

OPINION

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Atiyeh's trip does no harm

Jealousy probably has something to do with the carping about Gov. Vic Atiyeh's recent trip to Hawaii and his current month-long jaunt in the Middle East. People consigned to a soggy Willamette Valley winter envy anyone who can escape to sunnier climes.

Yet there is valid reason to look closely at any governor's out-of-state trips. Essentially, there are three questions to be asked: First, is the governor neglecting important state business? Second, is the governor placing himself under any obligation by accepting free travel or accommodations? And third, is the governor's trip a paid vacation, or does it promise to bring benefits to Oregon?

There do not appear to be any crises on the state's horizon — at least, none the governor can do anything about. The property tax problem has not been solved, but the governor needs the Legislature's help with that issue and he's not going to get it. There's nothing going on right now that can't keep until mid-April.

Nor do there appear to be strings attached to any of the freebies the governor has accepted. The Jewish National Fund is

footing the bill for Atiyeh's trans-Atlantic travel and for his expenses while in Israel. Atiyeh's two predecessors visited Israel under similar arrangements and incurred no political debts. Other costs will be paid by businesses taking part in an Oregon trade mission to Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The businessmen will gain prestige from having the governor as a member of their party, but that's all.

As for the benefits to Oregon, one never knows. Oregon has never sent a trade delegation to the Middle East before. There may be markets for Oregon products in that region of the world — or there may not. As an American of Syrian descent, Atiyeh's chances of finding business openings are better than average. If nothing else, Atiyeh's visit will create goodwill in a region sorely lacking in that commodity.

Oregonians should not begrudge their governor an occasional trip such as this one. The state will survive Atiyeh's absence, he's not selling his support to anyone and the trip might open new opportunities for Oregon. Atiyeh can't be blamed for wanting to return, as chief executive of an American state, to the Syrian village where his father was born.