

# Atiyeh's group to try to sidestep politics

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When seven Oregon businessmen and Gov. Vic Atiyeh met in a large conference room in the state capitol March 2, they heard an assortment of advice on how to conduct themselves during their planned trade mission to the Middle East.

Bhagwan H. Gulani, an employee of the Department of Economic Development who would be their unofficial guide, put one piece of advice above all.

"One of the things you should scrupulously avoid is talk about politics," said Gulani, a multilingual engineer who specializes in the electronics industry.

The politics of the Middle East are a long way from Oregon, but even if no one talks about them, they are hard to avoid.

When Atiyeh goes to Syria, his ancestral homeland, on Monday, only three of the businessmen will be traveling with him.

On April 1, when Atiyeh arrives in Israel, none of the businessmen on the trade mission will be along.

The reluctance of the businessmen to go to Damascus was ascribed to the strained relations between the United States and Syria and to questions about whether it has much business to offer.

When asked why they did not want to go with Atiyeh to Israel, several refused to talk about it for the record.

Privately, they said one reason for avoiding Israel was the public refusal of Arab countries to do business with Israel or, in some cases, with companies who do business with Israel. The desire for secrecy may be

related to the fact that since 1970, federal law has forbidden the "participation by any U.S. persons in illegal boycotts" and requires the reporting of any requests to comply with a boycott.

The American corporations penalized for allegedly violating provisions of the law include Citibank of New York, which was fined \$323,000 last year.

"This is really touchy stuff," said one of the governor's trade mission members, "We don't want to antagonize those people over there. They don't want you to do business with Israel."

Another replied when asked about the decision to skip Israel, "Are you typing or recording this? I don't want to get involved in that. We're not doing business (with Israel) now. Whether we are precluded from doing it, I don't know. I've heard there are some considerations there."

Others said the Arab boycott had nothing to do with their decision not to go to Israel.

Nofal Kasrawi, a Syrian-born naturalized American citizen who is a vice president of the CH2M Hill International, expressed strong personal feelings about what he described as Israeli aggression. "I will never set foot in Israel," he said.

He added, however, that that was not the view of his company, which he said nonetheless had "placed a low priority" on doing business with Israel because it did not offer the same opportunities for the engineering company as Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

When asked about the Arab boycott, William L. Bright, president of Western Power Products Inc., of Hood River, said he had "heard some of that, but they (the Arabs) have never said that to us directly.

"We will sell to anyone that wants to buy from us," he added.

The only businessman who expressed any intention of going to Israel was Matthew M. Braich, a vice president of sales and marketing for Bingham-Wilamette Co.

Braich said the company had an office in Tel Aviv, and that he would be visiting it later, but had decided not to enter Israel with Atiyeh to avoid publicity.

But Braich dropped out of the mission before it left Portland because of illness.

William V. Skidmore, director of the Commerce Department's office of anti-boycott compliance, said he did not believe that businessmen violated the law by staying out of Israel.

"It's kind of a close call," he said. "There is no obligation to do business with Israel."

Hershal M. Tanzer, an organizer of the Jewish National Fund, which will be Atiyeh's host in Israel, said any businessmen who refused to do business with Israel were "selling their principles."

Tanzer said Atiyeh would be met by several businessmen who will be part of a group of 20 persons from Portland that will join him in Israel. He said they were on a confidential tour list and he would not name them.

Douglas V. Frengle, manager of the international trade division of the Oregon Department of Economic Development, said Mideast politics made a combined trade mission to the Arab nations and Israel impossible. Similar conflict will require the governor to make separate trade visits to China and Taiwan later this year, he added.