

Tape 26, Side 1

CH This is an interview with Governor Vic Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland, Oregon. The interviewer, for the Oregon Historical Society, is Clark Hansen. The date is May 20, 1993, and this is Tape 26, Side 1.

In our last session we were talking about your appointments. You had just mentioned appointing Bob Smith to the Executive Department, and we talked about a few of your other close appointments. You also had some difficulties with some of your appointments, too, in getting them approved by the legislature - by the senate or by the entire legislature? Which is it?

VA No, just the senate.

CH That was something that had been passed recently, hadn't it?

VA This advise and consent had been around for a long time, and, as a legislator, the governor would make an appointment, and then it would go to the committee that would relate to it, the name would go to a committee, and it was all very perfunctory. Gentlemen, we have it, the governor's made this appointment. He'd read the biographical stuff, and, Do any of you know this person? Well, I've heard of him. Okay, you carry it. And it was just sort of - so I'm just going through all this as a senator, and finally I said, Now, look, let's either do it or not do it, which, incidentally, was one hell of a mistake. I didn't know I was going to be governor [laughter]. The very first one, we asked the person to come down to Salem. That never happened before. And the very first one was Becky Johnson, board of higher education. Oh, what's going on? They said, What's wrong? What's the senate - they really put - people spun on their heads. So I brought on my own misery. Well, the senate kind of liked

the looks of that one, and they thought, well, heck, let's just do that, and so by the time I'm governor, they're into it real full-blown. The one that I really had a problem with was Kelly Wood ~~W~~, Department of Energy. Kelly was - incidentally, energy, as you know, and you may - well, you do know, because we'll get into it. Energy was a very important thing to me, and I had that special message which we delivered to the legislature. Kelly was an eminently qualified person, knowledgeable. But Ted Hallock and some others and this fellow who knew something about nuclear power plants, and anyway, they got into it, they got into it, and it got worse. As a matter of fact, I talked to Kelly, and I said, "Kelly, you know, you're getting a lot of abuse for me." I'm saying, "the hell with it. Let's hang tough and let the senate do what they're going to do, but I don't want to put you through any abuse that you don't really need to go through." "No," he said, "I'll hang in there." Then it got very apparent that we didn't have - we weren't going to have the votes to do it. So they turned him down. I got real upset about that.

CH Hallock said that he actually felt sorry for you because you didn't have anybody down there to support him. Was that true?

VA I'm not sure that that's true, but that wouldn't have made any difference. Thank you for Ted Hallock's saying that he was sorry for me. I didn't know Ted was ever sorry for me. But they turned him down, and I got very angry. And I'm talking to Senator Boe and some other senators, and I said, "Now, look, you know, this is my appointment. Now, if you tell me the person's not qualified, I can deal with that. But if you get into a philosophy, I can't deal with that because if you turn me down, then the only one I can get through is the one that matches the senate philosophy, so the question is, is that my appointment or the senate's appointment." That was my position. It was also

interesting. I called another person, very well qualified, from Oregon State. I talked to him about stepping in. Obviously, this turning down Kelly Wood was news. So I was asking, do you own any utility stock? Have you ever involved in nuclear power plants? Anyway, I'm going on asking these questions, and finally he says to me, "Governor, it seems to me that you want somebody that doesn't own anything or know anything." I said, "I guess you're right." Well anyway, that really was - that was the major...

CH And you had to take over the department then, didn't you?

VA Briefly, until we had gotten somebody to do that job.

CH What was the response to your argument that it was basically a matter of philosophy and that should be left up to you?

VA Not an awful lot. Again, now, many, many times I have said that the legislature was not partisan. It was Democrat controlled all during my eight years. I always said that, but I didn't always mean it. If the same thing would have happened with Neil Goldschmidt, he would have been passed. No doubt. I'm a Republican, and they've got the votes, and away they went. So they just - there wasn't any particular reaction to it. I don't think they saw it in the same light that I did. And I would tell you it wasn't a matter of Vic Atiyeh. I was a great one for process. When I was a legislator - well, just like I told you earlier in the senate, I was a great defender of the legislative process. There are three branches of government; I consider them co-equal branches of government, and I feel very strongly about it. When I became an executive, I'm in the executive branch of government, and I feel very strongly about protecting the rights of the executive branch. It wasn't a matter of Vic Atiyeh, it

was a matter of any governor and the legislature, and so to me, philosophically, that - if they said a person wasn't qualified, I can deal with that. Okay, they say he's not qualified. We may disagree, but the fact is, it's the qualifications that we're after. Nothing beyond that. And when you asked me, they didn't react to it.

CH But the main reason for rejecting him was over nuclear energy issues?

VA That's among the reasons. I don't know all of them, but they just decided they were going to teach the governor a lesson, and I don't know why, I can't give you an idea. But that was one of the partisan things that would happen.

CH Well, in that same area, then, you also had some difficulty appointing people to the Energy Facility Siting Council as well.

VA Yeah. Same idea.

CH Oregon Supreme Court Justice Kenneth O'Connell, you had a problem with that appointment, and, then, with Harvey ^{Riswick} ~~Reiswick~~ [sp?]. Is it Harvey ~~Reiswick~~?

VA Oh, the labor guy.

CH Yeah. A union business agent ran into trouble.

VA They didn't think he was too smart. Those are bumpy roads that you go through, and every once in a while the senate gets the bit in their teeth and they decide they're going to do it. You know, you've not seen the senate turn down any of Neil Goldschmidt's appointments or Barbara Roberts. I really don't

have to say any more than that. They haven't turned down any of theirs. As a matter of fact, the senate approved some things that Neil Goldschmidt proposed, now not appointments, but government reorganization, and they were absolutely stupid. Absolutely stupid. But Neil Goldschmidt wanted it, so he got it. I'm not bitter about the whole thing. I understand it. I don't like it, that's not the way government should operate, that's not the way I operate, but, then, that's what goes on. Yeah, I had some problems. These are not problems that created wide gaps between us. I continued my communication, actually all eight years, with the president and speaker and the minority leaders on a weekly basis.

CH Wasn't part of the problem with O'Connell that he owned stock in the three utilities that were planning to build the Pebble Springs nuclear power plant in eastern Oregon, and that that hadn't been disclosed prior to the legislature?

VA Oh yeah.

CH And I guess they were pretty angry about that. Did O'Connell ever discuss that with you prior to your nominating him?

VA That, I don't recall. We may have talked about it because of the flap about Kelly Wood. Still, I'm operating under the theory, tell me he's not qualified. Don't tell me anything else, tell me he's not qualified. He's obviously a qualified person.

CH You had said at that point that you wouldn't make anymore appointments until the circus that is going on down there is straightened out. Was there any effort to straighten it out, then?

VA Just have to let them cool down a little bit and get busy doing something else. You know, this is early in the session a lot of these things are going through. The senate doesn't have anything else to do. So you wait till they start getting busy doing some other things. [Sentence inaudible.]

CH You would think at the beginning of their session that they'd be extraordinarily busy trying to get bills...

VA No, it's all routine at that point. Bills being introduced, being read, being sent to committee. There's no sessions. Generally, they'd meet in the morning and say hello and adjourn. There's not much goes on the first month, month and a half.

CH Apparently, during that whole process you had a rather heated discussion with senate president Jason Boe about trying to curb the committee headed by Fadeley, who was the most outspoken opponent of nuclear energy. Did that get you off on a wrong footing with Boe on the beginning, there, of your...?

VA No. Jason and I really got along very well. I had others. I mean, I was really very angry, and I would see Jason, and we'd have it out. But that never really ever dampened our cooperation. It wasn't a matter of I'm not going to talk to him anymore.

CH You'd had a pretty good relationship with him before?

VA Yeah. Previously, too, and all during Jason's tenure there.

CH You wanted to replace two members of the Energy Facilities Siting Council? There was a disagreement with Attorney General Jim Redden over your reason for wishing to replace the two

members of the Energy Facilities Siting Council, and you, I believe, referred to the law that limits members of the council to two terms and claimed that terms served on the agency's predecessor should disqualify them from reappointment. Do you recall that?

VA I don't recall that specifically, but I do recall, again, my strong feeling that no one should serve more than two terms, and that I was responsible, as a legislator, to change laws that related to this. I know specifically, I think, the Board of Higher Education was a six-year term, unlimited, and so we passed a law to make these things to be uniformly four-year terms, not just for higher education, but where there were four-year terms that they would be limited to two. So now I've got a theory - a philosophy of how government ought to be. Again, my general feeling is that really there's no one that is indispensable and that it's good and healthy to have things change. So that's where I would come from. But I don't remember that specifically.

CH You cut the salaries of your staff from Straub's level when you took over. Was that just a general cost-cutting measure, or were you...?

VA No, it was just what I believed in terms of what people ought to be paid. I call myself a cheap retailer, you know. You look at some of the salaries that are being paid, and it's way out of line. That's the reality. That's one of the values, I say, of coming from business, in that the dollar is worth something, and you take that into account. We also cut the size of the staff, and people worked real hard. Again, I was thinking to myself, well, I was a retailer; I worked hard. People can work harder than they're working. And so when you cut staff, you've still got plenty of staff for the work that's required.

CH How did your wife, Dolores, fit into her role as the governor's wife, and what was that role?

VA Well, she did very well. I know that she would have preferred to be home instead of what we were going through, but all during the eight years she was exceptionally good. She had her own causes, quietly worked at them. I know she's very proud about immunization before you get into school, thinking it's important that children be immunized. She did the kinds of things that were of interest to her. I've kidded an awful lot - and she does very well when she goes out among people and goes to groups, and I'd say that they'd try to get Dolores, and if they couldn't get her, then they'd try for me. But she did very well. It's something that she said, Okay, I'm here - she never told me this - I'm here, and I'm just going to do the best job I know how, and she did very well at it. Groups would come to the house, and she'd deal with that, do a lot of it herself, which was tough work.

That's interesting. I don't know if we covered that, but all of the furniture in the house and all of the dishes and pots and pans and silverware were ours. We moved them down there. Whenever there was anybody coming in, she was just like anyone else. I mean, at home she'd get ready for it, she'd make the cookies, she would - she would do it. When we had particularly large ones, we might get it catered. But people thought that the governor has all kinds of help, and they also thought we had a mansion. And I think I did tell you I rented the house, and they raised my rent. But it's - she was very good at it, very good. I don't think she would use the term, but maybe I'd say long-suffering. She did it quietly, and went ahead and did it. Maybe that wasn't - maybe I'm over exaggerating. But obviously you can't help but enjoy it. I mean, she is the first lady and respected and liked for that, and a lot of people liked her. A

lot. Most people liked her because she was a very fine, very pleasant woman.

CH How about the rest of your family?

VA I think they were proud of it, meaning my son and daughter. As you see in my - I don't know if you got to my farewell, but I just said I hope I didn't cause you too much trouble. It was a problem, you know, as they were growing up. I recall specifically that Suzanne applied for a job down at the marine science center, and some woman called me up. Her son had applied, and she was indignant, you know, that my daughter - you know, she's going to get the job, and my son's going to - I said to her, Look, I'm not looking for special favors, I'm just asking for equal treatment. My daughter, she's applied for it, and let her make it or not. So at times like that. At times I know I've heard of teachers that kind of jump on my children. Maybe they didn't like what I was doing or something.

CH Were either of them living at the mansion while you were...?

VA No. Tom was out and married, and Suzanne was out in school. We had a room for her, she had not yet married. There was Suzanne's room in the house, but she didn't use it very much. She was away at school.

CH From here we go on into the '79 legislative session, the sixtieth legislative assembly. Is there anything else in terms of your getting ready for the session, getting ready for your first term in office that you would want to mention at this point?

VA The inaugural address. Do you have that on your list?

CH That's different from the state of the state address, isn't it?

VA That's correct.

CH I've got your state of the state address here, but I - go ahead and tell me at this point right now about your inaugural address, then, because that...

VA The state of the state happens - well, there's - I had two inaugural addresses.

CH Oh, I didn't know that.

VA Each time I was elected I had an inaugural address. Then, everything in between was a state of the state.

CH Which was each year?

VA Each year. That would have been 1980 I would have had one, not '79. Eighty, '81, '82, and then - wait a minute. Yeah, '82. In '83 I had another inaugural address. And then '84 and '5 and '6 I had state of the states.

The reason I particularly mention that, when the governor prepares to make an address of this kind, whether it's an address - I have to make a little distinction, I guess. There's an address to the legislature in between elections, and, then, there is a state of the state, which is a separate speech. But be that as it may. You know, you have a choice of how you want to approach it. I didn't really study any previous ones, but as I've heard other governors, you know, you have a litany. This is what I want, these are the budgets, this is the direction, and all the rest of that sort of thing. I decided I didn't want to

do that. I didn't want to have this menu of offerings to the legislature. What I wanted to do was deal with the question philosophically. This is how you approach government, this is how you do things. I'll be very frank and tell you, it was - I was most anxious to go to that speech. I could hardly wait to deliver that speech. I really wanted to deliver that speech. I was quite excited about it. I had assistance, we had a speech writer, we sat down and talked, we had several drafts of the speech, and I - you know if I expressed myself, they took notes and helped frame the speech, and we finally massaged it down to the speech that I made. I've said many, many times - I've told members of the media, I'll tell you - if you want to really know who Vic Atiyeh is, you go look at my inaugural address, first inaugural address, because I was expressing my views on how we ought to do the people's business. That's why I want to bring it up. It was important to me, but I was very excited. I wanted to go deliver it. I think it's a good speech. It wasn't - you know, guns didn't go off and skyrocket in the air, but I think fundamentally - I think it's a very good speech, content and the way it was expressed.

CH Was it well received?

VA It was well received, but, you know, it's a new governor, and people are happy, except the Democrats, and it was well received, but I'm not sure how much they took it to heart. But anyway, it was one of the - that's the reason, as anything else, I wanted to bring it up, because to me it was both important, my approach to it, philosophical rather than menu, and it really did express my views of government.

CH Was that where you were talking about how government had grown arrogant toward the people and the answer is that the

government needs to listen to the people and be more responsive?

VA That's right, exactly right. I could quote several things from it; that I think we're more interested in the form of things rather than the substance. That's in there. You know, what is the form, how does the chart look? I'm not interested in that. All I'm interested in is what's it going to do for people. I kept reminding my state agencies all during my term - my terms, you know, why are you in business? You're not in business for yourself. You're in business for the people. That's why you're in business, that's why we're here. We're not here for any other reason. Government, including the legislature, even today, you know, really, it's just awful hard to penetrate that wall in Salem. It's very hard to penetrate that wall in Salem. And I'm saying, Hey, listen - I used the word kaleidoscope in that speech. You know, having gone through that experience, you've got different bills coming at you all the time. My problem as a legislator, a voting legislator, I may vote on an ag bill in February, and sometime in April another ag bill would come down, and I'd kind of have to remember. You know, I'd have to put this all together. I didn't want it in pieces, I want to know what does this ag bill do to the ag bill I voted on before. Not too many people would go through that kind of exercise, but that's what I would - I'm constantly trying to make sure I've got the right package in mind. It's not easy, but that's what I would try to do, that's what I was trying to tell them. You know, as these things cascade down on you - maybe in a different way I would say what I told you very early on, and I know I've since repeated, a set of principles and common sense. That's basically coming at it. That's how you come down.

CH You were also calling for less government spending and less government regulation.

VA That's right. I made a distinction in that speech, and it was a matter of regulation, not strangulation, and where we were, really, we're in strangulation mode, not in the regulation mode.

CH There was one interesting sentence here in the speech where you said, Where the people ask for protection, let us protect them; where they ask for assistance, let us assist them; and where they ask to be left alone, let us leave them alone. And that's, in a nutshell, what you're talking about, the less spending, less regulation.

VA Absolutely. You have to do it. I've never said there should be no government, because I clearly know there's a need for it. It's just a matter of how much government.

CH You were also calling for volunteerism too.

VA Yes.

CH And replacing social programs. You know, in a way you're - it seems like your path is coinciding with the same kind of message that Governor Reagan was calling for. Did you associate yourself with the movement that he was a part of as well?

VA No.

CH You saw it as being different or parallel?

VA No, I never thought about it. I mean, it never entered my mind. I was expressing myself, I was not influenced by Reagan or anybody else. I was just expressing myself from all the years and all the philosophy and everything that I grew up with. And all the things we talked about before, that was me. That's who I

was, and I was expressing myself and my particular views of government and the role of government. I am not one that believes that government is smarter than the people. I don't believe that. I believe that - and I may have said this before - that people, given the right information, will make fewer mistakes than the legislature will.

CH Why is that?

VA I don't know, I can't answer it, except that they live out there with their daily lives and they have to deal with common sense and reality, and the legislature lives in this box in Salem, and it's hard for me to determine that. If you put everything to a vote of the people, a lot of the bills that the legislature will pass will never pass out there. They'll never pass out there.

CH Did you feel that you had a closer pulse on the people than the legislature?

VA Yes.

CH Why is that?

VA I listened. In my speech also, and I firmly believe this, ~~is~~ ^{are} the words "common voice of Oregon." And there is such a thing, but you have to listen. Many, many, not just politicians, but a lot of people, they're not really listening to you, they're thinking about what they're going to tell you next. I mean, they're not listening to what you're saying, they're thinking what they're going to say next, and so they're kind of shielded from really listening to what people have to say. That's why I was kind of disgusted with Governor Roberts and this electronic

conversation with Oregonians. That's not the way to listen to Oregonians. That's not the way to do it. Everybody that came to these electronic discussions had their own agenda, for or against or whatever. That's why they were there. They weren't there just, Oh, I get a chance to talk to the governor. That's not why they're there. Those kind of people don't need a chance to talk to the governor. It doesn't make any difference. You've got to go out where they are, which isn't that hard in Oregon.

[End of Tape 26, Side 1]