

Atiyeh finds friendly roots

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One can go home again, but it is not easy, even for a governor, and especially if home is Syria, nestled behind a curtain of strained U.S. relations.

Yet, for all the flap about whether the subdued greeting at the Damascus airport was deliberate or inadvertent, Gov. Vic Atiyeh later found the welcome to his father's homeland more enthusiastic "than my wildest dreams," his staff learned from his daily phone call to the Capitol in Salem.

Atiyeh's trip offered the Syrians a dilemma for the very reason relations between his ancestral home and his own country are strained — Israel. On the one hand, Syria would be honored to greet the most prominent Syrian-American politician in the United States, but on the other, he later planned to visit hated Israel.

The governor was right when he was initially invited to go to Israel, to insist if he did so he would also have to go to

Syria. Conversely, if he visited Syria, he would also have to call on Israel.

But if Atiyeh's trip to the Middle East has been unspectacular as seen from afar, it has not produced any recorded gaffes. The State Department has reason to worry about governors traveling around the world, appearing to conduct their own foreign policy, but without constitutional authority to represent the U.S. government. Atiyeh has caused the department no embarrassment. Whether he has opened trading doors for Oregon business is yet to be seen.

The important point of his sentimental journey is that he has discovered the people of his ancestral home to be the open, friendly, peace-loving folks he expected. Therein may lie the greatest hope for an anguished region. Beneath all of the frictions of nationhood, religion, government and history are warm and kind human beings who would like to live in peace and harmony.