

Tape 28, Side 2

CH This is an interview with Governor Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland, Oregon. The interviewer, for the Oregon Historical Society, is Clark Hansen. This is Tape 28, Side 2.

The last time we got together you were talking about the welfare, reform of the welfare system, and the two-parent system that people were pushing.

VA Right. First, it's important to remember that I have a - my own personal philosophy, which is the same as Leo Hegstrom, who was the head of the department, that people don't really want to be on welfare. There are some that have really gotten accustomed to it, but what we hear are those few. Those are the ones we hear about - versus the huge number that really don't want to be on welfare. At the same time - so that's our general approach, and so our job is to assist them to get off. At the same time, though, there's a few that may need some nudging. Now we come to the two-parent family. There was a two-parent family, and they were able to receive welfare, and so we had concluded in our mind that it was good public policy, and good, incidentally, for those on welfare, that we eliminate welfare - and I have to remember exactly, but I think, let's say, from May to October. In other words, a portion of the year which we considered to be the higher-employment opportunity period, and that we would not pay welfare to a two-parent family. Now, the theory behind that is that with a two-parent family, one person can always go out looking for a job, and there's always one person at home. Understand, we're talking about parents with children. That versus a single-parent family. Now, that is really difficult. I mean, that's a tough deal because if a person wants to get more education or go look for a job or even get a job, what do you do with the child. So we made that distinction. So we proposed to

the legislature that they eliminate welfare payments from that period of time, and let me say May to October, first of October. Even today I can't really tell you why. I don't know. The legislature eliminated it altogether for the whole year. Totally.

CH Why?

VA Don't ask me why. I don't know.

CH There must have been some...

VA I don't know. I really don't.

CH Because they were in favor of it.

VA Oh yeah, they were in favor of the idea. So obviously that's the law. I thought, okay, we proposed a period of time. It's the law; we'll try it. We'll try it for a couple of years and see how it goes. And, incidentally, it worked. It worked very well. As a matter of fact, the funny thing came up in my campaign against Kulongoski. I remember this so well. We were in Medford, and it's one of those things where the candidate says something to the other candidate, and they quiz each other back and forth. That was the format. And Ted Kulongoski said, Governor, you did this terrible thing. You took the two-parent family off the welfare rolls. And my answer, of course, was very - Senator, you don't remember. I didn't do that, you did it. We proposed from May to October. It was you that took it out altogether. Well, of course, that was the last time that one came up.

The - I want to make sure it's very clear, because as I was leaving office is when they wanted to change it, and I tried so

desperately to try to explain to them to understand the significant difference between one- and two-parent families and why I thought it was incumbent upon the state to do that, to urge people to get out and look for a job, because they could do that - there was somebody always taking care of the child - and that they make a distinction between a one- and two-parent family. You get these horrible cases where somebody - in order to get welfare, the one spouse would leave. I can recall they - Roger the Lodger. They'd come in every once in a while and spend a night with their wife. What a terrible thing that we are separating families in order for them to get help from the state. That was the appeal on the other side. Well, I'm sure there was some of that, but, again, it's minimal. It was one of those things that so often happens, and you've heard it, hard cases make bad law. And so they bring up the hard cases and - it's going on all the time. It's going on in Washington, D.C., it's going on down in the legislature. It continues to happen. And, of course, the public gets all upset about, oh, what a terrible thing this government's doing, but it's a hard case.

We also concluded, incidentally, along the line of welfare, that when someone applied for welfare, they would not instantly go on the rolls. If they were to qualify, they wouldn't instantly go on the rolls. We would give them emergency help, but for one month we would work very hard with them to help them try to get a job, and we were very successful with that. Very successful. And it all comes down, really, to the thing that I felt so keenly, and I've told my Democratic friends, that they are hurting the people they're trying to help, because when you encourage them to live off of tax dollars, that's not good. That's not good for your pride, it's not good for your self-esteem, and those are two very important things to a human. And if you take that away, you've done the worst thing you can do to a human, and what you ought to do is to either nurture it, build

it up, or restore it. That's what government ought to do. And I've said that. What you're really doing is hurting the people you think you're helping the most.

CH There are a lot of suggestions now that the people that do get onto welfare are - should be doing something productive, if at all possible, while they're on that. Is that something that...?

VA That's not too bad an idea. I certainly don't reject it out of hand. But it still carries the connotation that these folks are living off of me, and at least they ought to give something back, and it - most of them are not. They'd just as soon not be where they are. It's not one that I would champion; not one I would reject, however, as a possibility.

To follow up, now, the legislature decided they were going to restore the two-parent family welfare. No, excuse me. I'm ahead of myself. We proposed May to October; the legislature proposed all year long. Once they did that, we said, My gosh, we'd better gear up so that we're ready - start October, we'd better really work, because they eliminated these people altogether, and we had a special program designed just for those people. Nobody came forth to apply for it. Nobody. Today it's - I said, Leo, what's happened? We were all geared up, ready to go, all set. Everything was ready. So that makes you kind of think, well, maybe...

CH It was advertised?

VA Maybe these two-parent families, you know, we had to force them to do what they were supposed to do.

CH It was advertised, the program was advertised?

VA Oh, no question about it. It was clear, very clear. So here we are, standing, ready to go, and nobody knocked at our door. Those were among the things. But the philosophy behind it all the time was not to rob people of their pride and self-esteem, that they were not people that really wanted to be on the [welfare] rolls, and that we should do everything we can to help them get off of it. So everything we did in terms of welfare reform was based upon that, not based upon - you know, a politician could do very well: Boy, these people are sucking your blood, people on welfare, and, you know, lifetime. It sounds good, it sounds real good politically, and a lot of people would nod their head, the voter, that is. But that's not true and that's not the way we approached it. When you approach it sanely and logically and with some compassion, you get the job done, and done very well.

CH Well, this comes up again, so - there's some other issues sort of surrounding it.

VA Okay, that's fine.

CH Also in the 1979 legislature there was legislation approving a \$16.1 million appropriation for the light rail, Banfield light rail system, and you had been against this and a supporter of the Mt. Hood Freeway, isn't that right?

VA The first thing I did as a governor was to try to restore the Mt. Hood Freeway. I soon discovered that that was not going to be possible.

CH Why?

VA Goldschmidt didn't want it. He persuaded Bob Straub that

Bob Straub didn't want it, and the state signed off. In that process, the only way you can get it restored is by a single bill in Congress. Now, I'm thinking to myself, we're going to have one bill for a Mt. Hood Freeway in Portland, Oregon, before Congress. What's the odds of something like that? So I determined, well, okay, there's nothing I can do about that. Then, of course, the light rail comes along, Neil Goldschmidt's pet, and he - while I'm building my budget, he sent the message that what he wanted was us to appropriate the \$16 million and move it over to their kitty, and he wanted the whole \$16 million, not four million a quarter or eight million each year or something like that, or every half year. So my answer was that Portland still had the Mt. Hood Freeway money that they could use, but not for the Mt. Hood Freeway. I said, I want that money, and I want to use it for not only metropolitan improvements, but I want to use it for downstate projects as well. The message comes back, well, he'll give me part of it. I says, No, I want all of it. And so that agreement came along and I got all of it, and he got - then I put the 16 million in my budget. A good chunk of it went for something I thought was very important. If you're not going to have the Mt. Hood Freeway, at least what you ought to do is improve the very dangerous I-84, so you recall, if you were around here at the time, there was massive work done on I-84. That was some of the Mt. Hood Freeway money. And, then, we also used a lot of it in some downstate projects that needed to be done that were available previously. That shows you the kind of negotiation that goes on, that I was willing - I was not unwilling to appropriate the money, but, at the same time, I wanted to make sure that the money that was still laying around for the Mt. Hood Freeway was going to be used, and used particularly downstate that I knew was important. My target, because I live up here and know about it, was very dangerous, unsafe I-84, and we went through that.

CH Why were you a supporter of the Mt. Hood Freeway, and when you were supporting it, was there also a debate about whether it should be light rail instead?

VA There are those who believe that everybody's going to use mass transit, light rail or buses, and I'm one who - I'm very practical and pragmatic, and I say that's not going to happen. I don't care what you do, that's not going to happen. One of the reasons, I'm sure, although it never was spoken, about eliminating the Mt. Hood Freeway was that we don't really want to make traffic for automobiles any better, we want to make it worse so people will get out of their cars and into a bus. Well, I know that's not the way it works, and that the Mt. Hood Freeway was important. It was important in terms of moving the traffic that I knew was going to happen. In other words, I wasn't blind. It's the fact that we - yeah, we need mass transit, I don't disagree with that, and we need to put people on buses, and I don't disagree with that either. At the same time, I'm not saying, Okay, we've done our job, we don't have to worry about transportation in the community, because that's not true. People are married to their cars, and I don't care what you say about it. The fact that you get in your car at one point and get off at your destination instead of walking or whatever you do to get to a bus stop, waiting around for a while in the rain, and then walk three or four blocks, you know, they won't do that. There are some that will, and MAX has proved to be very successful, but that is not to say that everybody's using it, in spite of its success. You travel 84, and you know as well as I do there's a lot of people who use 84. So it was just a matter of being practical, and I said, We need the Mt. Hood Freeway. We need it to move traffic. I'm sure those that opposed it were trying to make the movement of a motor vehicle very difficult. The people would say, Oh, the hell with it. I'll just take a bus. But

people don't react that way. They'll do it for a whole lot of reasons, but that's not one of them. You travel any of these at rush hour, and you can tell inconvenience is not going to stop them. Raising the price of gasoline isn't going stop them. They talk about those as if that's going to do something, but it doesn't do anything. They're still going to do it. But anyway, that's the long of it, not the long and the short of it.

CH You mentioned something last time about veteran bonds, and I'm not sure if that was in reference to the referral to the voters over a proposed increase in maximum home loans to vets. Is that what that was about?

VA Well, that's part of it, but basically there was a veterans home loan program, and it became particularly useful during the time when interest rates were going - when they did go up to 21 percent or 22 percent. The veterans bonds are very low interest in terms of money being loaned to veterans. There's a limit as to what you could charge a veteran, so it was very attractive. That, then, compounded with a downturn in the economy, and so you could keep something going economically, building, repairing, you know, with veteran home loan money. So there was huge expansion. The department would go back, and we'd sell bonds in the market. These would be veterans bonds, and they were very desirable bonds. They'd been paid off and no problems at all. And so we would have the money, then, to loan to the veteran. So what you're saying is just a piece of what I'm talking about.

CH There was also a moratorium on construction of nuclear power plants in Oregon until November 15, 1980, and the Journal said that, For a while there was speculation that he - referring to you - would veto the bill, but Atiyeh said he'd sign the bill, partly because an investigation of the Three Mile Island accident



probably will stall nuclear construction in the country for longer than a year and a half. How was your feeling about the bill aside from the issue of Three Mile Island?

VA Well, that was my practical viewpoint. I voted against a moratorium in nuclear power plants when we had the bills before the legislature, but I finally get to a point where I'm saying, you know, we're just - this doesn't do anything. We're not going to build nuclear power plants from now on. To me, the picture was clear. So, okay, it makes somebody feel good; okay, you feel good. But you don't have to pass the bill. We're not going to have any more nuclear power plants. And, of course, you can see what's happened. I don't recall of any nuclear power plant anywhere in the U.S. that's of recent construction.

CH Do you think that they're out for good in the future?

VA Yeah, I think so.

CH What do you think will replace them as our energy needs increase? Where do you think we'll turn for energy?

VA Well, conservation is probably the biggest place that you can produce power.

CH But aside from conservation. There'll be a limit as to how much...

VA Well, what that does is allow usage of more power. If you conserve, you've got this much power, and if you conserve, you've got X number to sell to somebody else. We passed a bill dealing with fish which really effectively stopped hydro projects. Coal fire, it's okay, but coal-fire plants, you have these unit

trains, and they're large, and - we've got the place out here at eastern Oregon, but it's not going to be the deal for it. Gas is, of course, very productive. It's there. It's a lot better than - of course, a lot of places are burning oil, as you know, to create energy, but at least up here there's plenty of gas around to use that for power.

I kind of lament - nuclear power plants are a good source of energy. The federal government is to be blamed, really, for us not really having them, because the heavy load is, where do you store the used rods, and the federal government preempted that from states, now I guess more than thirty years ago, and, yet, still haven't solved the problem. And so it's a problem, it's a genuine problem. All the nuclear power plants are like our own PGE, on-site storage, and that's where they are, and they're just sitting there. They're really - if they'd ever solve that - had solved it earlier, found a place they could safely store it and then the plants would operate, I think there's enough common sense around to know that the plants, per se, are not really that dangerous. Sure, they talk about Chernobyl, but I'm not sure that these folks are that well equipped to manage those kinds of things. Three Mile was just a stupid mistake, so things can happen. Part of the problem, I think, is there's so much redundancy, you don't know which valve to turn, you know, because, actually, all plants have redundancy. I'll tell you - I don't know if you've got it there, but we ran drills, we ran drills, and the NRC, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, watched us. They wanted to approve our state plan for a drill in case something happened at a nuclear power plant, and we've run drills on Trojan. I think I may have mentioned that earlier, where the drill would run, and one of the things that they were saying, that there was this drift in the air of X percentage of gases in the air, nuclear radio-active gases in the air, and there was a dispute between PGE and somebody else. Well, in a drill - you

know, if it were for real, you'd go find out. How do you find out in a drill? It isn't out there, you can't go measure it.

And - oh, what I was leading to, the second drill we had, and that's the redundancy, there's actually two power sources coming from the outside to Trojan; then, in Trojan there are three separate generating plants, so now we have five sources of power. The drill they were running us, the outside sources weren't working, and then they kept - something went wrong with the generators. I said, My god, they're going to get us to a burnout. You know, they're taking away all our generators. But that does tell you there's five sources of power. That's part of redundancy in a nuclear power plant. I've been in it. I'll tell you, it's a plumbers dream. There are more pipes - you cannot imagine the number of pipes in these nuclear power plants, but a lot of it's redundant. We've had perfectly safe nuclear submarines. They're very primary; that's it. Push that button, it's on; push that button, it's off. I mean, it's very simple. So part of the problem, I think, is overdoing - you can't ever be too safe, but you're overdoing safety to the point where it becomes unsafe.

CH There was another bill that repealed a law that made it difficult for passengers to successfully sue, as a result of accidents, their own driver. Some of these bills you may have not had anything to do with or...

VA I don't really remember that.

CH But I think there were other bills like that. I remember there was one, I think, when you were in the legislature about tavern owners and...

VA Yeah, being responsible.

CH Being responsible.

Going back to Trojan, there was a plan, evacuation plan, for ten miles around Trojan. Is this what you were referring to?

VA Right. Incidentally, the interesting part there is that that is interstate, because, obviously, the nuclear plant is directly across from Washington, so we had to work in conjunction. Whenever we drew a plan, and even when we ran our drills, the state of Washington was involved with us.

Oh, one more thing. We activated the emergency response room, which was room fifty. I don't know what they call it now, but it's a central room down in the basement of the capitol building. The governor had it, Straub had it, I presume the others did. But anyway, there's phones, there's a cabinet there with phones, and you could actually activate it. Come in, plug it in, and away you go. Well, it's a good thing we ran the drill. A lot of these phones had Governor Straub's name on it; second of all was the military department, and they called out from their phone, the number that they had, and they got the capitol guide service. So it's a good thing we activated that thing, because if indeed it was a real emergency, we were going to be in real trouble.

CH There was another bill for - to allow permission for doctors to prescribe marijuana for patients with glaucoma or cancer. And, then, I believe you vetoed this. I've got a quote here from the paper saying, Governor Atiyeh voted one bill, which he said would have liberalized the state's marijuana bills. I'm not sure if this is the one that they're referring to or not.

VA I'd have to go back and look. I don't think that would have been a bill I would veto. I can't remember that.

CH Later on we'll talk at some length about your vetoing and - sort of in retrospect so that we can review a number of things that you vetoed, but, in general, what was your plan for - did you have a plan on vetoing, or did you have a philosophy about it?

VA No. It wasn't any different than it was as a legislator. I either thought it was good government or I thought it was bad government. I'm not sure I said on the tape, but when I got to being vetoing a lot of bills, the media would ask, What right do you have to put your judgment before the legislature? And my answer was, The constitution says the governor can veto. It doesn't say you can veto under this circumstance or that circumstance or any - it just says you can veto, so I'm going to veto. I vetoed bills that passed the legislature ninety to nothing.

CH And it was sustained, wasn't it?

VA It was sustained, yes. When you ask me about it - I'll kind of withhold some of that because you say we're coming to it. I didn't have any particular - I either liked it or didn't like it.

CH When you vetoed your first bill, how did you feel? Was it a sense of...?

VA Awesome power? Not really, I just sort of took it as a matter of course. I don't like it, and I'm going to vote no. And I voted no a number of times, so voting no as a governor wasn't any different.

CH I guess having - you were well prepared, having been in the minority in the legislature for so long.

VA Yes. I don't even recall which was the first bill I vetoed, and recall only a few vetoes that were important. I think I mentioned one to you about - when we talked about free enterprise and all the rest. But I either liked them or I didn't.

CH The legislature doesn't have much in the way of options for the bills that you vetoed, really. I mean, after they've adjourned - you veto a lot of things after they adjourn, right, because...?

VA If I were to veto a bill after, then obviously it's suspended. Now, it is not off the books, it's just suspended, and the first time the legislature gets together, they have to deal with vetoes.

CH It doesn't become law until after they get together again?

VA It doesn't become law, it's just suspended out there. Now, if I have a veto while they're in session and they don't override, then it's killed. After the session, it's suspended, it's not in operation, and then they have a chance to say they want to override or not. They would come in from time to time to confirm the governor's appointments, and whenever they would do that, the law says that the first time they do that they have to deal with vetoes, so they get a chance at it.

CH I know that the governor has a line-item veto in budgets and appropriations bills, and we'll talk about that a little later. Is there a pocket veto for the governor?

VA No. I'm not quite sure. There is a pocket veto back there, back there meaning Washington, D.C. I'm not quite sure how that operates.

CH So what happens if a governor - the legislature passes a bill and the governor just doesn't sign it? Does it automatically become law?

VA Yeah. And as a matter of fact, there are some bills that I've sent back without signature, but I make the statement that I acknowledge not signing this.

[End of Tape 28, Side 2]