

Tape 15, Side 2

CH This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland, Oregon. The interviewer, for the Oregon Historical Society, is Clark Hansen. The date is January 22, 1993, and this is Tape 15, Side 2.

In our last session we were talking about your legislation in the '73 session, and I thought maybe we could talk a little bit about the other major legislation during that session. Governor McCall had budget recommendations for that session of a 30 percent increase and 12 percent more in state pay increase, more state police, and adding 551 positions to Human Resources, environmental quality, forestry, commerce, the PUG commission, and wanted workmen's compensation in higher education to be reduced. How did you fall on that issues, and what was the response, do you recall, of the Republican minority in the senate?

VA Well, as you recall, we talked about the fact that I wasn't on Ways and Means. My own personal reaction is that - and I keep bouncing over to the time I was governor, but it relates. In other words, you carry over a characteristic, and it's sort of a continuous line rather than you're doing one thing at one time and then you change your tune and do something else later on. As typical of the past, there's an estimate as to the income for the two-year period of time, and, then, a governor puts a budget together, usually spending up to the perceived limit. At the same time, Oregon was economically doing extremely well. As a matter of fact, Tom had no problems, nor did Bob Straub like I faced in the eight years I had. So he was expecting a lot of money, and he was going to spend it all. As we get into my governor years, you'll see just exactly the opposite, and - although I would tell you, in terms of state police, I support

that considerably and lamented that the legislature saw fit to cut it back during my term as governor. But a typical, I would say - I don't know how it ended up, and I can't remember it, but I don't think that Tom got all he wanted in the spending.

CH How would you characterize the relationship between the Republicans in the senate, or in the legislature in general, and the administration?

VA I would say it was really quite good. I do recall, and this would be early in his administration, as we go back now several years, his very first session was really, really bad - I'm talking in his eyes - and I know that he was thinking that, Wow, I don't know if I want to do this anymore. But it increased - his relationship increased to a better relationship his second session, and, of course, we know he ran for reelection and was successful. And that continued also, generally a good relationship.

CH Some of his other recommendations were to drop property taxes by 75 percent for the school finance program, and it was a top priority for McCall.

VA That was his sales tax. I opposed that rather strongly on the basis of what is even happening today as a result of Ballot 5. When the state puts in that much money - in this case 75 percent - the state is really going to tell schools what to do; and we get back to, remember, government closest, big is not better, and local control, and that's the bag it all wraps up in. And I opposed it on that basis. Tom never forgave me. He was quite angry. He was quite angry about losing, and he was very angry about - he considered me as one of his numero enemy - number one enemy and, as a matter of fact, said so. Well, that

isn't quite right. When we went back to Washington, D.C., on a national land-use bill, which was after this period of time, and he was, of course - Senator Jackson of Washington was the sponsor of this national land-use bill, and Oregon, of course, passed ours, and we were known for it, and we went back there. He was the star. I was asked by the National Legislative Association to come back to represent the legislative body on Senate Bill 100, and the first night we had dinner together and he got quite abusive, and he kept - he said to me "Austry [?], ~~he~~ said, "why are you going back with your worst enemy?" He's telling me this. And it got a little embarrassing. There we were, sitting in this fancy hotel, and he was fairly loud about chewing me out. But anyway...

CH And the reason for his chewing you out at the time was?

VA Well, he was stung by his loss on this school finance plan. He didn't take his losses very well. I never felt - as a matter of fact, you heard me say throughout our conversations, I had a great admiration for him. I don't have the same kind of emotional feelings that he did for or against people, for or against issues, whatever it might be. Certainly, you know, I'm surprised when he told me what he did. I wasn't angry about it and just figured that's Tom and let it go at that.

CH So you would characterize Governor McCall's political approach, then, as one of very personal identity with issues and legislation?

VA He was one of those that - and many legislators are the same way. If you oppose their bill, you're opposing them, not the bill. They take it personally, and he was one of those.

CH Would you characterize him as having a short fuse?

VA I was only exposed to that once. We'll get into that when we get to 1978. I don't recall him that way. I wouldn't say that because I don't know. Maybe, but I don't know that.

CH The senate and house disagreed over how to provide property tax relief, and there was a conference committee called to try to resolve that difference. What were the differences between the house and the senate?

VA I don't recall. Let's get to the sales tax for a moment. Although I opposed the sales tax, and had, and did after it passed for a vote of the people, I thought it was appropriate that we let the people vote on it. As a matter of fact, my own motivation was somewhat evil in the sense that a sales tax kept hovering around all the time as we were trying to reform income tax and do it better, and a lot of people were reluctant to make it any better because they wanted to have a sales tax. I got kind of tired of the whole thing, and so my motivation was, let's get it out there, the people will defeat it, and we'll put that to sleep for a while.

There was great, strong, and rather vociferous debate in the Republican caucus about this and about the measure itself. It failed on its first go-through, and then there was a motion to reconsider. We went back into caucus, and I said, We've really got to move this thing out. I still kind of chuckle because, if my memory serves me correctly, with a great deal of crocodile tears Betty Roberts and Al Flegel voted yes to put this bill out. They knew all along that they wanted to crucify Republicans with it, and so let's get it out there so we can do this. But it was wonderful to watch their performance. It was a great performance. Once out - as a matter of fact, I think I have my

explanation in the Journal - I know I do - in regard to my vote, and I didn't explain my vote very often. You can do that, you can explain a vote and have it entered in the Journal. As a matter of fact, Fadeley would do that. We used to refer to it as Fadeley's Journal because he did it so often. But I did it rarely, and this was one instance where I did. It came back - we'll get into that when we get into the campaigns and Straub and claims and things of that kind. When the time comes, we'll get into all of that. So it was quite vociferous. I recall in the campaign itself I was opposed to it. There was a - it was interesting. There was a TV program. I think it might have been Channel 2, sort of a Town Hall thing. In any event, what they wanted to do was to pair up people pro and con, and Tom would not pair up with anyone except me, which was interesting. He said, if you try to pair up, then I was the one he wanted to pair up with. He wasn't going to pair up with anybody else.

CH Why do you think he felt that way?

VA Oh, I don't know. I suppose he thought at least I would be reasonable. I think he probably still thought he was going to win. I recall Jason Boe, incidentally, was on his side, and I was on the other side, which was kind of curious. But anyway, he lost.

CH There was an election on May 1, wasn't there?

VA Yeah.

CH And that was when the measure went down?

VA He lost, yeah.

CH Did he feel antagonistic towards a more conservative - ideologically conservative minority Republican group in the legislature?

VA No, I think he was pragmatic enough to know he still had to work with the legislature. I think he sort of took it out on just a few individuals. It wasn't a broad-brush kind of thing. And he had some real strong and good allies, for example, in Newbry and Tony Yturri and Debbs Potts and some of those folks. They were good, strong allies of his. I don't think he'd broad-brush them. I was smart enough to know that.

CH There were a number of other issues that came up during that session, and I thought I might run through some of them. There was a farm labor bill that - where labor says that it was heavily restrictive of farm workers' rights to organize and strongly opposes the bill, labor is opposed to the bill, and there were amendments to change this which were fought by the farm bureau and other backers of the bill. I guess it had some difficulty getting out to the house floor. Were you involved with that at all in the senate?

VA We talked about farm labor bills, and my own position was, I didn't really have much problem about them organizing. That didn't cause me any pain. But that's not really what they really wanted. What they really wanted was the opportunity to strike during the crop season, and there I was immovable, for the reasons we talked about earlier.

CH Apparently they also wanted minimum wage increased for - without migrant farm labor. Was that something that you supported?

VA I think I mostly supported it, because this wasn't the first time it had come up, maybe altogether, maybe not. I can't recall which time when I was faced with it. Being a small-businessman, number one, and, number two, being greatly concerned about the opportunity for young people to get started, there was always kind of a pull against my voting yes on minimum wages. There really had to be some kind of exclusion for young people, but then you get into the child labor - quote, child labor - arguments. But it operates against, I think, really, the young people who are starting out and want to get some experience and earn some money, just like we talked in my early days when I delivered newspapers and worked for the department store. I still remember back in the newspaper days, you had all this money. Of course, I had to pay for the papers, but here was all this money - some bills and a whole lot of coins - and I think about the special pride and the memory I have today, today, that my first - the first thing I did was, I took three dollars and bought myself a baseball mitt. God, that was a great feeling. Well, you know, to kind of deny that kind of opportunity really was a pull against me voting for minimum wages.

CH There was also legislation for buying Cape Kiwanda.

VA Yeah, but I don't remember much about that. There was always all that sort of thing coming on.

CH I think we've talked a little bit about gambling before. There was an effort to allow gambling for charities and lotteries for counties, and the senate defeated that. I presume you were opposed to that.

VA Absolutely. There, I don't need memory. I voted against every gambling bill of any kind, and I'm pure as the driven snow

in that area, so I don't have to go to recollection. You ask me, I can give you an answer [laughter].

CH Well, this is probably another one that you were pretty clear about. The senate did pass a bill to ban live public sex shows. [Laughing] I'm going through the summary by the Oregonian on the legislative session, and this just happened to be in there.

VA That's weird [laughter].

Now I'm trying to remember our previous conversations. Did we talk about obscenity laws and things of that kind earlier, do you remember?

CH I don't recall that we did.

VA All right. This might be the appropriate to tell the story. If it isn't, whoever is reproducing this can leave it out or edit it somewhere else.

We had problems with the obscenity laws in the state of Oregon, and the supreme courts always were saying they're too vague in order to prosecute these. I've forgotten who introduced the bill, but I can recall - probably Ted Hallock, who was a very clever guy. He said, "Vic, did you read this bill?" dealing with the obscenity law. "No, I haven't yet." And he was laughing, and he says, "I think it violates our current obscenity laws." In other words, to try not to be vague in drafting a bill. He said, "I think it's violating our present obscenity law" [laughter]. Well, just say it failed, and I probably voted against - well, I probably voted for strengthening that. But, you know, it's - you keep running into freedom of speech, but they don't talk, you know, when they have things like live sex shows. It's very difficult, that's a very hard facet, and we

face it today. Watching the news, somebody wants to make this neighborhood marijuana free, and we can't do that. You have to change Oregon law.

There's a lot of things I lament about change in society, a change in morals in society. I happen to be - getting back to principles again, I really believe very, very strongly, and it's because - going way back, I think I mentioned it to you earlier, my paraphrase of our present constitution: "Let's see if the people can run the country," that it's the strength of the people, then, that survives our democracy, and the stronger the people are, the better democracy we have; the weaker they are - and when I say weak, I'm not talking about physical, morally - then the country is going to be morally weak. And these are erosions that are going on, and many of them, ^{NOT ALL TOO} acceptable. The whole concept of living together is something I think is wrong, maybe wrong in the sense that I believe that a family - the family really is the strength of the nation. It's not that you need to be mother and father and all the rest of it, but obviously you do if you're going to have a family, but that's probably the government closest to the people, if you really put it in that fashion. And where there is a concerned parent about the education of the children and about what they're doing and how late they stay up and all the rest of that sort of thing, that kind of strengthens the country. And when you say it's perfectly okay to have children out of wedlock, and it's perfectly okay to come and go as you want to do; perfectly okay for a president of the United States to invite ladies into the White House, à la JFK; I don't know if I can really say this, but perfectly okay that Ted Kennedy drove off and left a young girl dying. You know, it's - that really is a serious thing. And you take Reagan to task and Bush to task for all of that, they sort of "ha-ha" and - I don't "ha-ha" that. I think it's too important, and, at least in my view of a democracy, a continuation of it, and it's important.

CH Do you feel pessimistic about the way the country is going int that regard?

VA Well, actually, Reagan, he comes in for a lot of lumps, but I'll tell you this, that there was a speeding - large, speeding locomotive going down the track, and had been for a long time - long time meaning at least starting with FDR and up to our days - and he really slowed it down and slightly turned it around, which was a mammoth task. I mean an incredibly mammoth task. And the pressures are still to crank up that engine all the time. ~~People are stoking coal into an oil-pumping [?] diesel.~~ I don't lose heart. I still think that there's a great, strong belief in the kinds of things I'm talking about. Less cynicism, but - the media really is no help, and I'm not a Spiro Agnew when it comes to talking about - or a Nixon talking about media. I am a great believer in media and the role they play in our society. And maybe only to the extent that - I gave one speech to the newspaper publishers, and I almost forced myself on them in the midst of my - in '86, you know, before I'm leaving office altogether, I almost forced myself because I wanted to give them a speech. Basically, what I was saying in the speech is that, you know, we get all of the bad things instantaneously, we have cynical writers - and they are ~~#~~ cynical - and they sort of offhand speak about so and so, they were living together, just like there's nothing to it. But my point was that that's what you read in the newspaper. You read it on the front page, you read it in major articles, and it leads off on television news, and that sort of thing.

CH And it becomes the norm.

VA And what I was saying is, that's not all that's going on, so that the public out there gets a distorted view. When you're

asking me a question, am I giving up on a democracy, I'm saying no, I'm not. There's a lot of good things that are happening, there's a lot of people that are concerned. We're just getting a distortion because that's what we're getting out of our media. Whether I blame them or not, they're saying that's what people want to read. They want to see the crash and they want to hear - I don't know. But the point of my speech to them was that I read all this and I hear all this, but you don't really give a counterbalance about what's good going on. You don't give it the same kind of play.

I'll give you an example now, but it does relate to my governor years. I won't get into the whole thing, but maybe when we get there we'll talk about it. There was a front-page article in the Oregonian, fairly good play, about how the state had wasted \$3,600, and the article went on - this happened to be an OLCC, Oregon Liquor Control Commission, training session, and the training idea was that everyone be in the same, in this case, motel that was part of it; they'd all be together. That was part of their training. Well, this was out at the airport, the Holiday Inn, I think, and where the state wasted \$3,600 was that a lot of people who lived in the Portland area could just as easily go home instead of staying in a motel. That's how it was wasted. On that same day, when it was in the morning's paper, I had an employee suggestion award. We would give people money, 10 percent of what they saved in the first year. So I said to Les ~~Sykes~~ ²⁴⁷⁸ [sp?], who was the writer of this article about us wasting, "Les," I said, "Today at noon -" or 12:30 is when I had an open house - "I'm going to be presenting a check to a fellow that saved ^{THE STATE} \$45,000." Well, that never appeared in the newspaper. There was never an article about that, and if there had been, it probably would not have been on the front page. That's the distortion I'm talking about. That's the kind of thing.

And some of what I'm saying, too - and I gave you a long

answer to your question - is that I still am an optimist, and I believe there are a lot more people that are good and those that aren't good, how will we measure it? But I don't despair. Voters make mistakes from time to time; elected officials make more mistakes. So I'm still an optimist, I still have great faith in the people. I could tell you they made a mistake in this last election, I really believe they did, but that's not really part of - I don't think George Bush deserved what he got. Actually, this man contributed so much and was doing so much good. But anyway, those things happen. They certainly made a mistake, and history will prove it, when they elected Jimmy Carter. I mean, that's history: 13 percent inflation, 21-, 22 percent interest, you know, that - you can't duck from that one; that actually happened, and a few other things. But no, the country is good, I'm still an optimist, and I still believe there are a lot of good people out there, and I just sort of agitate when I see the imbalances going on.

CH How responsible do you - just going back to your last comment on Carter, how responsible is a president for the success of the economy or the inflation rates, the elements of the economy?

VA We can't help but blame him. When I say that, I'm not being unusually cruel. I believed, as the governor, if something happened, it was my fault. For example, Freddye Pettit~~g~~[sp?] got in real trouble in Human Resource, and so people are blaming Freddye Pettit~~g~~. I'm blaming Neil Goldschmidt, but not because I want to pick on Neil Goldschmidt. If I were in that position, I would be to blame if the same thing happened. And that's fair, because, obviously, if good things happen and they get credit for it, you can't really duck and say, I'll just take all the good stuff, but I don't want to have anything to do with the bad

stuff. It was his administration, the people that worked for him. We haven't had, not to at least my memory, anything that approached the 13 percent inflation rate or anything approaching 21-, 22 percent interest in my life.

CH During your governorship did you - what was the inflation rate?

VA Well, at the beginning, when Jimmy Carter - see, I was governor for two years in Carter's last two years.

[End of Tape 15, Side 2]