add anything to Okay, okay, that that one doesn't stand out in my mind, even though I was on judiciary, yeah, all three terms, yeah, and where I was going to go, and I'll just leap forward a few years about Hardy. We were a judiciary committee actually made up of lawyers then so few. And I don't know what the what the count would be currently, but there it was a diminution of lawyers over time, just because it was too expensive to spend a lot of time at the legislature. I learned that lesson. Yeah,

James Moore 10:58

that's why Hardy left. And it probably, yeah, he had kids going to Stanford and Cornell and stuff, and it was time to be in the legislature. So

Norm Smith 11:06

but when Hardy was chair of that committee, it was a five, four committee based on apportioned seats. And to this day, I really recall maybe one occasion when the committee, because of the way it was managed and the collegiality of it, there was one vote that afterwards, when they finished calling the roll, was five to four. It was all five Democrats against all four Republicans. And nobody really noted that until a couple of minutes after it happened, and said, Is this a first? Yeah, I call that out only because it still was the end of an era when people talk to each other and work things out. Yeah. And sure, politics was there, and it wasn't the halcyon days of the legislative process, but it was, it was an era that is different than the one we're in now. Yeah, and so Vic. Vic was bridging a time when you could call the majority or the minority leaders into the governor's office, and you could have conversations about what was possible, not what you liked, but what was possible. Yeah, and I know that still goes on, it'll be ever thus, but it, it was. He had a comforting style when he was in that mode. And he always had just at the at the cat bird moment. He always had just a little smile on his face, because he sort of had already figured out what all the chess moves would have to be, yeah. And, you know, in hindsight, I saw him as a person who really understood process, but he liked people, and his approachability and his likability was an asset, yeah.

James Moore 12:58

So 79 ends, Paul Volcker puts the screws on the economy. Interest rates go through the roof, which hits us just brutally hard. Then 1980 we began a series of special sessions that peak in 82 did any of those special sessions jump out to you in the way they were organized or disorganized or or anything the one I'll want to pick your brain on, if you can remember, it the January 1982 session. Okay, it was the long one you guys kind of met, went on recess, came back, had to wait for committees to Yeah, exactly. And in talking to the Democratic leadership, they didn't have any hint from Atiyeh what was coming to that session. Other everything else was, by gosh, we planned, we planned, we planned. And it was eight hours, 10 hours, but that one that just hit him out of the blue, but any do any of the other sessions stand out to you? They blur

Norm Smith 14:05

for me now, but I do know that I'm trying to think of which year was then the longest session of the legislature exceeded 180 days. Yeah. And I think we also then had specials on top of that, which was really destructive to home life and business life for a lot of people, and that probably contributed to tension. Yeah, it's really hard, particularly if you're not on the committee of jurisdiction, which is hammering out the deal the rest of the time is marching place. Yeah, plenty of time for speculation and rumor milling and that kind of thing. And I'm speaking generically because I haven't thought about the differences between the sessions. But what I what I do, remember. Clearly was in caucus one day when Donna Zajon, looking at a proposal from the governor's office, said, by golly, he had one more rabbit in the hat. And I that stuck with me because it was sort of descriptive of, oh, okay, we can use we can push expenses across the line to the next biennium. We can manipulate on the margins. We can do, you know, heroic actions, one of which sticks out of my mind as one of the big mistakes. And it proved to be a big mistake, and that was the taking of the SAIF trust funds, even though the Republican attorney general at the time, Dave Frohnmayer, gave us an opinion that we were in the clear right. Dave had served on judiciary with most of the lawyers, and you know, we had high respect for his acumen and capability. So notwithstanding, even the business community that I had favorable support from, I felt okay the governor put this forward. It's something we can get our hands on, and blindly, I think, went down that path, and I don't know how many years later, but couple of decades later, it got reversed, and

James Moore 16:27

it wasn't. It was pretty quick because Wally Carson, it was Wally Carson's first major decision on the supreme Okay, and Vic had appointed him, yeah, which caused Wally, yeah, great pain. But, you know, Vic appointed me to think about these things, yeah. So he voted against it, yeah, yeah. But it was Ted Colin goski, 20 years later, who actually paid it back. Okay, that's what I'm thinking. Interviewed him and said, You know, when I wrote that final check, it was a big check. It was like two \$40 million for the \$70 million or whatever

Norm Smith 16:55

it was, yeah. And of course, since then, I've experienced similar things. Ironically, I think Ted had Ted, or John had appointed me to the Oregon Cultural Trust in a season when the legislature was desperate for funds, and they did a sweep at the end and took, among other things, money that was called trust money. And I thought back to, okay, this is kind of payback time. It harkens back to that grab for the SAIF funds. Yeah,

James Moore 17:31

VIX, this is all during the 82 election. And vix money guy was a safe board person who was ticked off for a single day and then said, Let's go win the election.

Norm Smith 17:41

Yeah, well, I remember getting a call from my Washington County campaign manager's husband on vacation in Hawaii was had worked for years to isolate that money, and was a large industrial guy.

Unknown Speaker 18:00

I got a new one

James Moore 18:03

that day, yeah, yeah, absolutely. There was also an income tax surcharge that came earlier, yeah, did that? Was that a tough one to get through? It was, it was a similar kind of thing. Was kind of like, this is the end of our rope, yeah, yeah. So here we go.

Norm Smith 18:23

Yeah, and I know that we even flirted with sales taxes, and I think we actually moved a proposal out of the house where it had to come from, and got it out of the house by one vote. And I remember being intimately involved in finding that one vote on the premise that we have to get it out there to discuss it. Yeah, so there were some raw nerves, I think, on taxes. But again, I mean, this is a Republican governor that's that's putting this forward. You would not have expected it. He hadn't done a no new taxes. Read My Lips statement exactly, but it was still a twinkle somewhere. It was an unlikely thing to have happened, yeah, but it's what it took. Yeah, absolutely. In some ways, a gamble and very statesman like,

James Moore 19:11

yeah, yeah, absolutely. So talk about the 82 election you're involved in being one of the debate preparers. Did you have tough elections at all? In 8082 actually,

Norm Smith 19:27

in 78 I was pleasantly surprised to win a seat over an entrenched incumbent, and that may also have elevated my visibility being in Washington County with Vic who was just winning his seat in the in the governor's office. And so the next time I had no opponent in 80 and got. Write in and did the nominated by both parties. Yeah, 82 almost the same thing and and then I, I resigned my seat in the legislature before I finished my third term to take a position with AT&T. But no, I, I was then in a solid Republican district. I don't think it's so much so now, but King City and Summerfield, strong

James Moore 20:27

Republican as it gets in Washington County. Yeah,

Norm Smith 20:30

really, much bigger district. It stretched all the way from Rex Hill down to Tualatin up into Beaverton, Washington Square. And of course, as populations have increased, yeah, it's, it's just a Washington

James Moore 20:44

part county part now is just like a thin finger, so it's got a lot of yam hilly, you know, that kind of stuff in it,

Norm Smith 20:52

yeah, yeah. So the answer for me was, No, I did not have difficulties getting reelected. And there is a story here I would go to, but I think you want to talk about the election first, and Vic go to the story. So Kathy and I had

Unknown Speaker 21:18

been married for 11 years.

Norm Smith 21:22

She was slow about me getting into politics and because she'd never been around it. And so when it happened, it was a new and exciting life for us. And we had our first child when we were in the legislature, and Spencer was our first and only born in 81 and he was resident in the capital in a bassinet during special session. And of course, we have the obligatory pictures of him standing on the House floor desk, you know, grabbing onto the microphone to steady himself, probably the way his dad did. And it was, it was one of those things that can change a life. And I really was, I thought pretty ambitious at the time, and I saw myself, you know, running for statewide office, and I embarked on that

Unknown Speaker 22:17

when

Norm Smith 22:19

my I'll call him my first mentor, Clay. Myers indicated to me that he was going to be leaving the Treasury,

Unknown Speaker 22:28

and there was,

Norm Smith 22:31

I'm sure he and Vic conversed about that very privately. I think I first knew from clay that Vic was considering me as one of a handful of people for the appointment. I try not to embellish this, but I'm pretty sure that the Governor and I had that conversation alone in his office one day, and that if there were to be a vacancy, that I would have the appointment.

Unknown Speaker 23:09

That's probably not something that's

Unknown Speaker 23:12

very public. Yeah,

Norm Smith 23:17

I embarked on that race to get the Republican nomination. My good friend, Bill Rutherford, and let's see, I want to say David Chen. Does that name pop into your mind? It does, but I'm not sure. I think the three of us sought the Republican nomination before Clay had made any announcement,

Unknown Speaker 23:43

but it was.

Norm Smith 23:46

It must have been obvious at some point to all of us that there was going to be a potential vacancy. There it was during a special session, and I'm thinking it had to be.

Unknown Speaker 24:01

It had to be 82

James Moore 24:04

was it for the 82 election? Was it would have been the same time as the governor? Or would it be offset?

Norm Smith 24:10

No, it would have been off. It would have been 8084

Unknown Speaker 24:18

general election. Okay,

Norm Smith 24:22

but in, and I, I'm trying to remember whether there was a special in, well, 83 would have been a general session. Yeah,

James Moore 24:29

83 is a general session. 84 I had them all written down at home. I haven't loaded them on here yet. Yeah, there was the unitary tax one in the 84 that was the biggest one, or most important one. Who was short, well,

Norm Smith 24:41

I actually resigned in 83 at midnight on Halloween. Intentional choice. Vic i. So Vic had two other opportunities, and I'll come. I'll circle back around Mike Ragsdale resigned his seat in the State Senate. He called me personally as one of the two House members in that Senate seat, and explained what his circumstances were, and just assumed, and it was a logical assumption, that I'd be very interested in it. As a freshman member of the House, we're backing up a little bit. Vic called and said, these opportunities don't happen. He said, you need to do this. And he said, you're new, you're fresh. You know you may have inexperienced, but you have the attention of a good central committee that knows you, and a county commission that saw you win the last election. So Vic weighed in and said, You need to go to the Senate. We were 2832 in the house. And perhaps foolishly and perhaps too idealistically, I said, I think we can get the house, and if I give up a seat that's been held for three terms by a Democrat, I'm opening the door the wrong way in the house. Declined to do that, but Vic weighed in. Then, yeah, where I'm going with this is in the 83 session. I've told Jerry Thompson this, and my wife knows it, but I was alone very late at night, and we were dragging on and dragging on and dragging on trying to get out the door is close to sine die, the governor smoking a pipe in the private office. We had the little Squawk Box on. We were listening to the floor debate to see if there were any votes, but only turning it up when there were votes and I would disappear and come back.

Unknown Speaker 26:59

And he started reminiscing

Unknown Speaker 27:02

about his political career,

Norm Smith 27:06

and the words that stick out to me, and I hope his kids really appreciate this, because I think he was close with his family, and I could tell at the memorial that his family was close with him.

James Moore 27:18

Yeah, there were tons

Norm Smith 27:19

of them. But he said to me, out of the blue, he said, You know, I've been at this for 24 years or longer at that point. And he said something to the effect, if there's anything I regret about having spent this much time in this building. It is that I didn't spend more time with my kids when they were growing up, and it just hung there for a while. What he knew was I had a child had been born recently, and it was just hanging out there. Now this is still in the context of he's offered to help me get to the Senate. At one time, he's made it clear that if I want to move into one of the statewide seats, he'd be supportive of that we had worked closely together on his re election in 82 which I'm sure, you know, helped our bond build. I uh, but when the opportunity came to sort of lay my cards down and say, Okay, I'm really, really, really going to

run for statewide office, or I've got a brand new child after 11 years of marriage, I've got a youngster, this opens up whole new horizons. All everything that you commented on about Hardy, you know, I've got to start thinking about paying for college. I've got to get my law practice back together. And then I had this rather marvelous offer from AT&T to go forward. The Governor's words stick in my mind to this day, and I think at the last moment when I decided, am I going to withdraw from a statewide political race that I always thought I wanted to do? Yeah. What are the motivations and the words in part that were ringing in my ear were the proffered advice about being around for your children while they're growing up. Yeah. And that was very possibly the greatest gift I ever got from Vicki. It wasn't about some vote or some nudge to seek higher office, it was fatherly advice. And so I'll flash forward to where we sit today, at the Ford family foundation, which, for the record, I left in May of, at the end of May of 2013 but Vic and I had lunch occasionally downtown, and when

James Moore 29:56

you meet in the basement, well, we went

Norm Smith 29:59

to LA. Rosary the day that I'm thinking of

James Moore 30:03

a day would always have lunch with him in a basement somewhere.

Norm Smith 30:06

Well, la Brasserie had a basement. Oh, okay, yeah, wedding reception, yeah, yeah, yeah. And many ironies there, because in my teenage years, that had been the Headless Horseman, which was a teenage nightclub, and I had been a drummer in a local garage band and played many, many nights. So Vic and I were having lunch at La brasserie, no agenda. At least I didn't have one. It was just catch up time and see how he was and I was he asked about my work at the Ford family foundation. Said it must be amazing. And I said, it really is extremely gratifying. And I used to say I didn't have to charge by the hour. I didn't have to partake in an AT&T career where people got bothered every night at six o'clock during dinner by MCI sprint and AT&T and I didn't have to raise money as in politics, that the gratification of the philanthropic work was that somebody very thoughtfully had provided a legacy that was an endowment, and that the challenge now was to bring to bear the best way to distribute the endowment. He indicated he didn't know how these things worked, but he knew Ken Ford. I've never called him Ken Ford, other than I think he did. And

Unknown Speaker 31:38

he said, I

Norm Smith 31:41

know some of your board members. Would it be appropriate for me to talk to any of them? He was interested in being on the board of this foundation and perhaps others, but he was inquiring of me about this one, and I said, Vic, you'd be an outstanding member of that board. They're a little gun shy about getting too close to political figures, but you and I are ex political figures at this point. Dave cromart is on the wall, yeah, well, and he got here later, yeah. But what the kind of the point of the exchange was? I said, Vic, we have age limits. And he said, What are they? And I said, at that time, I think there was an age limit of 70. And I was thinking, Vic was about my now age of 68 and thinking, the boardroom politics on this are going to be, we wouldn't have him for a full term, and then he'd be turned out by age. And so I said, Vic, I don't, I don't know, with our age limits, whether you get a full turn out of it or not. And that might be, might be an issue that you ought to be aware of. And he said, Well, what is it? I said, 70 years old. He says, norm. I'm 78 now. What I loved about that was, you know, here's a guy that's still looking for a way to participate in the Oregon story and to, you know, be vital and engaged and, you know, doing the important work that people in the state cared about, and the foundations mostly about rural Oregon. And he's made an impact on rural Oregon, yeah. So it was, it was a bittersweet moment, because I, you know, I he other than a vote here or there. I think he had rarely ever asked me for anything. And here he was putting himself out there, saying, counsel me, yeah. And so the sweetness was, gosh, I actually have something to offer him. For once.

James Moore 33:51

That's great, because it's also that's a time when he's also beginning to cut back on boards. Everybody wanted him on

board. And so by the end of his life, he was active in an advisory capacity, like with a cool Chinese cemetery. It's called lung fir. But you know, there's things like that that were really close to his heart, yeah. And other than that, you know, Boy Scouts, he would drop in and salute Warm Springs. Warm Springs. Not well. Ted took his place on the board earlier, but yeah, Vic was out there. Yeah, every time. Yeah, absolutely every time. But yeah, that's, that's, that's really interesting. Other things as an ex governor, I mean, you talk about someone who had a love of the state and wanted to contribute in a real way. Did you see people asking him to contribute. I'm thinking and talking to people has become really clear, the things that Vic did well as governor management, crossing party lines, get things done, the pragmatism the governor since have done, I don't think any of them could. Come close in management, but the pragmatism crossing lines. But it seems that very few people kind of went to him and said, you know, for instance, in the recession we're going through now, or in the one at the beginning of the 2000s boy, how would you manage this? Did you did you see people using him as a resource, as an ex governor, or was he just this grandfather of the state? As his daughter said,

Norm Smith 35:28

the first image that jumps into my head with that question is he was still a visible, loyal Republican figure in the state, of course, he wore the mantle to the time of his death, of being the last Republican, the latest governor, yes, the very latest, yeah. And it got later and later, but I would see him at the Dorchester conference

Unknown Speaker 36:03  
and Dolores, yeah,

Norm Smith 36:06

and I saw them in later in their years at a function, very public function at seven feathers, a big banquet event, and he was an honoree in that event, but I think both of them had just recovered from illnesses and maybe hip replacements and who knows what all, but still wanting to be visible and engaged. The fact that he was there, he was always welcome at Dorchester. I mean, that that was kind of family, the broader Republican family was in the room. It was important to the family that he be there, but that might feel closer, more closely the the notion of grandfather of the state, right? But he, I think he welcomed that role, if he hadn't. You know, I've talked to all of the former governors who are still living,

Unknown Speaker 37:18  
and almost every one of them, in their own way,

Norm Smith 37:22

has said, you know, about a day after you've been the governor, the phone stops ringing, and it's a very humbling experience. You know, you were making life and death decisions only a week ago, and now, now nobody's calling. Yeah, and I think Vic, like his peers, hungered to be called

Unknown Speaker 37:45  
and

Norm Smith 37:47

but I think he made himself visibly available to be called. Now I'm trying to think of a really good example of somebody approaching him and saying, we need you now. We need you for this, my sense is having talked with Ted comes to mind as one who may have actually talked to Vic.

James Moore 38:19

That's when their relationship it wasn't that they were enemies at 82 but it's when it became what it became the last 10 years of his life. Yeah, Vic just adored Ted. Yeah, well, but it was because Ted, as governor, picked up the phone and said, yes, what would you do? Let's think about this.

Norm Smith 38:35

Yeah, and good for Ted, and I'm sure that Vic welcomed that.

Unknown Speaker 38:44

Can I jump to another anecdote? Yeah, absolutely.

Norm Smith 38:47

This was just back in the earliest of my freshman session. He's the brand new governor. The state does not have Mahoney a hall at this point. It has a little white cottage in downtown Salem that you've probably seen or visited. It's right behind the state lands division now on the Mill Creek and in groups that could be managed in a small venue. We were invited over to a reception, and Dolores met us at the door and greeted everybody. And the governor was in the household in court, and we walked in, and they had refreshed this building for the new governor, new paint. And apparently, I can't remember whether Dolores actually called out that it had all new carpet, that the place had looked awful before. And I said, Well, is it a tea of carpeting? And she said, Oh, heavens, no, the state of Oregon can't afford that. The Flash forward many years. I ended up appointed by other governors to the Oregon Arts Commission and later the Cultural Trust and the offices in. In Oregon, biz and the state lands division looked down on that cottage. Oh, and one of the great serendipitous moments for me when it was when I met Megan Atea, who manages, still, I think the 1% for the arts program

James Moore 40:19

in the same place that Barbara Roberts lives, yes, in the same condo, yes,

Norm Smith 40:23

yeah, Vic and Dolores had held court in the little house right out Megan's window, right down in the backyard. And very few other people that had that yeah, that same kinship over that. And to this, to this day, we still, I think, enjoy the fact that her grandfather was a friend and a mentor, yeah,

James Moore 40:46

and she got his big desk carved by the prisoners, which is wonderful. Yeah, that's wonderful. So let's go to 82 the recession is raging. There's special sessions that work or don't work. Then you have another special session to because you got another revenue forecast and he's going to take another 200 million out and Vic at some point his close staff, it drove them nuts. He would never really tell them when he was going to run, and he decided late. But he gets in the race. He describes the economy as something that he felt comfortable working with. But he also describes Ted Kulongowski didn't really have any competition. He was the guy as this Kennedy-esque type. So the old guy against the Kennedy-esque type, all of that being said, and the polls showed that Atiyeh was in trouble. But by the beginning of September, it was pretty clear to everybody, except the people right around Vic who still won't say it, Denny was running the campaign, Atiyeh was going to win this thing, cooling gas, just campaign hadn't come together, this kind of stuff. So what do you remember about the dynamics of that campaign? And you were part of the training for the debate group. Yeah, so Well, two

Norm Smith 42:28

formative thoughts in my head right now. The first is, I think it was necessary, as it becomes sometime in politics, to early establish the notion that the challenger is a risk and is a dangerous person, and that that theme emerged, and probably correctly so. I mean, there was a concern, I think, that

Unknown Speaker 43:00

two completely different styles of

Norm Smith 43:05

Well, first of all, two different political backgrounds. And one, a very traditional Republican business person incumbent against a

Unknown Speaker 43:19

very entrenched

Unknown Speaker 43:23

Liberal Democrat, labor lawyer

Norm Smith 43:27

that espoused principles that were just different than what Vic had been raised on. I don't remember Vic personally ever being in any way

Unknown Speaker 43:45

vicious or mean,

Norm Smith 43:49

although when, when he felt something or somebody was just plain wrong, he would say so. And I, I think he was calmer in appearance than he must have been, because all of us would have felt that this is going to be an uphill climb. I mean, we're managing in very difficult times, and this is a time that voters like to make changes. Yeah, at least that was the conventional wisdom, I tell

James Moore 44:17

you, from the political science point of view, there's no way he should have won one, yeah,

Norm Smith 44:21

yeah. But so, yeah, so I can't even remember what the alternative would have been if he had said, you know, I've taken my blows in this and I'm going to step out. Yeah, I don't think that was an alternative for him. Yeah. You know, in hindsight, what was he going to do, yeah, and he did carry the banner for his party, which was in a minority position in the legislature. And so, you know, I think if he even analyzed it, that maybe he was going to have to fall on his sword during a campaign and not just leave the field of battle, right? Yeah. I've heard a lot. Of Denny's take on this over the years, and so I remember the debate as being a very interesting focal point in having been engaged early on as sort of a glorified intern, although a paid staffer in the Packwood campaign against Wayne Morse and the pivotal nature of the debate that at a very critical moment of peaking, gave final thrust to the Packwood campaign, albeit, you know, a few 1000 votes that were about two per two cent, Two votes per precinct across the state margin. I think at that point, we were still all convinced that the power of television and media was a key factor in that a debate had to be clearly a deciding point for many people. And so a lot of time was spent in that, I would say Denny was the chief coach. The rest of us were basically listening and commenting and offering maybe slight nuances, but tactically it was you have three messages, you've got to bridge back to those three messages over and over and over. I mean, nothing that isn't now

Unknown Speaker 46:28

pretty hackneyed and

Norm Smith 46:31

television and movies and everything else, but indeed that that was it. It was Vic. Had to stay on message and not get ruffled by as you described, Ted this younger Kennedy esque. He's got the solid jaw and the good look, and I'm thinking that the governor really kind of relished that. But I also can picture a moment when when he would push back and say, No, I'm going to do this. And Denny and others incorporated what he really wanted to do into the three messages, bridging back to the three messages. But it wasn't just okay. We're going to spoon feed you. You're going to memorize what other people are telling you. He was the governor. Yeah, you know he had that advantage. He proudly wore the gold pin and the lapel and the cufflinks. And so I was probably in maybe two or three of those sessions getting ready for those states, and I remember meeting in the hotel room, I believe after one of them and all of us having this kind of moment of catharsis, but it was more about we didn't lose points. Held our own against the young challenger who's out there to make a name for himself, and

Unknown Speaker 48:06

but it wasn't jubilant, and it wasn't

Norm Smith 48:10

it was just we wanted to reinforce him. He probably used up a lot of adrenaline, and ours was probably all gone, that we felt it was our role to

Unknown Speaker 48:20

congratulate him on

Norm Smith 48:23

going through that and doing it well. I don't remember it being a stunning blow. Yeah,

Unknown Speaker 48:34

we just didn't want to back step anywhere. Yeah,

James Moore 48:36

exactly one thing that Ted remembers because Denny, one. One of the main focuses Denny had was the plant closure bill. And when I was interviewing Ted, he just started out and said, okay, it was a big mistake to name that thing, the plant. Yeah, yeah. But apparently it's some of the public appearances Vic would do, kind of a Joe McCarthy thing, plant closure bill. And he pat his pocket. I have a list of the clothes. You don't have a list. There's no list. And he wouldn't say anything. You just, you know, do this, yeah?

Unknown Speaker 49:15

Dick had a nice sense of humor,

Norm Smith 49:18

you know, I related the one about I was hoping we'd have chicken early in our discussion today, yeah,

Unknown Speaker 49:25

but he just, he had what

Norm Smith 49:29

I wouldn't call he wasn't flashing. Nobody would say he was flashy. He He just had a nice sense of timing, yeah, gentle, then strong, then a little humor, and then back to being

Unknown Speaker 49:43

forceful in a quiet way.

James Moore 49:46

Yeah, as I'm going through my interviews with him and I summarize them, I don't transcribe them, because transcribing doesn't grammar doesn't work, but there's so many. Has so many throwaway asides, and so I have to put in brackets chuckles. Otherwise, no, he didn't mean this that way. He's laughing when he says this, but yeah, Barbara Roberts remembers him because she was newly married to Frank and Vic. Well, she said it at the memorial service, Vic kind of came across the floor and said, Oh, you're the new bride. But Vic, on the floor of the Senate, would never sit in his seat. He'd stand at the back of the room. And she always knew where he was, because he'd be back there, and he would have told somebody a joke that didn't quite work, but he had a great time, so there'd just be this laughter going on back there.

Unknown Speaker 50:43

A lot of people

Norm Smith 50:46

who've not served down there would never probably understand well, how come these people aren't in their seats, and why aren't they listening intently, and why are these side conversations going on? And there's a buzz across the floor while somebody's addressing the chair, and but I would say that when you got back under the gallery, under the back wall, and could quietly engage with somebody, it was a tremendous opportunity to kind of let go of what all this is about out here for the moment and build a relationship. Vic probably was the one who made it clear to me that of the 2000 some votes you'll cast in a session, there'll be four or five that will be very, very contentious, and you'll be either on the winning or the losing side. The rest of the time, it's good work from committees that came to the floor and probably will pass, yeah, and, you know, there'll be throw away lines on the floor, but it's, it's not the great moment of the session,

James Moore 51:55

yeah, absolutely, yeah. So learning about Lee Johnson and Jim Redman used to write each other's lines as they were

going to pummel each other. So, you know these kinds of things, yeah. So, so, anything else stick out about Victor Georgia?

Norm Smith 52:17

Yeah, I would say that I came to admire him that being the Minority Leader in the Senate was

James Moore 52:30

minority. I mean, he had six in his caucus. Yeah, Bob Smith would never show up. I'm interviewing him tomorrow morning. Yeah,

Norm Smith 52:36

I'll be interested how Bob is I we used to be a regular touch, and I haven't talked to him in probably a year now, but yeah, please say hello to brother Smith for myself, I recall being found by a page and then directed to a uniformed officer off the side aisle and being asked to get down to the garage and move my car, which I had left, running in the middle of the aisle, blocking access to and I thought, This doesn't sound right. I'm in my parking space, number seven down there. What's this car look like? And I think it was a Cadillac. I said, I think that's the other Smith. I hmm,

James Moore 53:23

exactly, yeah, north, the Roberts family ever had those problems? I'm

Norm Smith 53:27

sure. I'm sure. Well, you've got an interesting challenge. I I'm anxious to see the website and when, when do you give yourself a deadline on some

James Moore 53:37

of this? I'm hoping that the book is next year, I think there'll be some really interesting things that come off this as we're looking at the presidential election, just in terms of, do people want to get things done, or they want to just yell at each other? The other part, and this depends on Jerry, but I'm getting more and more out of her. The real story of the racists never been told, and Jerry's the crucial person, although

Norm Smith 54:08

Dave from Meyer was fairly Yeah, open about it from the point of view of the state's chief legal officer,

James Moore 54:14

yeah, and he died the third I was gonna call him Thursday of that week and about it. I guess it's now more than a year ago. Last January, Vic gave me there was an abortive attempt to do a biography of him about 10 years ago. And so he sent me a list of the people that were supposed to have been interviewed, most of whom have never heard of this woman, but, but he wrote down D for dead and F for frail on the list. So Mark Hatfield D going down. And so my, when I my sabbatical started the end of January this year, it was hit the F's, yeah. And Dave wasn't on the list so

Norm Smith 54:53

well for for several reasons now, more obvious, yeah, yeah. And

James Moore 54:58

so we, I. But there's all sorts of people from the AGs office who were in the meetings, Bill Jerry, yeah, but Jerry was the key. And it's not just the state. There's stuff at the federal government. So in this time of this, you know, war on terror, we found out that the different parts of government not only won't talk to each other, they can't. She made it happen from the FBI down to the sheriff. And so there's a story there that I think really needs to be told. And so we'll see how much she's willing to

Norm Smith 55:34

I've enjoyed been on the Oregon State Capitol foundation since its inception, and served with Jerry and Denny on that board, and Jerry still, and one of the pleasures of being on that foundation is the relationships from Jane cease, Jerry, Frankie Bell, you know all of the inhabitants, and all of them probably admirers of Vic and Dolores. And I'm sure you're

going to get get the other side of the story, but you'll get that full story, just from an observer's point of view, from that moment when we had that intimate conversation about family, it just he was so incredibly focused on Dolores and that relationship, and when things were going well, there things were

James Moore 56:37

all fine with, yeah, yeah. That's when, when, when he died, and people were asking me, that's I got to tell you, you know, he loved that woman, yeah, when people had talks with him because she, you know, she's with dementia and things like that, and he would always explain to him, no, it's till death. Do you part? Yeah,

Norm Smith 56:56

that's just the way it is. And that that's almost a good theme for the way he lived his life. I mean, he was had a cultural background that had codes of honor, and they weren't just words or thoughts or metaphors, they they were a

Unknown Speaker 57:22

course setting

Norm Smith 57:25

way for him to live his life. Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, I'm sure there's a temptation to give him sainthood too soon, you know, but he Well,

James Moore 57:35

he wanted warts and all. So yeah, and people like, for instance, Hardy was wonderfully honest. I loved him, I hated him, and so that kind of stuff is going to come through pretty strong as we go into this. He's a human being, yeah.

Norm Smith 57:56

And I like your original approach when we started talking that there was an era here and now. There are other eras in his life that I'm sure you're covering, but that period of time that he was governor and responsible for some of the most difficult times for Oregonians, yeah, I mean, when you get right down to it, it wasn't about how clever you can be and can you find the last vote to do a tax surcharge? I mean, that's tough enough in an environment that is volatile, but at the end of the day, it's really about what's happening to my state. Yeah, and I, we've honored a lot of governors with state parks and other things that keep their memory alive. Vicodia was worried about his state, yeah, and the people in the state. I mean, the state had boundaries, but the natural characteristics of the state, coupled with the people that lived there, mattered to him. Yeah, it really did. It was a passion. Yeah,

James Moore 58:59

just as you're You're saying that because, you know, things come to me. So I learned I don't have to write much down, because I'm recording things. People give me phone numbers. Let me write that. Oh, wait, you just say it and it's there. But it just occurred to me, the Portlandia image is Neil Goldsmith's legacy. The Intel image is the catias legacy. Now that's still huge problems, which, you know, well, sitting here, you know, in this foundation, so much of the state, that's not part of that,

Norm Smith 59:30

yeah, but we're sitting in it right now, you're right,

James Moore 59:35

but there's, there's something to be said about that. I think that that's worth really, really seeing if it works,

Norm Smith 59:44

making, making the argument. I assume Paul Phillips is in the list here someplace.

James Moore 59:47

Oh, yeah, absolutely. There's several people. Paul Phillips, Lynn bergstein, ran the two Straub campaigns. So you there's those people, but I've kind of floated it out there saying, you know, after the sessions over. I'd love to talk to you, yeah, yeah,

Norm Smith 1:00:01

that kind of thing. I raised Paul only because, well, for several reasons, not least, which is the connection to the university. Yeah, absolutely. And I'm supposing that maybe he had some influence in, I don't know that he did in Vic's connection there,

James Moore 1:00:19

yeah, we don't know that he did. Okay. The main thing which I came to discover Vic because he was elected in 58 so 59 on, they were the multiple member districts up until this his for him, the 72 election. Yeah, 7074 election. And so he loved those district. There's a for him. There were the governing was a very different beast. When they switched, he also got meaner letters because he belonged to his district.

Norm Smith 1:00:55

And I often look at single member districts when I used to talk on this kind of thing as as a profound change in Oregon, yeah, and, and there was that notion why, you know, Atiyeh and Hartung and others like that, could, you know, have a county wide reach, and then you know, one person, one vote, says we've got To be, right, you know, more deliberative about getting people into districts. But he did come through that other era.

James Moore 1:01:25

Yeah, he did come through that. And he so he was specific universities, representative and senator, and so that, okay, that, yeah, and then

Norm Smith 1:01:34

maybe Paul's connection was just, you know, being his ombudsman at one time. And then Paul got the Central Committee appointment when I resigned my seat, so he was my immediate successor, okay, and that's why I Yeah, raise his name, and then two connections, yeah, yeah, yeah, Paul.

James Moore 1:01:55

He was this intern, and Vic didn't want any stinking interns. Paul also describes going into his office and he can barely see the man through the cigarette smoke. Yeah, but you know, then poof came on. I interviewed Edith, who was Vic's driver in 78 for the primary, and was very thankful to hand it off to a young Paul Phillips, who would be the driver, and he'll go on to greater

Unknown Speaker 1:02:20

and that's what I used to do

Norm Smith 1:02:23

for play. I was at the law school across the street. He'd call and say, Do you have time tomorrow after classes? Can you drive me to Albany? I'm going to be in the parade? Yeah, yeah. And it was a great way to just see a statewide office holder in action, because the briefing book would be there, and I'd go through and say, Okay, it looks like you're going to see the following people, probably in some crowd somewhere today. Oh, yes. And the encyclopedic mind would click in. And I it's a fabulous way to learn. At the hand of a senior politician, yeah, is to spend a few days in the car with him? Yeah, absolutely

James Moore 1:03:02

so if you drove, drove with clay. Did you ever do things not like that? Did you ever like go when he was going to talk to donors or anything like that? I

Norm Smith 1:03:12

actually chaired his Travis cross in a meeting when Clay was to be re elected. Said, I think we need somebody younger for Chairman here, and I vote for norm Smith. And so I was the Honorary Chair of winnings campus. So yeah, I spent time on the political side as well as the political science side, right? Yeah. The

James Moore 1:03:36

reason I ask is because Edith observed it, and then I've been putting together with wonderful talks with other people. When Vic was running for statewide office, it was still everybody had to go for timber money somehow. And Ted Kulongowski brings up an 82 he was competing for the same money. Vic was the public employee unions didn't come on until after, and now they're the money bags for all that Democrats, but especially in 78 Vic at one point, went to some timber company and he came out and Ed his nephew was saying he was really angry because he there was supposed to be a check and it wasn't there. That's because they were holding back for when McCall won the primary, all the money would go to whoever the Democrat was. McCall doesn't win Atiyeh wins, and all of a sudden that money flows there, and Bob Straub is the one who gets angry because, you know, he's a, he's a timberland owner, yeah, and all the timber money was going to Vic and not to him, but this the concept they had to compete for the same pot of money.

Unknown Speaker 1:04:46

Yeah? So small state,

James Moore 1:04:49

yeah, small state, absolutely.

Norm Smith 1:04:51

And those weren't the days when you had big independent packs from outside the state. No. And it influenced the outcome, maybe trivial amounts. But yeah. Yeah, it was really about who you knew and who was ultimately loyal to their word here, yeah,

James Moore 1:05:07

yeah, fun stuff. Fun stuff.

Norm Smith 1:05:10

Well, thank you very much. Thank you for including me. Yeah, this is great. I'm delighted, and I'll be anxious, as I said, to read and I...

[Recording ends.]