

Tape 4, Side 2

CH This is an interview with Governor Vic Atiyeh. This is Tape 4, Side 2.

Well, I guess I was wondering, Ben Musa was chair of the speaker's committee, and the speaker was Bob Duncan, and I was wondering why you were put onto a committee where they were meant to be loyalists to Bob Duncan.

VA You have to have a certain number of Republicans on a committee, minority, of course. They didn't really expect a great deal out of me. All they were worried about were the majority Democrats. As long as they went along, they've got all the votes they need, and so that was - we understood what it was all about.

CH Was that a surprise to you, or did you expect that there was something like that?

VA No, I wasn't either offended or surprised. It was just, okay, that's the way it is; now I know. Later on, the State and Federal became the committee, but Rules then was the speaker's committee.

CH One interesting thing in terms of the Oregon legislative system compared to other states is that Rules and Resolutions in other legislatures is often the doorman to the floor, and they really guide what goes on, whereas Oregon has strong speaker system. How do you feel about that system?

VA I think it's much better. I get indignant with a small group of people deciding what bills will come before the legislative body, and there have been some suggestions - you know, they worry about the number of bills and stuff, and there ought to be some committee, and I would always say I am violently

opposed to that. But if there ever is one, I want to be chairman of it [laughter].

No, I think that's terrible. I actually - it does take a lot and there's a lot of cost involved, but you've got to give - I think this is an opportunity to be heard. There's a lot of bills that just don't make any sense at all and they're not going to go anywhere, but that doesn't mean that they should - people have a chance to say their piece. I believe, like - our rules are designed, and I believe it very strongly, to allow the majority to prevail. But it also allows the minority to be heard, and I'm perfectly happy with that.

CH How did you feel about Bob Duncan?

VA I like Bob Duncan. I liked him ever since. We got on together extremely well, became good friends. When he was a congressman, I would visit with Bob, I've been out to his house back in Washington, or wherever it was that he lived, but anyway, back in that part of the country. As it turned out, one of my most valued assistants when I was governor worked for Bob Duncan. Pat ~~Annandale~~^{AMADEO} [sp?], she was a Democrat, she was one of my most valued assistants. So it's been a continuous thing. I see Bob from time to time, not too often. Still a friend of mine.

CH He lives down on the coast, doesn't he?

VA Yeah.

CH There were a number of other notable members of that year in the legislature. You had mentioned Monty Montgomery. He was a freshman that year too, isn't that right?

VA Yes.

CH What was your impression of him? You said that he was a

fairly close associate.

VA Yeah. He was a - he may have been more sophisticated - not sophisticated, but more than I. He was involved in Jaycees and [was] very active in that and had gone through - I guess they have campaigns for state president and all that sort of thing, so he was not totally unaccustomed to some of that. A good man. Really, he - he worked at hard at what he did. More light-hearted was Carl Fisher. A very nice guy. We're all still friends today, as I had mentioned earlier.

CH Another one was Stafford Hansel.

VA Stafford Hansel. I have said so many times that he's got his head screwed on real good. I could stand for a whole legislature full of Stafford Hansels. Folks from eastern Oregon, by and large, have got their heads screwed on real good.

CH How do you account for that?

VA Oh, they're closer to their constituency. Actually, I think a lot more people know their elected official there than, let's say, in Multnomah County, where a lot of people never see their elected official, ever. And back there, they all know - you know, I think they're - and I suppose when you get to be farmers or working in among farmers, they're close to where the real world genuinely is. I think that's where it all happens. As a governor, I just loved to go back to central and eastern Oregon. I looked forward to those opportunities. The people out there are more open, they'll tell you if they like you or don't like you. You know, you don't have to wonder about it. I think that's what it all comes from. Now, I relate now to Stanford, I relate now to Mike Thorne, in this case a Democrat. A great guy. He's got his head screwed on really good.

CH Another well known figure that served that term with you, and, of course, later on as well, was Grace Peck.

VA Yes, Gracie.

CH How do you remember her, how do you recall her?

VA Two ways. Gracie was a very compassionate woman. Where most of us really never came face to face with the people, particularly those in human resource, welfare, children's - you know, all of that, Gracie knew. Gracie - you know, she was right there with them. Very wonderful woman. She really was. I liked her an awful lot. Admired her a great deal for that position that she took. Very difficult to debate against, in the sense Gracie was like many others. If you got up to debate against Grace Peck, she took it as if you were debating against her personally, not the issue, and I would never do that. By that I mean I was only going to debate an issue. But there were many others; she wasn't alone in that. But she was among the most notable of them. "If you debate against my bill, you're debating against me personally." "No, Gracie, not you. I still like you. It's that I don't like your bill." So it was hard for people sometimes to make that separation. So I remember both of those things. Of course, the candy thing. [Several words inaudible.] And her desk, I don't know how she - she had barely enough room for her bill books so that she could do some voting. Just candy and flowers all the time. Always back in that - I guess it depends on - if you're looking from the front of the house, she would be in the back right corner.

CH And didn't she always play piano at the end of the term, "Auld Lang Syne" and...?

VA Oh yeah, she'd do that.

CH There was Representative Elfstrom.

VA Bob Elfstrom. Bob was a businessman, kind of quiet, not terribly gregarious. Nice fellow.

CH What about Beulah Hand?

VA It's interesting how you think about these things. I'm thinking to myself, now, Beulah Hand sat over there. I've forgotten what row it would be. Oh, I would just say she was among the legislators that I served with. That's not particularly derogatory; she just was among them. The one I remember as probably being the least effective was Ray Dooley. Now, Ray Dooley would have sat in the very opposite corner from where Grace was. And believe it or not, it was a month, or something like that, after I was in the session the first time that I even knew he was a member of the house of representatives. And I think the zenith of his career, one time he got up and made a motion to move the previous question, closing off debate. That was the zenith of his career. Ray Dooley was just there.

CH Lonergan?

VA Who?

CH Lonergan.

VA Oh. I don't remember very much about him. Was he there at the time?

CH He was there at the time. He must have been another ineffective member [laughter]. What about Al Flegel?

VA Oh, Al. Good old Al. God, do I remember him. He beat me

every time.

CH How so?

VA Well, he was one of the leaders in the - if I got up to debate a bill and he got up to debate against it and the Democrats had a majority, that was the end of the detail.

CH So he was a good debater, then?

VA Well, not particularly. He just had the majority with him. He was good, but he wasn't brilliant. The real brilliant debater of all that I met - now I mention it to you, and I'm trying to think of his name. ^{GEORGE LAUMAN} A lawyer from Yamhill County. Yamhill County? Polk County. Gosh. I have to go back. This is terrible, because he's the only one that I know of that changed votes on the floor by debate.

CH Well, I've marked this down, and when we - eventually, hopefully, we'll come around to his name and we'll - because that would be an interesting - well, how was he able to do that?

VA He was, first of all, very well respected, and he didn't speak too often. He spoke very well and clearly. He'd say, This is how I feel and this is why I feel, and he'd make a good case for it.

CH What about George Van Hoomissen?

VA George was a good legislator, very partisan, very partisan. Some were more partisan than others. George was quite partisan.

CH When you say that, is that not complimentary?

VA Not particularly. Too often partisan in what he did and how

he did it. Nice fellow, though.

CH He had a fairly long career too, didn't he?

VA Yes. And a very nice fellow.

CH Ed Whelan?

VA Ed Whelan, great guy. I remember him as a great, outspoken person for labor. He did his job, he worked hard at it, very fair. And in a general way - I have to say this in the tape. In those days - and I'm not sure when you begin to break off those days. I can't tell you that. It was sort of a gradual transition - if somebody told you I'm with you or they told you I'm against you, you could take that to the bank. You could count. If you count to 31-29, that's as solid as it can get, or whatever count you come up with. Gradually, that changed, and I can recall, as governor, asking Lee Johnson, who was my chief of staff, "How many votes do we have, Lee?" And he'd tell me, "Well, we've got seventeen." I'd say to him, "That's not enough." Because the dependability factor had left. You couldn't really count on it.

CH How do you account for that?

VA I don't know, but that's what happened.

CH And that's an essential quality?

VA Oh, I think so. I think there's no question about it.

CH What about Keith Skelton? He was in that term. I don't know whether that was his first term or not. I think it was.

VA Well, he was there while I was there. Keith was a very

bright guy. I would categorize him as I would George in the sense of being very partisan. Very bright, very personable. I really had very little problem, in my own mind, dealing with legislators. You know, when you get in with a group of anybody and you're with them for a while, we all make our own judgments. I like that person better, for whatever reason, than this person. I think this one's brighter than that person. You know, we do those things. It's just the nature of things when we all get together. The only one I really had any problem with, and this would actually be the second term, actually second and third term in the house, was Jake Bennett. I had an awful time with him; I did personally. Here's a guy that had been recalled from office, he'd got elected to the legislature. I said, How can that happen in this great society of ours? The guy's been recalled from office. He was a cantankerous guy. Oh, he was cantankerous. He was terribly - as a matter of fact, I recall in '63 he got Clarence Barton so mad that Clarence Barton broke the gavel trying to get him to sit down. Actually broke the gavel. Let's see if I can reconstruct it. It had something to do with the cigarette tax. I think that's what it was. There was a debate going on, and I can't recall, but for the sake of example, this will work. The debate went on that it was going to collect, let me say, \$12 million. I don't know if that's the figure. Initially, it had been predicted to get \$15 million. Well, I can recall Jake on the floor. He wanted to know where that \$3 million went. He wanted to know who was going to get that three - I was mad. You know, he's impugning, and I may be assuming it, myself. I was a tax committee member. But, you know, he's saying this three million had been distributed among - who's getting all this \$3 million? Well, the fact was that it wasn't going to be for a full biennium, meaning twenty-four months. It was going to be for, let's say, eighteen months. That's where the three million went. But I was mad at him, besides saying to myself, This guy, he doesn't deserve to be down here, the cantankerous old man. Then began - and I really had problems. I

really had personal problems. Then began the second session; Jake was there. That would be 1963. And finally I said to myself, Now, wait a minute. I know that Jake Bennett doesn't represent his district, but Jake Bennett represents the Jake Bennetts in Oregon, and they're just as entitled to representation as anybody else. I relaxed, and I didn't have any trouble with him anymore [laughter].

CH Well, one person that seems to evoke a lot of comment - and I know this is probably later on. It was in the senate. I'm not sure if you served with him or not - Tom Mahoney.

VA Mahoney, I served with him in the senate, yes. That was another interesting - Tom Mahoney, for what reason I can't tell you, he was - I can recall, though, he was just really mad at me for something. I mean really mad. And he told me, he said, "I'm going to get you." And, you know, if Mahoney tells you "I'm going to get you," he's in a position to get you. Some people say that and they're not in the position to do it. Mahoney was. He didn't scare me, I wasn't intimidated, I just remember it. He was angry.

CH Why was he in a position where he could get...?

VA He was a majority member, and he was an influential member of the - he was part of the upper crust of the senate Democrats, been there a long time, you know, all that stuff, and over the period of time we served together, mellowed, and when he passed away, I was one of those that carried his casket. Strange how those things happen. And it wasn't a matter of me buttering up to him or him to me, we just sort of - for what ever reason, I just got along with him real well. In fact, he's the only one, actually, that had probably the last remaining spittoon in the senate, and he had it, and I'm sure in the early days everybody had it. Incidentally, in those early days you could smoke in the

chambers, had ashtrays at your desk - no way [laughter] - for a long time. That finally went by the board.

CH How did you feel about that?

VA Well, I just sort of went with it. You could go what they call outside the bar in that hall. You could go there.

CH And you could listen to what was going on on the floor?

VA You're right inside the chamber, you're just on the other side of that railing. And there was the Betty Browne Memorial Window, where she had an ashtray, and we'd go back and smoke over there, and, then, pretty soon you couldn't even do that. You just have to live with it, that's all. It's just one of those things. I didn't particularly like it. I understood it. In those days, that's the way it went.

Mahoney - and Bain was another one. Now, Bain and Mahoney didn't like each other. They were both senators from Multnomah County. I can remember that there was some discussion - that would have been, well, while Monty Montgomery was speaker of the house. That would have been '65 or '67. He was speaker two times. They began to talk about building the wings on the capitol building, which they didn't do till later, and Bain is saying, on the floor of the senate, that they ought to name those wings the Mahoney wings because those are the only wings he's going to get. That's what Bain said about Mahoney.

CH And I presume that Tom Mahoney didn't laugh over that.

VA No, he didn't laugh about it.

CH Well, he had very different views from yours, didn't he?

VA Mahoney?

CH Yeah.

VA Yeah, but actually not that much different, strange as it may seem. Maybe that's why we actually got together. He had his own way of doing things. Let's see if I can construct this for you. He got up on the floor one day and said, "This bill passed out of committee with the unanimous vote of the majority of those present." That's the way he started out. "This bill came out of committee with the unanimous vote of the majority of those present." And I'm sitting there thinking, Mahoney, you put that out all by yourself [laughter]. And that's, I'm sure, correct. He was chairman of the Judiciary Committee. People found bills, oh, two or three years later, in the desks they used. I mean, bills that had been sent to the committee, they were in a drawer. They found them.

CH People have characterized him as being similar to sort of an old-time Eastern-type politician.

VA Yeah, probably, probably. He had his own way of doing things, Mahoney did.

CH Well, what were the relations with the senate like during that first term, or maybe even in the first few terms?

VA I remember most vividly the year '63 when Barton was chairman of the house committee and Ben Musa was president of the senate, and it was a very, very cantankerous, very bad relationship. Clarence Barton would have almost a daily press conference, and Ben Musa, and they were going at each other. Being a Republican and not a member of the majority, you know, you just sort of sit and watch all of this. And I can recall very well - we had a caucus, and usually the Democrats would caucus and the Republicans would caucus, but this time we had a joint caucus. It never happened before that nor since then. I

began to realize the problem that Clarence had. I didn't really think about it before that, because Clarence was almost at his wits' end. He didn't use these words, but something like, What are we going to do? almost in desperation. And I'm in the room with the Democrats, along with my Republican colleagues, and all of a sudden I see Kitty Musa sitting there, and the light goes on. There was no way that Clarence Barton could strategize in a caucus because Ben's wife Kitty was a member of the house of representatives, and she's sitting there. Oho, I say to myself. Now I understand what's going on. Then I did have to laugh. Clarence Barton was big on taxes, and again, in those days interim committees were passed by both bodies of the house. We were going to have in interim committee on public health, an interim committee on taxes, whatever the interim committee was, and there was only a few interim committees. The very last bill was the interim committee on tax. Now, the house - Clarence and Ben had been feuding all session long. We're standing there waiting. The senate has the interim tax committee bill. We're waiting for that to come back. Clarence wants that bill. He want's the interim committee on taxation. And the senate got the last word. They passed the bill, but they said a senator had to be chairman [laughter]. I laughed, and I remember standing there right in front of the podium, and I thought, the senate got the last shot on us. So I really wasn't that emotionally involved like Clarence was. Clarence was really emotionally involved in it. I thought, if we have a tax committee fine, if not, okay. I don't care. But they got the last shot. So now he's stuck. It's either a matter of say no way - you know, we can't delay the work, but this is the very last bill. We're waiting to go home. So they got it.

CH What was the basis to their antagonism, their feud?

VA Oh, I have to guess they both had very big egos, and that's probably it.

CH The newspapers referred to that '63 session as the do-nothing legislature. Is that an appropriate description for what went on?

VA I suppose so.

CH We haven't really talked about the other issues, but why was a joint caucus brought together?

VA I think just out of frustration by Clarence Barton.

CH Joint being both Republican and Democrat?

VA That's right. That never happened before - as I say, before or since that time.

CH That seems like an extraordinary thing.

VA Yeah. I think it was just out of sheer desperation.

CH How does the caucus work? What is its nature?

VA Well, obviously the only one I'm privy to are the Republican caucuses, and a minority of a Republican caucus, so you're trying to figure out how you can save your hide, or how they're going to get you, what are they going to do.

CH Were you ever in the majority while you were in there?

VA Never.

CH Even after you left the house and it became Republican, then...

VA I left the house when the house became a majority, and went

to a minority in the senate. Never, ever. As a matter of fact, you may have heard or seen when we were six Republican senators with a photograph in a phone booth. We got a photograph of the six of us in a phone booth. But, you know, you just - well, obviously there are times when major issues are coming up and you're trying to debate those issues, and sometimes - I remember particularly in the senate, McCall had his tax bill, which failed on the first vote. My position was that the house should - the Republican senators should vote for it, and - but I didn't prevail. You know, we follow the caucus. But we went back into caucus again. Those kinds of things. Other than that, it was basically routine about where we're going, what we're doing, or if somebody had something to say. We wouldn't caucus all that much. The Democrats would caucus an awful lot, trying to figure out how they're going to keep us from doing whatever they thought we were going to do to them. Every once in a while there would be some motion on the floor, I remember particularly in the house, and when I go back to our freshman days, we - we, Monty, Carl, Doug, myself, Pat Metke, Metke less than the other four - we'd get up and make some kind of a motion, and taking the Democrats by surprise, quite often we'd win. Quite often we'd win. But, then, all of a sudden they'd call recess and then they'd go into caucus, and then we'd get steamrollered. Now, wait a minute, guys, you don't understand what's going on here. And back they'd come and everything we - so they would have caucuses to kind of protect themselves from us Republicans. But that's fundamentally it. It would be an issue or some parliamentary thing or one thing or another, and we'd call for a - let's regroup, guys, and see where we are.

CH Your first term in the house, Walter Pearson was president of the senate. Did you encounter him at all, or did you have much to do with him?

VA I've always had an attitude as I'm an elected - I'm just as

important as anybody else. I've got the same right to speak, I have the same - I mean, I wasn't intimidated by anybody. There is a press - I saw a clipping, here, not too...

[End of Tape 4, Side 2]