

Gerry Thompson Aug. 2017 interview on Atiyeh, part 2

A short interview of Gerry Thompson on the topic of Oregon Governor Victor Atiyeh, recorded on Aug. 7, 2017. Thompson was Atiyeh's Chief of Staff during most of his governorship. The interviewer, James Moore, was as professor of political science at Pacific University and was Atiyeh's biographer. This is one of several recorded interviews between Moore and Thompson; this specific recording is only 16 minutes long, and appears to have been made on the same day as another, longer recording; see PUA_MS161_063.

The interview includes discussion of: negotiations between Moore and Thompson regarding her personal archive of material relating to the Rajneesh crisis, and whether she might be willing to donate it to the Pacific University Archives; Atiyeh's 1982 gubernatorial re-election victory; Atiyeh's policy plans; missed opportunities for tax reforms; Atiyeh's leadership style; his relationships with advisors; and challenges he faced in balancing personal and professional responsibilities.

Note on the text: This transcript was made through AI in 2025, with some manual corrections. It has been provided in order to facilitate research, but the text does contain errors and inaccuracies. Users should check the transcript against the recording before quoting the speakers.

[Recording begins mid-conversation.]

Gerry Thompson 00:00

Know, I just can't do it. I said, Yeah, I after the book's out, I said, I have no idea what Jim's doing on it, but I said, I just don't feel right about doing it. And I don't think he's even gotten really, I wonder if he's really gonna do it in the end. I don't

James Moore 00:14

know. I don't know. He's in there because a, you know, they've wanted to kill him, yeah, but he's also in there because he was the head reporter for The

Gerry Thompson 00:25

Hardy county thing. Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah. He's got a beautiful ranch over there. Yeah. I can't believe at his age, he's doing that. Oh, I know.

James Moore 00:32

And being the editor of the whole paper, yeah, it's like, well, whatever. I think he's

Gerry Thompson 00:36

just having fun with life. But anyway, you know, he keeps saying he's gonna write it. And I know that. I know that Marla Ray sent him something. I have no idea what she sent him, yeah.

James Moore 00:49

So that brings us to one last point. I do have all of your Rajneesh stuff which is cited as yours. Would you be willing to let me have that be officially scanned for the archive.

Gerry Thompson 01:04

You can have it. What am I going to do with it? Jim, well, you said you wanted it because your parents, my kids keep crying for it, mom. Mom, what are they going to do? Just say they got it. That's all they're going to do. Dave from Meyer always said, I want all your stuff. I said, No, you can't have it, right? He said, Well, put it in your attic and don't tell anybody you got it exactly. But no, I Why would I Okay?

James Moore 01:28

Because I have the whole thing scanned for myself,

Gerry Thompson 01:32

but as long as I know where it is, but I'm gonna visit it, I'm getting told even think about doing anything with it. No way les wants to do it. I've told les that you have all my stuff. Yeah,

James Moore 01:45

good, good, yeah. I would love to get les take on things. And as you read this, actually the first maybe year or two are more heavy towards media coverage stuff. It's things are happening. But, you know, whatever. But when the shit hits the fan, your stuff, is it? Because there is no other stuff

Gerry Thompson 02:09

fans circulating in my office. Well, yeah, if you remember when they first came, it was utopia. Everybody was raving about. They're gonna take this not good land and turn it and all this wonderful.

James Moore 02:20

It's the stuff I'm writing. The economy has fallen apart. And here's these people with money,

Gerry Thompson 02:26

good, oh, they're selling heavy equipment to man they are. Oregon is in love with the Rajneeshees, yeah.

James Moore 02:35

Let me read. Let me take a bit to get up here, the very last line of the 1982 election. Thing. Where's 1982 running for governor? 82 There we go. So we got Vic has just won this amazing victory. Isn't that nice, that Vic wins victories. I All these things, um, oh, the ding dong that you guys didn't hire to be the Yeah, he was already attached to players united. No, yes, no, yes,

Gerry Thompson 03:18

indeed, you mean our drunkard friend, your

James Moore 03:21

drunkard friend? Exactly, Danny. Let me have his little graph. That's nice. Okay, so here we go. So last two paragraphs, Vic Atiyeh won a record breaking victory over Ted Kulongowski. He now had political capital, the backing of the electorate, to push through policies upon which he had run his campaign. A tea wanted to revisit tax reform, going back to ideas to straighten out the property tax system by shifting the tax burden to the income tax He said, He also stressed the need to bolster Oregon's higher education system, and the effort to trumpet Oregon's open arms and newcomers, especially industry. So it's kind of thin. Two big policy pushes would market to your second term. The first would be tax reform, but not quite the way he phrased it in the days after the election. This effort, as with many other attempts by popular governors, McCall, would not succeed. The success in the second diversifying Oregon's economy would open the doors of Oregon to the world economy in ways not understood or anticipated at the time. A TIA would accelerate Oregon's stature in the high tech industry, and he would lead a very public but small tax revolt that would revolutionize Oregon's economy, the unitary tax. And there was that group out in the Central Oregon wearing the reddish colors of the sun, the Rajneeshees, would play a major role in Tia's second term. And they did, and they did, but it's just that's why I was asking you. That sounds really good, the tax stuff, because, you know it he wins, and he says, well, great, let's do what I haven't been able to get through before, and they're not going to pass again, really. So what

Gerry Thompson 05:14

you know in what amazes me, and not only want to get into it again, but what amazes me, is he had all the resources at his fingertips. He could have called in, like Richmond, some of his economic advisors, exactly. You got a brain trust? Yeah? Let's sit down here. Here's what I want to achieve. That's where I would get so itchy, yeah? And there were times when I would almost do it myself and think, no, I'm overstepping my bounds, but he had all the resources.

James Moore 05:43

He had the resources and because he started doing payrolls when he was 21 years old, which is, right, you don't have the

tax one. But the fascinating thing is that's exactly when the income tax became withholding, really. So he's there as that shift is he sees it in his own paychecks all of a sudden, yeah, whoops, wow, it's small. And then he's the guy doing the payroll. So he's seeing this

Gerry Thompson 06:11
stuff, and has a good understanding of

James Moore 06:13
understanding. He's a businessman in downtown Portland. He sees the horrible ravaging of our property tax system because of the Great Depression. Yeah? And then he sees the 25 year process to basically get it onto some kind of footing, which then spawns the property tax rebellion. Because why taxes got so much bigger? Yeah? Well, because we're actually taxing them now. He sees all that, and yet he never says, Oh, I've got political capital. Let's take this thing and shake it by its neck and say, what would be the ideal way in which to run? He really

Gerry Thompson 06:50
could have. He absolutely could have. He carried the credibility, the trust, yeah. I mean, yeah, he had political capital at the time. But my gosh, he had all these other things. People believed in Him. They loved him. Yeah,

James Moore 07:03
and yeah, he had all of that. It's just like, Kitzhaber, you know, going for his fourth term. It's like, we're gonna do it. We're gonna do it. And then, like, well, people don't like a sales tax. It's like, there's other things that's right, and, you know, have behind the scenes stuff like you did in the tax thing. Yeah, got great stuff where you guys have the invite, the kind of big mucky mucks all to show up and put their ideas. And one of them is, I know we'll have Victor O for Oregon, which doesn't get any votes, oddly enough, no, but, you know, but do that stuff, why not

Gerry Thompson 07:45
use what you got? Yes, and they were all there. I mean, he didn't have anybody dragging feet. That's the thing. Amazed me. It wasn't trying to pull something. No, no. People would have jumped Absolutely. They would have sat down and said, Let's go. Let's

James Moore 07:59
go in a mix of industry, the Richmonds of the world, academia.

Gerry Thompson 08:09
They all loved him. Academia loved him. Why go do it? And it's just, I wish we could do it over Yeah, but he wouldn't do it, yeah, just like the interior attacks. I mean, why didn't he jump on that?

James Moore 08:22
Yeah? And then he doesn't. And it's like the most satisfying thing in his entire

Gerry Thompson 08:27
he was thrilled when he picked the phone up and called Morita. He said, We did it, yeah. And then he turns to me and he says, now they really trust me, yeah.

James Moore 08:40
And in that chapter, and looking at it, you know, and coming in first on that makes a difference. That's right, if you come in second, yeah, Oregon, whatever. Oh, now, yeah, I'm getting

Gerry Thompson 08:49
so frustrated. Jim, so frustrated.

James Moore 08:54
Yeah, but you look at that, and there's no way to know, but I one of my first questions to you was, did he have a kitchen cabinet? And he didn't, because it was his own self. And, you know, is there anybody who could have played that role? I

doubt it by the time, because he was set in his ways by the time he became governor. And it worked so well for him in the legislature

Gerry Thompson 09:15

well, and that probably, I think you've maybe he had made a good point. He felt good about what he had done in legislature. He felt good about the relationships he had. He felt good what he had accomplished, and why not keep on doing it? Yeah,

James Moore 09:29

and that's the Richmond that he was a super legislator, yeah? And breaking out of that rich saw that he broke out of that, like with the tax reform thing. But it's hard, you know, he always said, I know more about this in the legislature, it's like they're another branch. You can lobby, that's right, but you're not there.

Gerry Thompson 09:53

I, you know, I even asked myself if I'd been more of a lead Johnson. Mm, hmm. Could I have convinced him? But I don't think I could have. I really don't think I could have. He was, he was either done or he was too focused on what he was doing and enjoying and didn't want to mess it up. Yeah, I just it's too bad because he would have had, wow, yeah, exactly, he literally could have redone the whole tax

James Moore 10:21

plan, yeah, and we needed to redone tax plan since approx 1928

Gerry Thompson 10:27

oh god, I know it. And, you know, Richmond would have been right there deciding, oh, yeah, all the way, yeah. They work so well together, yeah,

James Moore 10:37

and rich then would have been the institution to keep it going. That's right after, after he left home. That's right.

Gerry Thompson 10:44

Well, did lon keep you in stitches? Laughing? Yeah, yeah, good time. Did you meet him at his house? Yeah,

James Moore 10:50

met him at his house. He was it's actually the longest interview I've ever had. Yeah, and lots of things that were going neither here nor there, I know. But yeah, it was, it was very good. Good, very good. Did you meet his wife? Yeah. Briefly, he first told me, I had to sit looking in a particular direction so I wouldn't see her naked in the hallway. Oh, and then afterwards, after a while, she came out, and he said, Well, I have Jim sitting like this. We wouldn't see you naked in the hallway to

Gerry Thompson 11:22

see i He was so close to Victor, yeah, my goodness.

James Moore 11:27

Well, both Vic and Denny talk about Victor as a father, yeah, and yeah, yeah.

Gerry Thompson 11:37

Well, they, you know, Lon was with him. My God, the hours that put lawn put in were incredible. Always right beside it, yeah, the governor,

James Moore 11:46

yeah. One question I asked him Is, so did the governor ever get away from you? I was thinking of that time in Syria, but he wasn't on that trip. No, when I told him,

Gerry Thompson 11:58

yeah, long would not have let that happen. Yeah, and,

James Moore 12:02

and knowing, for instance, that, I mean, his, yes, the governor trusted him and lived with him and did all that stuff. But the governor, there was a there was a wall there, so lawn had no clue, until I told him about the no negotiation. Oh, really? Which, you know, those kinds of things in there, which I would tell my security men that but, but that's, but I don't hear they're there, yeah,

Gerry Thompson 12:28

but I don't think he anticipated on being on any of those trips.

James Moore 12:32

But he was on the one where you got the guts, you designed the pledge, yes. And so that's, that's interesting to me, but lon just talking about being the one because he was the aid security. He wasn't really security, and Victor was so funny. He's like, Well, I don't know why all these people running around. They got motorcades for Goldsmith and all this. It's like, Well, it's because lon said to the Secret Service, how do we do this? And they said, Get motorcades, yeah, and Victor never understood that, but

Gerry Thompson 13:09

no Victor wanted take taxi cabs from the hotel to the White House. Geez, Louise, exactly.

James Moore 13:17

But so lawns there and Victor would get in the car and say, so, how you read the room, that kind of stuff. And Juan said his, his main thing that he say to make the governor smile, was fucking my feeding dog food. I've never heard that one, but I believe Juan would say that too. He said it like that once on tape. And he also said, Said, fornicate. I believe one would lawn was always very conscious around me.

Gerry Thompson 13:49

But I loved law, and I really did, he was just a peach,

James Moore 13:52

yeah, it's amazing giving up your own life.

Gerry Thompson 13:58

And he really did, yeah, he, I mean, about

James Moore 14:00

that, you know, his wife raised

Gerry Thompson 14:03

the kids, Yep, yeah. And, you know, I'll never forget John Williams, who I loved. I loved John Williams, but when I went to him and said, You guys got to give him some relief, yeah, he just can't this. Governor's going to burn him out completely, and he's not going to have any family left. Nope, no money in the budget. I just didn't have any sympathy whatsoever. Of course, this is the same Superintendent of state police that didn't like women being on the force, and we got complaints that exactly other guys were putting rats in their in their lockers and doing other kinds of naughty things. At

James Moore 14:38

least he wasn't flying in alcohol from Oklahoma.

Gerry Thompson 14:46

You know, you can see how things goes the way. Why in Washington, DC, can you imagine all those Jews running around? Oh, yeah, they're all going to do something exactly.

James Moore 14:53

I got power. I got a plane. Yeah, one thing that will be. Question about Victor, because Victor did get away from Lon [Holbrook] a couple of times. One would get a call from the command post saying, well, he left, yeah, he's back with a Christmas tree. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay, great. They got a Christmas tree. But the night that Tom McCall died, Audrey called, and Victor jumped in the car and drove up. He did, yeah,

Gerry Thompson 15:25

and then, did you ever get the story, though, when he was first elected and he was driving into the underground parking at the Capitol Building and he hit a bicyclist?

James Moore 15:32

Oh, no. Oh, well, there you go. I think it

Gerry Thompson 15:36

was in the paper. Uh huh. I'll look for that. I don't know that he, I know he was at the Capitol building, but I'm not sure he had been. I don't remember well enough whether he'd been sworn in yet or not, right? Because

James Moore 15:51

he had his own little weird office for Governor elect and stationary that said Governor, that's, I got a picture of that in there chapter.

Gerry Thompson 16:02

Anyway, he'd been told he should not be driving, and no way he wasn't gonna give up his driving. Right? Bad incident, yeah, made him give it up. Yeah, it's got to be the paper somewhere. Yeah. Oh, look, yeah, sure, it was either pedestrian or bicyclist, but I think it was a bicyclist. Can you imagine the beginning, and then Suzanne, when he was first elected, she would call and send the state police. I'm at Fred Meyer, and there's somebody following me. Oh, I met Byron Franks, and there's somebody following me. Great. Well, Jim, you're really making headway. They're working on it.

James Moore 16:45

Great. Well.

[Recording ends.]