

Kate Brown Interview on Governor Vic Atiyeh

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Interviewer: James Moore, Pacific University Professor

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Kate Brown 0:00

...governor, that I was surprised to see him. And then you have, I haven't reread Tom McCall's book lately, but I just finished Governor [Barbara] Roberts' for the second time, which is a long one. It's very good. I did read Bob Straub's, but Chuck Johnson's book -- have you read it? I thought that book was very interesting, and what I really want to do is go back and read them, you know, read McCall and Straub's book at the same time.

James Moore 0:36

Do McCall, Straub, and Betty Roberts.

Kate Brown 0:38

Oh, wow.

James Moore 0:39

And then you get a real parallel thing going on.

Kate Brown 0:45

But I also think, I mean, you know, I think we think of McCall as this superhuman superhero, right? And I do believe some of it was Straub nipping at his heels. And maybe that's not the right word, but...

James Moore 1:01

I think it's exactly the right...

Kate Brown 1:02

You know, I think McCall gets a lot of...people said that, you know, he always found the parade and got ahead of it, right? Well, I think Straub was a lot of the parade.

James Moore 1:16

Straub was a lot of the parade, and when you read my book, you're gonna find out the legislature was a lot of the parade,

Kate Brown 1:21

Right? Yes.

James Moore 1:25

This is some things I wanted to ask you about. There's fascinating things. [Governor] Vic [Atiyeh], for instance, was

accused of not supporting the bottle bill, which he supported the entire time. He sent it back to committee because he saw there was a fatal flaw in it right on the floor of the Senate.

Kate Brown 1:42
Wow.

James Moore 1:42
And so people used that, said, "Well, he was against it because he sent it back to kill it." It's like no, he sent it back because it was going to cover every bottle. How could he tell? Because senators brought in all sorts of bottles, put them on their desk, and said, "So is this going to be in it? Is this going to be in it?" And he said, "Yeah, I read that. And no, [Brown interjects: we have to narrow it] narrow it." And it wasn't his committee, but it was Betty Roberts' committee. Send it back. Fix, come back. Vic, also, in 1963, is part of what became the birth of the DEQ [Department of Environmental Quality]. He's the committee that's looking at water issues and smoke issues. It's called smoke, not smog.

Kate Brown 2:24
It was field burning, right?

James Moore 2:26
But it was also in the cities where everybody burned coal.

Kate Brown 2:28
Oh, wow.

James Moore 2:30
And so he then is instrumental in our environmental science.

Kate Brown 2:35
That was like, so not a decade, but Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring"...

James Moore 2:35
Had just been about '62.

Kate Brown 2:36
Okay, all right. I had her in '68. Okay, all right.

James Moore 2:43
'62, and so he's at the beginning of that. The model that they eventually come up with is used to create the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency]. And so, you know, Vic, moderate at best, Republican is one of the founders of the environmental movement? This is weird.

Kate Brown 3:00
This is so great. This will be the first book on him, right?

James Moore 3:04
Yeah.

Kate Brown 3:06
Aren't you excited?

James Moore 3:07
Yeah, it's a blast, and I'm learning so much. All the major '97 stuff, Vic proposed something that was a 1% [Brown interjects: gross receipt tax] gross receipt tax in '82. If it had been two and a half, it was raised exactly this much money. And where did you get that idea? From Mark Hatfield, who proposed a much smaller gross receipt tax in 1961 and 1963.

Kate Brown 3:34
Do you use the Oregon [State] Archives at all?

James Moore 3:37
I haven't. I use them from afar at this point, because we have our archives, I want to exhaust it and then out for the other things.

Kate Brown 3:43
All right. You can also, I think, know that Governor Barbara used it extensively when she was writing her book. You can also, I'm sure, just call and let them know what you're looking for, and they'll find it.

James Moore 3:58
And when I interview people here often, I don't know if you ran into Jon Yuncker, but...

Kate Brown 4:03
I see him occasionally in town.

James Moore 4:04
He's such a sweetie pie, [Brown interjects: he is] but when I interviewed him, he went and got letters that Vic had written to constituents on X things.

Kate Brown 4:14
Wow. So, were they permanently... so now all the constitutional officers, all letters, everything are permanent public records, right? Was that true when...?

James Moore 4:30
No, it wasn't. And so that's why we have so much stuff at Pacific [University]. Some people, like one of his chief staffers, who was with him almost the whole time, Pat Amedeo, who did natural resources, she just left her office and it went to the archives, but there were no rules. So Gerry Thompson took everything home as Chief of Staff, [Brown: no...] and Vic took tons of stuff home as ex-governor, and so there's stuff in the attic still.

This just breaks my heart.

And some of it, I told you briefly when I saw you last December, there was an attempt on Vic's life during the [unintelligible]. And, you know, Gerry Thompson's got all that stuff. I now have it, but I don't have her permission to put it in our archives yet. I have it for my book, and I've copied everything, but I don't know. I need her permission to put it... I mean, this is her handwritten notes.

Kate Brown 5:33

The world is very different in terms of permanent public records.

James Moore 5:38

Very, very different, yeah.

Kate Brown 5:41

Chris is on the campaign side now, but my understanding moving from the Secretary of State's office to the governor's office was different, I think, than current practices. And so, for example, as Secretary of State, every note that I wrote, which was a lot, was permanently preserved, right? Yeah, I don't know that that was the practice in the governor's office, So it's really unfortunate, because it sort of adds... it's the spice, right? It totally is.

James Moore 6:17

Secret meetings on the Rajneeshees with the Feds, the state and all the locals there. Gerry and the governor basically said we had to crack heads against people to work together. I have the handwritten notes, I have their signatures, and their phone numbers, where they all signed in, you know, all those kind of stuff. It's fantastic.

Kate Brown 6:34

Just to compare, right? We have the occupation at the Malheur Wildlife Refuge, because of the safety issues. My notes, not, you know, conversations that I had with the Deputy Attorney General. You know, exempted from disclosure. But a year from now, two years from now.

James Moore 6:58

Dave Frohnmayer, the Attorney General, told Gerry, you can't keep these notes, because they could, the Rajneeshees could subpoena. But she said, they had, that's the way I work. And so they never were subpoenaed. But just a fascinating time, because the public records law is just 1971, '73 it's all still fresh. They're still working through it.

Kate Brown 7:25

Yes and it's evolved. How many? 500 exemptions and 18 volumes of the Oregon Revised Statutes? Moore: [exactly.] So I'll just share, my exposure to Atiyeh came through my work on the Commission on Indian Services so, I came in...

James Moore 7:45

So were you on the Legislative Commission?

Kate Brown 7:46

Yes, for basically the entire time I was in the legislature. So it's an interesting story. I was appointed to replace Judy

Bauman when she resigned. I don't remember the exact date, November of 1991, and Larry Campbell was Speaker of the House. I'm sure he's like, "What are we gonna do with this feminist from Southeast Portland, right?" So he's like, put me on the Legislative Commission. I'll bury her there, and that was my first exposure, because whether it was his leadership or his brainchild to create the commission, I don't know, but to the tribes in Oregon, he was the be all to end all, right? I mean, he was the creator of this commission, and no other state has anything like it. I don't know where he got the idea from, but to this day, the tribes would say, time immemorial, you know, Atiyeh is the creator of this incredible relationship that the state of Oregon has with the tribes. I ended up staying on the commission. The world changed for tribes, because this was just after the national gaming rights act right and you had a few of the tribes begin to acquire financial resources and with that political power, and it was, it was interesting, because when I moved to the Senate, they took me off for six months, and then the legislators didn't come, so they put me back on. But now we have four members of the legislature on the commission, because it is so important, right? And it's so politically powerful. Was that a statutory change? It was a statutory change, yes, and it's the only creature like it in the United States to this day. And so, for example, I went to Pi-Ume-Sha, I know I was Secretary of State at the time. So would have been, you know, '09, '10 it was probably '09 or '11, and Governor Atiyeh was there being honored right at Warm Springs. And that was my interactions with him. And, you know, they treated him like he was the president of the United States, and this was 20 years after he had been governor. Really extraordinary. The commission honored him at the Capitol a couple of years ago. I was there for that. It was pretty amazing. And I think to this day, the tribes still hold him in that regard, yeah. And now, Kulongoski is sort of taking that [unintelligible].

James Moore 10:36

And when Ted came on, Vic was there to hold his hand and introduce him and plug him into all that, because even as governor, you're part of the sovereign thing. It's personal relationships.

Kate Brown 10:49

And the challenge is the change. So, you know, I'm sure for him becoming governor, the relationship is different than when you are a legislator, right? It's very different with the tribes. So the other interactions that I had with him were, and it was in May before he passed away, there was an Asian Chamber of Commerce meeting, and he was there in full force, right? And his ties to the Asian community are also very strong, endearing -- enduring, and endearing, I think. And it was obvious he created the international office in Tokyo, and I know he did the TV from Oregon with love, so that was all his work. But for him to come he was quite frail at that point in time, was pretty remarkable. And I remember we sat at one of the overhangs and had a conversation. He is, to this day, one of the people that I wish I could talk to. There's a handful of them. He is one of them, just because he was so encouraging and so supportive all the time. He got the Statesman of the Year Award from OBA. I don't remember what year. I remember going up to him, and he just said, "Keep doing the great work. You're doing the right thing." All the time, he was encouraging.

James Moore 12:28

I interviewed Barbara [Roberts], just as you were either not quite governor or becoming governor. And I said, the next time you see the new governor, here's my advice channel Barbara Roberts and Vic Atiyeh just go.

Kate Brown 12:46

So I think one of the reasons why I mean he remains in our memory, he's obviously the last Republican

James Moore 12:53

The latest. The latest Republican governor. [Brown and Moore laugh]

Kate Brown 12:59

The most recent! The most recent Republican governor. But I think people really liked him, right? He was very, I think, endearing and enduring, but he was endearing people, just regardless of what party or where they were from. He treated

people with respect. He clearly liked people very, very much.

James Moore 13:22

And he lived long enough for people to look back and say, "You know, that was really important."

Kate Brown 13:27

Yes, exactly.

James Moore 13:29

And so that's a tough thing.

Kate Brown 13:31

I think it was his compassion, you know, I would describe it as compassion, right? For people. What's the other thing that I thought of? The other sort of stands out to me. And I had it on my clear... I had a desk cover when I was SOS, and there was an article, and I wasn't able to track it down. I think it might have been Steve Dean, but it was about the time he was driving to the hospital and he had a heart attack, right? But he said, you know, then I can't remember the exact words, and I can't find the article because it's packed away and stuff. But he said, you know, "Put the people of Oregon first. Set aside the politics. You're going to be fine." And for me, that's kind of the ballast, you know, how do we look at stuff? We look at stuff through what we need to do, how we serve the people of Oregon.

James Moore 14:23

When he was on the task Committee, which he was forever, he would go in and he'd say up front, if he decided how he was going to vote on it, usually he was going to vote against whatever the bill was before the committee, he said. And he looked out there, he said, "Well, it's going to pass the committee. And so we can make this the best bill we can possibly make it so when it does pass, and I'm going to vote against it, but when it does pass, it's the strongest we can possibly make it." And he had a pen knife. He would take his pen knife out, he would cut the bill so it was flat in front of him, and he was never the chair of the committee. Because he was always in the minority.

Kate Brown 15:00

And that's the other point.

James Moore 15:01

He would just underline it and work hard and make it the best possible.

Kate Brown 15:05

So that's a different view of being in the minority, right? And I think there are two philosophies about being in the minority. And for me, and I was in the minority for 14 years. In my 17 years in the legislature, it was about, you know, the bill is going to pass. How do you make it better? How do you delay its take off? How do you make the route bumpy? How do you try and excuse the analogy, crash land it, right? But in all, if you know you're going to lose, pick your fights very carefully, and figure out what it is you can accomplish. And I do not believe that Governor Kitzhaber, Governor Roberts, or Governor Kulongoski served any time when they were in the legislature in the minority, and I think that changes your perspective greatly. So I chose as minority leader to figure out how we could impact things, make it better, change the bill. Sometimes you had to, you know, try and stop the bill. But if you knew something was going to become law, I thought your time and energy was much better served figuring out how you make it better, and I know that he did the absolute same thing. I think the other piece is the world has changed in politics, unfortunately, and I think it's more generationally and just sort of the different changing dynamics than the Republicans and but, you know,

I received a lot of criticism as the caucus leader for not being more of a fighter, a blow hard of whatever word you want to use, you know, throwing more bombs. I just didn't feel that that was the most effective way to work in the institution. And I know he totally saw the world that way.

James Moore 17:09

And he had two times when he was the minority leader, when he was relatively close, but he had two times when there were seven and then six Republicans. So as Wally Carson has said, we didn't need party discipline, because it didn't matter at all.

Kate Brown 17:22

And so when I started in the Senate, it was 10-20 we had 10 Democrats, they didn't need us. But I also served in 15-15, and 16-14, when the Republicans controlled... Gene Derfler was the Senate president, and I knew he didn't have a full 16 out of most things.

James Moore 17:44

And Vic had that for two of his times. So here's specific questions, you become in the majority party. Are you going to be the Senate president? You know, what's going to happen? Vic, in 1971, was in a very similar situation. He had become the minority leader in a 14-16 split. But they used to have the coalition. And so the Democrats say we're going to nominate Bud Lent, okay, and the Republicans go in and miffed Vic. He doesn't, he doesn't stay angry, but he remembers everything. They did not nominate him, the minority leader, to be the president of the Senate. And it stuck with him.

Kate Brown 18:36

I did not know this story.

James Moore 18:38

And I talked to the remaining alive people from that Republican Caucus, and they, "I don't know," you know, that kind of thing. So you know, something happened here, guys.

Kate Brown 18:52

So they're not telling you what happened?

James Moore 18:53

Well, they're not telling you, but they're also in their mid and late 80s, so I don't know. Eventually John Burns, Democrat, yes,

Kate Brown 19:03

Yes, but he was a conservative, very conservative, Democrat.

James Moore 19:04

Yeah, but he was acceptable to them. And then he also, when he becomes the president, he's actually really equitable. It's the last time that we really have more or less equal Republicans and Democrats running committees, which was a real common practice. It ended in the house when Bob Smith became the speaker, as Republican, he said, "End."

Kate Brown 19:30
Doesn't surprise me.

James Moore 19:31
Doesn't surprise me at all either.

Kate Brown 19:34
But I will say, and when are you finishing this book and what is your publication deadline?

James Moore 19:41
There is no publication deadline, and I hope next year.

Kate Brown 19:45
So, I think President [Peter] Courtney has worked very hard to bring back more of what I would describe as a co-leadership situation in key areas. I think that's both practical realities of the dynamics of the Senate, but I think that's also the kind of leader that he is. I remember having the conversation with Gene Derfler. I don't know if Gene remembers this, it was prior to redistricting, and I said to him, "Gene, you should appoint, and the house should appoint a bipartisan committee to do the redistricting plan." This would have been like 2000 and to do a bipartisan redistricting plan, and he went, "Ha, ha, ha, ha." Well, you know what happened? We had lawyers who beat him to the courthouse steps, and we won that battle. Yeah, and I think there is certainly the philosophy that a level of bipartisanship makes better policy right for Oregonians.

James Moore 20:52
So, your experience, you just said that Peter Courtney's, it's like his personality is doing this. [Brown: Yes] Is it important? Is that personality important? Or is the party split in the more partisan era that we live in more important in one way or the other?

Kate Brown 21:09
I think Peter's personality has an incredible influence on the functioning of the State Senate. And you also know, I had a leadership battle with the Senate president. It was a little different. We were split. 15-15. I was the caucus leader at the time. Bev Carno, I would describe her as a moderate Republican, was the other caucus leader. The Republicans wanted Peter as Senate president. They didn't want me as Senate president, and the agreement we made was that he would be Senate president.

James Moore 21:49
So, even without having the coalition in effect, you ended up having the coalition. They were co-electing leadership.

Kate Brown 21:53
Yes, but it was a conscientious choice to have the Democrat have the gavel. I thought that was a better choice for the issues and the agenda that I wanted to deliver on, or that the Democrats wanted to deliver on. It was very different than what happened in the house when they were split, and I'm sure they learned the Republicans learned from that. They did co-everything, nothing that anybody opposed moved through the House floor that time around. In our 15-15, split, there was stuff that... It probably wasn't influenced by party, but by philosophy, that moved forward because we didn't have the ultimate, you know, Republicans could kill anything, or Democrats could kill anything. It was more about, you know, can you get the 16 vote? And that's what controlled...

James Moore 22:53

Okay, that's great. So now let's shift so you're coming to the end of your legislative career. Why did you decide to run for state office? I asked, Vic did it, the last Republican that I can think... I was just quickly thinking of it... is Lynn Snodgrass? Would she be the last one who was kind of in leadership and Republican and then ran? She ran for Secretary of State.

Kate Brown 23:18

Did Lynn Lundquist run for something as well statewide?

James Moore 23:22

Sure, but, it's kind of that same era, but I'm looking at this election cycle. If this was 1978, [Ted] Ferrioli, and [Mike] McLane would be running for governor, because that's what Roger Martin and Vic Atiyeh did.

Kate Brown 23:37

Wow. But the political landscape is very different. They were, for lack of a better word, I would describe both Atiyeh and Roger, who I haven't seen in a while, as Tom McCall Republicans, right, as moderate Republicans. I think Ferrioli and McLane wouldn't want that label. I think the state has become more blue over time. Part of it has been really interesting for me. And Governor Atiyeh represented Washington County, right? So when I came in, most of Washington County was red. It is now blue, and we call it the urbanization of the suburbs, right? You've got a coffee shop on every corner, and people want the same amenities in the suburbs that they have in downtown Portland or downtown Beaverton or wherever. So the numbers have changed. So I think it's both philosophical and practical on their part that they're not running.

James Moore 24:46

So why did you decide to run? You've been in for a long time.

Kate Brown 24:48

I wanted to run. Yes, I've been in for 17 years. I was 46 or 47, I had led the Democrats. I mean, I spent eight to 10 years as the caucus leader, that was a lot of time and energy, raising money, setting agendas, doing the work. I was ready for a new challenge, but I was very passionate about a couple of issues. One was the elections issues, the initiative process, and what was happening to the initiative process at the time. There were a lot of conversations happening about the fraud in the initiative process. The other piece was my personal experience as a young legislator running against Judy Bauman's shipwreck and beating her by seven votes and the importance of every vote. The other was my role as caucus leader and negotiating budgets for I'd been in that end of session room for 10 years and figuring out I'd read a book called The price of government. David Osborne and Peter Hutchison, and the ability to take a look at how we deliver services through the audits division were key to me, and then just ready for a new challenge, like, was I going to stay in the Senate and be Peter Courtney's lieutenant, right? Or was I going to, you know, grow my skills and have an opportunity to represent the entire state?

James Moore 26:19

Okay, how long did that decision making process take for you? Did you look at a couple years out? Were you looking at, kind of, what election is near?

Kate Brown 26:27

It was pretty much during the '07 legislative session, I was in Earl [Blumenauer]'s district. I had Earl clearly going to be there a long time, not feeling like Congress was where I felt like I could make a huge difference and ready to move on

and face some new challenges.

James Moore 26:51

Vic's decision making was a little bit more compressed, because he never really thought about the next election, and that's one of his principles. Govern like you're going to lose the next election. Just govern to do what's right. And it paid off for him in every election except the money lost to the struggle. Legislative elections, though, he only had competition once. He thought he was going to lose an election in 1964 and he won it. But as he was driving to the courthouse to see who won, he heard he lost. And he was in his mind saying, "Well, it's been fun," and then he won. So it's fascinating, legislatively, he basically had a romp through most of his elections. Gubernatorially, he had [Brown: a challenging race], challenging races every time.

Kate Brown 27:37

So I think the economics really determined his ability to win. I think it was... '78 was his first election. I think Straub benefited. He had McCall's endorsement. And I think there was some, you know, let's give Straub his due thing. So I think it was sort of the benefit of the doubt. '78 you know, the path was clearly his, and '82 was clearly his.

James Moore 28:09

Yeah, Ted was just funny on that.

Kate Brown 28:13

He says, until [Bill] Sizemore, he was always the one who said, "who lost his gubernatorial election by more votes than any other candidate." Oh, I know that still probably stings to this day at some level for him.

Chris 28:26

We have time for about one more.

Kate Brown 28:28

Okay, so could we just do this every day? [Both laugh]

James Moore 28:32

Exactly, I'll lose my job. So, you were thinking, I imagine you were thinking about running for governor anyway at some point down the line. What do you think the advantage of holding statewide office already was for thinking about the governor? I mean, we traditionally looked at the Secretary of State as it's one of the ways to get to the governor's position. Vic, though, went straight from the legislature, and the Secretary of State thing hasn't worked [Brown interjects: for a lot of people] for a while.

Kate Brown 29:06

Right, it worked for Hatfield, right?

James Moore 29:08

Yep, Hatfield, Barbara, it worked for McCall.

Kate Brown 29:11

So I think for me, the executive experience taught me some very important lessons that have been useful in the

governor's office, and I am the executive experience to me managing an agency, figuring out how you envision a project, our website, our small business advocate, and then implement the project have been extremely useful. If you've got a state division director who is struggling, how do you help him or her to get the best out of their team? That experience has been extremely valuable for me in this role as governor.

James Moore 30:05

Yeah, Vic kind of gets that because he's a real hands on member of the legislature who works with people like that.

Kate Brown 30:11

Yes, but I also would argue that his experience as a businessman, and I know it was a, you know, it was a smaller, family owned business, but it's the same. How do you empower people, right? How do you give them the tools to innovate and deliver state services more effectively to Oregonians? I mean, he would get that.

James Moore 30:33

And you need to know that even when he was governor, his brothers consulted with him on all their hiring decisions, and they were just he... Vic, in effect, forced the brothers to retire, because they were all about that age. But it was just fascinating. The brothers saw that too. That's why he was the president. He had been in the business longer, because the brothers were in World War Two, and then came back. Vic had to take over the business immediately when his dad died in 1944.

Kate Brown 31:01

And then we don't have time for this, but he was also very gutsy, in terms of the revenue issues, you mentioned that the gross receipts tax, the income tax and surcharge, he tried that, remember, in '01, '03, we had the Dirty Dozen. It was 13 numbers. That's how we lost Bruce Starr. That's how Susan Morgan did not get to be the co-chair of Ways and Means, but that was a solution that the legislature came to the table around. It was a Vic Atiyeh style solution.

James Moore 31:36

Yeah, but the tax conversation is completely different.

Kate Brown 31:42

Yes, it totally is.

James Moore 31:43

And he was there as the beginning as that was happening. You know, fighting the Prop 5, five, yeah, well,

Kate Brown 31:47

And I think they did the kicker.

James Moore 31:48

Yeah, the kicker, which, I think I've got it nailed down. It started with a Democrat.

Kate Brown 31:53

I think, no, I think you're absolutely right in that. Okay, Chris is getting nervous. We could do this forever. Thank you so much.

James Moore 32:00
You're welcome, thank you!

Kate Brown 32:01
After the election, I'd love to come out. I know your classes are pretty small at Pacific. It would be fun, though, to do a maybe we can figure out something.

James Moore 32:11
well, I got my parties and elections class, it would be really great. They're gonna be doing presentations, but it'd be good to have one day when they don't do presentations and you know, like you come in.

Kate Brown 32:20
Okay.

James Moore 32:23
Just, you know, don't tell them.

Kate Brown 32:25
It'd be fun.

James Moore 32:26
There we go.

Kate Brown 32:26
It's good to see you.

James Moore 32:27
Good to see you!

Kate Brown 32:27
Thank you so much.

James Moore 32:29
Thanks. Thanks Chris for putting this together.

Kate Brown 32:31
Yes, thank you so much.

Chris 32:33
So when you do have the book ready and the chapter finished, if you use anything from the interview, I would love to

see it.

James Moore 32:38

Oh, definitely. Well, I think what I'm going to end up doing is...