

Gerry Frank Interview on Governor Vic Atiyeh

An interview of Gerry Frank on the topic of Oregon Governor Vic Atiyeh, recorded on August 17, 2015. Frank was a former businessman (an heir to Portland's Meier and Frank department store) who served as Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield's Chief of Staff. The interviewer, James Moore, was as professor of political science at Pacific University and was Atiyeh's biographer.

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.

James Moore 0:00

Into the archives at Pacific. I take it and cut it up, you know, for whatever topics that I need. So a number of questions for you. Start with World War Two.

Were you in the -- Geez Louise, there's my questions -- Were you in the army specialized training program? Were you with Richard and Ed [Atiyeh]?

Gerry Frank 0:27

I was -- I was not, okay. It was a nationwide program, okay? I was not, but I was a part of it, and I did my ASTP at Loyola University in Los Angeles, okay, and then I went overseas with the Third Army, with General Patton's organization,

James Moore 0:54

okay, so about the same time that they did, yes, well, it sounds like so look World War Two. Let's move beyond that. Um, when did you first start working with hanging out with Mark Hatfield,

Gerry Frank 1:14

well, when we were building the store in Salem, my friends in Portland said there is somebody in Salem who you should get to know. And he is a professor at Willamette. His name is Mark Hatfield, and how the first meeting went the Oregonian did a feature on the most eligible bachelors in Oregon, and Mark was one of them, and I was one of them, and the photographer suggested that we meet at my house so he could get a picture of both of us, and he did, and did get the picture, and that's how I first met Mark, and he was a great sidewalk superintendent. He would go by watching the progress of the store, and was very much interested in the features of the store. And that was in 1955 I it about that time he was interested in running for state wide office, and I worked with him on Secretary of State, and then his campaigns for governor and US senator, most of which I chaired,

James Moore 3:04

yeah, yeah. Now, did you work for him as governor, or was your first during

Gerry Frank 3:08

his time as governor, he appointed me the chair of the Oregon Economic Development Department, okay? And I chaired that commission of some very high powered people around the state, we had great success in creating 186,000 new jobs,

but I continued

with my own business and running Mar and Frank. Then in 1965 when Mar and Frank was sold, a disaster to the May Company, which my family did not want, but the Meyer family did. I left the store and Mark asked me to go back to

Washington because he had just been elected senator. And I went back for his first term as \$1 a year man, and then became his chief of staff, yeah, and I left in

1992 okay,

James Moore 4:29

so virtually the whole time that he was there, yeah, when he was governor, and you're doing economic development, and you know, keeping an eye on things, did you run into the young Vick Tia who was newly elected in 58

Gerry Frank 4:45

Yes, I did. Of course. I knew the Atiyeh family, having been in the retail business. We sold rugs too, and I knew the very fine organization. And. That was Tia brothers. Then I also ran across Vic with Boy Scouts. I chaired the cascade Area Council at one time and worked closely with Vic on various scouting programs. He was a devoted Boy Scout, very supportive of the activities, so I did get to know him that way also.

James Moore 5:31

Okay, did you get any silver beaver awards or anything like that? I did. Okay, good. I was just chasing that down because Vic remembered the silver beaver. And then going through the documents, it's like he also got the silver antelope for the regional things. He said that was a much rarer thing, and it is. It's a much rarer thing. Yeah. So when Vic was first in office, and Hatfield was basically first there, as well as governor. There was a group of the young legislators, the Young Turks, and they eventually made mark an honorary member. We actually had the plaque that has all that.

Were you aware of that group?

Gerry Frank 6:17

Yes, uh huh. I knew practically all of them, they were a very

bright, motivated,

positive group of people who were on the right track for good things for Oregon, something that we are missing tragically today. What

James Moore 6:45

was it that that brought them together? Was it business? Background? Was it enthusiasm? Was it age? Love of state. Love of state really drew them all together. Okay, that's wonderful. I um Vic runs for governor in 74 then again in 78 were you paying attention to those races? Other than being on, you know, in

Gerry Frank 7:14

we watched very carefully. We didn't get involved in them, but we've watched it very carefully, and of course, Mark was very fond of Vic and supported him strongly.

James Moore 7:30

When Vic wins election, one of the first big things he has to face, and then voluntarily faces, is Northwest energy. So there was the issues of the nuclear power plants, but most importantly, putting together the Northwest Power Planning Council, which is a cooperative effort with all you in Washington

and states to work

things here. What do you remember about that process? Well,

Gerry Frank 8:00

I remember that we were very much interested in it. We felt it was a very positive thing. We supported what Vic was doing. And as an anecdote, the two people who were running it, staff people I uh,

Mark Walker and

Unknown Speaker 8:32
Steve,

Gerry Frank 8:35
I'll tell you in a minute. Uh,

our

former staff members. Oh, okay,

James Moore 8:44
that's wonderful. That's wonderful.

So how much did you guys get involved in DC, in getting the states to work together? The way, the way I've heard it, is the congressional delegations, especially the staffers, were really on board. They knew each other very much, but there were problems with Governor Spellman in Washington. Were you involved in negotiating with him or working with no

Gerry Frank 9:12
Washington other staff? People were right. Okay, I was not personally involved with it. Okay, okay.

James Moore 9:22
Another thing that comes up later on is the Columbia Gorge scenic area, and it's been described to me as the process. I mean, it was a hard process, but it was a process that was made a little easier because a lot of the same people had been involved with the Northwest Power planning negotiations were there,

Gerry Frank 9:44
but the real impetus there was Nancy Russell, right, right, and we worked very closely with her, yeah, her husband was a school mate of mine, and I knew Nancy very well, and she was a very person. Assistant individual.

James Moore 10:02
Now, did she was she had the champion of that idea? Did she generate the idea

he was the champion. She was the champion of it? Yes. And

looking at it, I mean, this is, this is one of Senator Hatfield's big things that he was pushing on. Did he What was the other rest of the Oregon delegation doing with that? Or was it just

Gerry Frank 10:28
Well, they were supportive that Mark took the leadership.

James Moore 10:31
Mark took the leadership on it, okay, and in terms of coordinating, how much were you coordinating back with Governor at his office, or were you basically saying, I gotta do the DC part. You've got to do this part.

Gerry Frank 10:46
Our staff people were very much involved with the Atiyeh people.

James Moore 10:51
Okay, okay, putting that all together, okay, towards the end of a Tia's time in office, 8485 86 there's the first effort of doing something about Opal Creek, and it's all tied up in the fact that Vick's in laws owned Opal Creek, so He was getting pressure from one of his nephews. It's been described by staffers that Vic wasn't lying, but Vic was probably

telling different things to different people, as he was torn in all of this. Were you involved? Talking about Opal creek that early

Gerry Frank 11:38

our staff people were involved. I personally was not that my job as Chief of Staff was the direction, right, our people, what they were doing, right? I did not get involved in the details of it. I didn't have the time, and I didn't feel that was my job. Yeah,

James Moore 11:59

absolutely, absolutely. And then it comes together 10 years later, right as his Hatfield is leaving office. So in Vic's time in office, he's elected in 78 so 79 to 87 and it's been described as the first six months of 79

Oregon's budget was as strong as it ever had been.

They gave back a lot of money. They were really worried about Proposition 13, the property tax, things that had passed in California. There were majors in Oregon, and things like that. And then by about September, Paul Volcker raised interest rates. And by the end of 79 interest rates had gone up 40% and so Vic from then, and basically till the end of his term, had to govern in this economic disaster area. The one of the big things is the collapse of the timber industry during that time from its preeminent role to this much smaller role. And one of the things that's been described to me is that there were, it was hard for the state people to talk to the Reagan people who were running the national forests, you know, the BLM Forest Service, that kind of thing was your office involved in trying to get that conversation to happen, very much so

Gerry Frank 13:25

Mark was very knowledgeable, very supportive. And yes, we were. It could not have been done without our office and Mark's personal involvement.

James Moore 13:40

And did you find other members of the delegation playing a role, or was this another time when Mark was the lead? Mark was the lead, was the lead player. Okay,

you know, it's fascinating to me, because, as I'm doing this book, memories are memories, and so it's my job to get the memories and to figure out, okay, when did that actually happen? But so many people see that 82 collapse of the timber industry, and they say it was the spotted owl, but the spotted owl's not until three years later. So it's just it's one of the really fascinating thing to really explore and look at. Another big thing that happened during the Reagan years. Reagan was cutting back on the federal payments, block grants and things like that, just as the states across the country were in this huge economic downturn, and to put it mildly, this tick tock vicked off, was your office involved in trying to get David Stockman to see the light or anything absolutely

Gerry Frank 14:39

personally involved. Uh huh. The name of the other party with the Northwest par Planning Council is Steve crow. Steve G, R, O, W, right,

James Moore 14:51

right. So what did you do? What personal involvement with the Reagan administration trying to get the. The federalism ideas changed. Mark

Gerry Frank 15:03

was spending hours days with David Stockman and others on this court, okay, and I think it's fair to say in all of this that vickate was far more appreciated later for what he did than during the time that that he was not an attention getter, and there were many other things that were going on where he was certainly a valuable source, but he was not somebody on the front scenes, yeah, yeah. And it was only later as he grew older and

some who

succeeded him

were not as strong as they might be, and people then began To appreciate what a smart quality forceful forward looking person, Vic was, yeah,

James Moore 16:24

yeah. And he also began, as you implied there, he also began to actually come out and say, we did this, right? A working title for the book right now is something that Vic told me, and I had to track down who it was, because he wouldn't tell me. Jill Thorne on Neil Goldschmidt staff, about six months after Neil had taken office, saw Vic and said to him, this job is a lot tougher than he made it look.

Gerry Frank 16:54

It was very sad thing that the relationship between Neil and Vic was at the end, was a very unpleasant one, yeah, yeah. He didn't want to be anywhere where a deal was, yeah, absolutely. And being a close friend of both of them, I found that extremely difficult, yeah, yeah.

James Moore 17:21

And it was fraught. A lot of, I mean, from when Neil was the mayor of Portland, they just

had the only butted heads on so many

Gerry Frank 17:32

things. There was no love lost. Yeah,

James Moore 17:35

absolutely, absolutely,

in terms of a chapter, actually, that I'm just finishing up right now is the rajneeshees. And the Vic side of it has never, ever been told which issue the rajneeshees, oh, the cult.

And the key to that is

Gerry Thompson, who has the boxes, so I think I have enough leverage to get them from her now, but in the research that I've done, Senator Hatfield wrote a letter to the Immigration and Naturalization Service in May of 1982 Asking them to specifically really look into the Raj nishi's, look at their bank accounts, all that kind of stuff. Do you remember where that came from?

Gerry Frank 18:31

Where the impetus came? Yeah, where the impetus came from? Or it came from the senator himself, okay, he was very concerned about that. Felt it was very dangerous, and they hated him, and they did all kinds of things during that period. As far as Mark was concerned, in

nasty remarks,

threats, it was a very unpleasant relationship,

James Moore 19:08

and as you watched that develop, do you think that that letter from Senator Hatfield got the Immigration and Naturalization people and the IRS to do things more, or were they already kind of doing things

Gerry Frank 19:19

anyway? I have no way of knowing, no way of knowing. Yeah,

James Moore 19:23

it's the public record versus what was really happening. How do you reconcile that during the time that Vic was governor and then the about the decade before that, Oregon became known for innovative bills, the bottle bill, the beach bill, those kinds of things. The land use legislation becomes fascinating because there's a series of hearings about whether or not there should be national land use legislation in the or basically early to mid 70s. Do you remember that?

Gerry Frank 19:59

Well. Yes, I remember that because we were involved with that. And many of the things that you mentioned, there were things that Tom McCall was involved in, and he was a great publicity seeker, and was very different from Vic, who let the deeds speak for themselves. Tom wanted to take the credit for it, yeah. So there was a very different feeling between all three of them, between Vic, Mark and Tom. And the relationship between Tom and Mark was a very interesting one, because on the surface, it was always a congenial one. Underneath the surface, they couldn't stand each other. Vic was or Tom was very jealous of Mark, and Mark was very upset, because Tom would say one thing publicly and something else privately. Right?

James Moore 21:23

Talking to some staffers, they had the same problem. That's fascinating to me, because when you look back in history, there's kind of we have the three big liberal, moderate Republicans. So we've got Mark, more of the moderate side, Packwood. I think you can say liberal and and McCall liberal. And now we're putting, I'm going to try to put Atiyeh so people mentioned him in there as well. More concern, more of the moderate, leading to conservative than those for Republicans now they're all way off to the side. You know, Mark said when he retired, he wouldn't be able to win a primary, and Vic wouldn't be able to win a primary at all. Right, these days, I found out that when Vic was first elected to the House Tom McCall, who lived just up the hill, would was a frequent visitor came in, coming over for dinner. A frequent visitor come over to the Atiyeh house and have dinner, really, yeah, and then later, they develop a relationship that sounds much like the one between Mark and Tom, the one between Vic and Tom has the same sets of weird dynamics going on.

Gerry Frank 22:46

You might go back to when Dolores and Vic were in the governor's office. They lived in a very modest home, and I can remember being invited there many times for one thing or another, and being appalled at what the state of Oregon was doing for our governor, and later on,

when I

uh, let's see what year it was when Neil became governor.

He then asked me

and the way down Frisbee to raise funds for our governor's home, which we did, yeah. And I did that because I was, again, so appalled at the way the TIA family and Mark Yeah, the quarters that they lived in,

James Moore 23:59

yeah, yeah, yeah, a funny story, because Dolores was the also, she was on her own to be the hostess there. She had, she was, like, bringing the daughters of friends to help out, kind of thing. But shortly after they they moved in there, because it had been repaid and the carpet had been refurbished and things, someone came in and said, Oh, is the carpet from Atiyeh brothers and Dolores said, Oh, no, the state could never afford that, which is classic. She was so happy to get home after eight years, so happy. Tell me more about the land use idea at the national level, it does, it doesn't eventually take off. But this is a, this is a unique period in time when we're, I mean, we've just now got fresh the EPA, and you all these kind of Nixon era environmental things are coming through. Do you think that the National. Little land use idea had a chance at the time, or was it more didn't have

Gerry Frank 25:05

a chance without Mark Hatfield, okay,

James Moore 25:09

so he's got as far as it did because he was there pushing it.

Okay, okay.

You we talked about a little bit so far. I'd like to hear your impressions of the management styles of the different governors.

Gerry Frank 25:32

Okay,

Tom McCall was

greatly aided by a very good staff, and

he himself was not a good manager. Vic

was a good manager, and

the folks who he selected

were able to follow through because of his direction.

Mark Hatfield

did not like details. Was not interested in the day to day operation of the office was mainly concerned with projects and programs, and he never hired or fired anybody in his life. That was my job, and I'm not bragging about it, but during his first term, when I was not as steep as staff, the office was in great disarray, and it was my job to bring it back with my own type of management, which he gave me full control to do, which my prior experience in managing Martin Frank came in very happily. I was a very detailed manager. Mark was anything but, yeah, yeah.

James Moore 27:25

Did you see anything like, you know, any observations on Bob Straub or Neil or Barbara? Yes,

Gerry Frank 27:38

Bob Straub was a very good businessman, very poor staff, which was difficult for him.

The black lady,

not black in color, but who has become the black lady who was Patricia? Patricia, yeah,

was a bitch,

and she put up a wall between the public and Barbara Roberts, right?

I have no respect for

Neil was an incredible case, absolutely brilliant mind,

very forward thinking,

an idea, not a minute, but a second, extremely difficult to work with, because he would have all of these conceptual ideas and then leave it to staff to follow up. And if it hadn't been for Tom Emerson, who you can't say enough good

things about Neil's, time would have been very different. Yeah,

James Moore 29:16

yeah. I interviewed Dan Simmons, who was running all sorts of state things at that point. And he said, oftentimes he would be the only one saying, so this is what I'm hearing that you want us to do in those meetings with Neil, because it's just hard to coalesce. How do you get this to an action? Very difficult. Yeah. Yeah. Fascinating. Fascinating. Towards the well. Vic deals with it a lot through his governorship of ideas for tax reform, just as every governor seems to deal with it, and he had about as much luck with it as every other governor. But eventually, by the by the time he gets to about 1985 He says, okay, so real tax reform is going to involve a sales tax as part of a package with this, that or the other. What did you see with those tax ideas? I mean, Hatfield had, you know, reforming tax ideas. Everybody's had reforming tax ideas. I talked to Tony van Lee, and he said, You know, when you look at, when you look at vix Barbara's, and who else did he have it there? I think John gave it a shot. But, you know, basically, I wrote the original plan. They're just using the same plan. But what, what did you see when you were looking at those tax reform ideas and the political reality of them. Well,

Gerry Frank 30:45

the essence was that what was being proposed was no different, basically, than what had been successful in other states. And there was no reason in the world why Oregon should be any different? The problem was that the politicians were so afraid of the Union influence that they didn't accept the sales tax proposals, when, in truth, I was around the state a great deal, and in talking with the audiences, when you would talk about the tax situation, and when you would explain What a sales tax would do that it would eliminate medicine

and food

and other things, and that it couldn't be the rate couldn't be raised without a vote of the people, and where the leadership would be strong didn't have to be a politician. It could be strong, a strong person in the business sector, when all these factors were considered, most people would accept a sales tax but that never came about, yeah, because the unions had the politicians tied around their finger. Yeah, it's

James Moore 32:31

fascinating at the time, not I mean, it was slightly before Vic became governor, and then in the early parts, how the political parties in Oregon would switch. Now, Republicans are in favor of it, then they're against it. Democrats against. Wally Carson talks about being in the Senate and going to meet some colleagues in Washington State, where at that point, the parties were exactly the opposite on income tax and sales tax. And Wally said, I never knew the waters of the Columbia were so powerful. Now, change it. You bring up an interesting thing. You know, a lot of other you know, other states have done this successfully. What sense did you get about Oregon politicians paying attention to what was going on in the rest of the country? We're leading the country in things like beach, build bottle, build land use. But then there's things like taxes, where other states clearly have a more successful system.

Gerry Frank 33:25

Mark was not interested. Tom McCall didn't understand it. Barbara Roberts didn't either. Neil did, but he was so involved with so many other things. He there was not the time. Bob Straub probably understood it better than anybody. Yeah, we didn't have the staff to bring it about, to

James Moore 33:54

bring it about, yeah,

looking at people like Bob Straub and Vic,

very different governorships, but they both have that strong business sense, no question. And you come from that background as well. A lot of people now, well, they've done it for 30 years. Talk about, we need to run government like a business. And Vic discovered you can't run government like a business, but a business understanding of budgets and things like that is an amazing thing. Did you see, I know Vic did. Did you see Bob Straub use that business side of him when he was being well,

Gerry Frank 34:35

he tried to, but it's impossible for the number one person to do it by himself. He's got to have people around him. So the staff just Straub had his poor staff, as I can remember, for anybody, yeah, so it was not deceivable for him to do it, yeah, which is very sad. I love Bob Straub. He. He was a wonderful man, and he was very smart, good businessman, but he was not well served by the people around him, and his speech impediment was a real problem. Yeah, yeah. I

James Moore 35:18

mean, this brings up another issue, picking staff.

You've been involved in picking staff. You were picked by Mark

transitions into governorship, so Vic had Travis cross and Lynn Newberry as His people doing that. How much of that picking staff is the newly elected person, and how much of it is the transition team? In your experience?

Gerry Frank 35:48

Oh, it's critically all the individual okay not to transition. There has to be a chemistry, yeah, between the staffer and the office holder, yeah, very important decision. Yeah,

James Moore 36:08

it's a very important decision. And

Gerry Frank 36:10

when people come in, they all troop in and out of this office,

those who

have run or thinking about running, and

I say to all of them, I said,

you have to have two things.

You got to have a strong financial base where you're going to get into trouble. And secondly, you've got to pick somebody at your side who you thoroughly trust, and who trusts you and understands you,

that person

can go ahead, yeah, and do things. Gerry. Pause. You here. I I want to get

there. I'm sure you see all the pictures of the people. Oh,

James Moore 37:06

yeah, yeah, no, it's really fun. Really, really fun. One thing I've discovered, and all this because Vic gave all his stuff to Pacific University.

Boy, you guys get a lot of plaques and things.

And I then, when was checking things out at the Washington County Historical Society had anything on Vic. And the main things I have is he gave them, like, 150 plaques, some of which told me things that I didn't know about it. Yeah, so that's it's important that I look at all of them. But it's just amazing. Just amazing. So for you, did you watch the Lee Johnson Vic saga, the first two years of his governorship?

Gerry Frank 37:53

Well, I watched it from a distance, because

Lee was a good friend of mine. Yeah.

So, yes, I did watch it. I didn't become involved in it, but I thought it was a fascinating diversion, yeah, how

James Moore 38:11

quickly did you get a sense that it wasn't really going to work out?

Gerry Frank 38:16

Very quickly, very quickly. Okay, there are very different human beings, yeah, yeah,

James Moore 38:23

yeah, that was just amazing. And I was never able to peg Vic down. I mean, his first choice was always Gerry, his second choice was Lynn Newbury. And both of them would have been just fantastic, and but Lee is somewhere down here. So it's just fascinating. So what happened to those interim people? Who did you go through? And we'll probably never know that, but

Gerry Frank 38:55

personalities were so different. Yeah, I

a jury

is a good administrator. She, she was a strong woman.

He continues to be, he continues to be, yeah,

I like her a lot.

James Moore 39:19

Yeah, she's, I mean, you're talking about personalities, and Vic hired her. He also hired his 1978 campaign manager, Carol Whitney. They, to this day, really don't know why they were hired, because Vic, who, like he had, he trusted his gut for, I'm going to win the election. I'll win election. But when, when he felt that, it gelled with a person, he just, yeah, boom, it was there.

And a mystery if you're on the other side of

Gerry Frank 39:50

it, but you can go through the list

of governors of.

That House of Representatives, members, us, senators, and you could the connection between the strength of the administrator in each case is so strong that you can see from who it was, whether or not that person was going to be successful.

It was the key ingredient, key ingredient,

James Moore 40:35

that's good. That's good. So any last things about Vic is Governor. Yeah,

Gerry Frank 40:45

as we said before that, here was a man who was much more appreciated after than during. And if I were writing the book, that's an area that I would emphasize, yeah, absolutely, because it's very fascinating,

James Moore 41:05
it's absolutely yeah.

It's funny to learn that at Dorchester, they would do skits based on that, yeah, we can't win the governorship. So what do we do when they do things and there'd be Vic sitting in a chair, yep, that kind of thing. One last it just occurred to me, as we're talking about that importance, after Vic lost in 74 to Straub, and he lost by a lot. It's the worst defeat for a governor candidate since 1950 but he was thrilled he had met people. I found out from his son that he had a Watergate discount. So I lost by a lot, but actually I didn't lose by as much because Watergate drove it, which is probably absolutely accurate. But at that point, he stepped into a real leadership role statewide in the Republican Party. He was bringing Reagan here and Ford here and all that.

Gerry Frank 42:05
But my friend, the Republican Party then, was very different, yeah,

it was in succeeding years, yeah.

James Moore 42:16
So, yeah, Walter hust is beginning to show up as kind of a delegate, yeah. I mean, you

Gerry Frank 42:21
can't really discuss the Republican Party in terms of what it was, what it became, and what it is, okay, totally different.
Yeah,

James Moore 42:35
at the time, did you get a sense that Vic was playing this kind of statewide leadership role in the party, no, okay, because it shows up. And yet, in 78 when he runs again, people are looking at it as McCall's race, whenever the heck he gets in, and Vic is kind of seen as a third. So it's just fascinating. Very

Gerry Frank 42:59
different. Very, very different.

Okay, good. Thank you very much. Is that the kind of thing you want?

James Moore 43:04
Yeah, exactly, exactly you got anything else you want to say, go for it. Nope, yeah. Well, this is wonderful, very

Gerry Frank 43:11
important questions.

James Moore 43:12
Thank you very much.

Gerry Frank 43:16
There the OH.