

Tape 7, Side 1

CH This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh in his office in downtown Portland, Oregon. The interviewer, for the Oregon Historical Society, is Clark Hansen. The date is 12/11/92, and this is Tape 7, Side 1.

I notice that the legislature passed laws to allow for oil exploration on the coast, and since then, more recently, that's become more controversial. Do you remember the discussion at the time about that issue?

VA I don't remember that, although there again, you see, they're making a distinction between exploring and drilling and mining, and this was really for exploration. I never really thought it was much of an issue because all my understanding was it really isn't much likely oil being off the Oregon coast. And to my mind, go ahead and explore it and find out if what we think is correct, is correct, and that puts it all to sleep instead of worrying about it all this time. But, no, I don't recall that. There was something about mining the black sand, or the sand at the mouth of the Columbia River, because there was supposed to be some value to all this stuff washing down, but I don't think anything came of that either.

CH There was a bill to allow International Paper Company to develop a paper plant on the coast, and also laws were passed to control agricultural picketing while perishable crops are being harvested. Was that an issue at all in Washington County, where you were representing them? Did you have farmers that approached you about this situation?

VA Oh, I'm sure I did. I'm trying to think of timing. Maybe even later than that, because there was this legislation to allow strikes during the harvest, but I think that was later, much later. I think I was in the senate by the time that came up, and

I remember that's the first time I ever met Vera Katz. She was up here with Cesar Chavez lobbying for this. Now, that was very much of an issue with the farmers; that is, striking during the crop season. I don't really remember that too much in regard to the picketing thing, but I'd have to guess my farmer friends weren't very happy with it.

CH Did you meet Cesar Chavez or speak with him?

VA I don't recall meeting him, no.

CH The Oregon Technical Institute in Klamath Falls was giving money to start. That was Harry Boivin's project, wasn't it?

VA Yeah.

CH How did you feel about that?

VA I don't really remember that too much. I would say, if I were going to apply my general feelings, I would have been supportive of it. I've been supportive of education and institutions of education, including private colleges and universities.

CH There were some people that Klamath Falls really wasn't an appropriate setting for a technical institute, that it would have been better having it somewhere else.

VA There's always arguments on all sides, but I don't recall. I really don't.

CH Is there anything else you can tell me about your learning the ropes, the trial and error period that you went through in your first sessions in the legislature? Did you have any kind of mentors or people that helped you through the hoops in learning

the process?

VA No. I think the only thing was this young Turk bunch. You know, we'd usually have dinner together, and we'd share our experiences, and you kind of learned almost by absorption. Any problems that they would have had or I would have had and - but we never discussed it as that kind of a subject. You just sort of osmosis it all, all developed. Answering your question directly, no. You learn by getting beat up. Al Flegel beat me up. Every time, I knew, he got on his feet, I'm dead in the water because he's going to get the votes and I won't. So you learn the strength of a majority. You learn how difficult it is - we talked about Grace Peck, and she wasn't the only one - that when you're debating some people, they think you're debating them personally rather than the bill. Or how you vote, you voted against me, not the bill, that kind of thing. But no, I didn't have someone to take me by the hand and lead me through the process, not at all. I just sort of did it.

CH How would you summarize the '61 session? Was it...?

VA Oh, it was sort of a peaceful session, as I recall. Nothing earth shattering.

CH You ran, then, in 1962 for another term. Why at this point were you running again? Was it pretty much the same reason as before?

VA Yes. I could see I could get some things done in committees. Remember, I told you earlier that you're going to get beat up on the floor on bills, but you surely could make bills better, or maybe even debate them in committee enough to keep them there.

CH You were on an interim tax committee then, between the

sessions?

VA Yeah.

CH Any other interim committees that you were on?

VA No. The only other interim committee that I remember, and we'll get to it, is out of the 1965 session, and that was the Interim Committee on Public Health.

CH Was there anything remarkable about your election in 1962, either the primary or the general election?

VA No. I don't remember when this fellow Bud ran, Bud Kyle [~~SP~~]. I don't recall which session that was. It might have been that one, I don't recall.

CH It was while you were in the house, though?

VA While I was in the house, right. That would have been the only time I would have really recalled even who my opponent was at this point in time.

CH When you're trying to make up a statement for the Voters' Pamphlet, what things do you consider, and what did you do personally?

VA Well, that's a good question in the sense that the Voters' Pamphlet politically is a very valuable tool, very - much more than many politicians think it is. Maybe they do now recognize it, but in those days, there wasn't that much recognition of the value of it. And so we took it very seriously, always took it very seriously in all the campaigns that I've run. And there you just talk about your experience, what experience you've had, the kinds of things that you've done, the things that you look

forward to doing.

CH How was that election for the Republican party in 1962?

VA Well, I can't remember, except that I know I was in the minority all the time I was there.

CH You got back onto Food and Dairy, which you've talked a little bit about, and about the balloon bread bill and milk; and also on Rules and Resolutions, which was the speaker's committee then, too, in 1963?

VA Yes.

CH And, then, also on Taxation, of course. Was there any legislation that came out of those committees that you worked on, any particular issues that they dealt with?

VA At this stage, I can't remember. You know, I remember the timber tax bill, which passed in '61, and we talked about that.

CH That was the House Bill 14?

VA Yes. I'm laughing because we took a trip somewhere, and they made sure that my room was 14. They gave me room 14.

The balloon bread thing was really interesting. I did mention about the only time I got offered a trade, but we didn't get into the subject itself. I didn't think about balloon bread. I'm not a shopper in the grocery store, and balloon bread, what the devil is balloon bread. There was a law that related to it, and you had to do some kind of a labeling, if I recall, because it looked like a larger loaf of bread, but it would be only one pound, and that's where the balloon part of it came. That's why they call it balloon bread. I can remember in room 50, which is our large hearing room, which is no longer used as a hearing room

- I don't think it is - but we were sitting there, kind of up on a stage-like deal, and here was this long table in front of us with bread, just different bread across this whole table. And it was the issue - the Department of Ag was saying, look, we cannot - the way the law is written now, we cannot administer this law. We're going to lose in court every time. And as you recall, I told you they said, you know, either repeal it or fix it, but don't leave it there on the books, because it's on the books, we have to do it by law, but we're going to lose every time. So our decision was, do we want to repeal it or do we want to fix it. So that was the debate, should we fix it, and we decided, of course, to fix it.

CH And how did you fix it?

VA I don't remember, but whatever we did, it works.

CH Did that have anything to do with nutritional contents?

VA No, it was just a matter of consumer - it was a kind of a consumer thing. Let the consumer know what they were getting, but they weren't getting - you know, a loaf that might be fifteen inches long is the same loaf as a twelve-inch loaf. They're both one pound. They're not getting any more bread, and they shouldn't have to pay for more bread. It's a consumer legislation, is what it was.

CH The senate in that term killed the new constitution that had been proposed, and in fact they had been working on that for some time, hadn't they?

VA Blue-ribbon committee. You've got to have a blue-ribbon committee, and it was a blue-ribbon committee, and that's fairly typical. You know, they talk, and there's been talk since, not only Oregon's constitution, but our national constitution.

Nobody really wants to get into it, and that's mostly because there's so much body of law that relates to the constitution as written, and, obviously, if you're going to rewrite the thing, you change all the ground rules on the law, and there's always somebody that's got some particular part of the constitution they like as it is, they don't want anybody changing it, so it's just - there's so many points of potential disagreement that the chance for any constitutional reform taking place just doesn't exist. Now, when I say that, I mean in a wholesale form. We've changed our constitution a little here and a little there and a little here and a little there, and just most recently they were going to try to put in the constitution about homosexuals. So we've done it a piece at a time, but to take the whole document and now change the whole document, that's never going to happen. And I don't care what blue ribbon committee you pick, and they were good people.

CH Did that come before the house? Was that an issue that was debated on the floor, or was the new constitution debated on the floor?

VA I don't remember that. I know that there was - it had no chance. They had the blue-ribbon committee in joint session make their report, and it was a big deal.

Incidentally, we should bounce back just briefly to the 1959 session. I say that, too, because in joint session - and I was in the house at the time - a Dr. Sly ~~NSP~~, who was a tax expert, came and made a presentation to the joint session of the legislature, and the thing I remember - I still have his report in three volumes, a paperback of eight-and-a-half-by-eleven pages. But the thing I recall is, he was saying that when the state budget got to 300 million that the state would need a new form of taxation. Now, you have to understand we've long exceed 300 million biannual budget. This is 300 million for two years. We've long exceeded that one, and we're still on the same tax

system, basically the same tax system, we were then. But I recall that. That was the 1959 session. Now we'll go back to '63.

CH There was an approval for the beginning of the Department of Commerce for the state. Was that ~~Ludemann~~ [sp?]?
WEDDEMANN

VA That's right.

CH What was he like? What was your impression of him?

VA A very, very kind man, a very soft-spoken person. Well, I guess that's pretty much it. That's the kind of a guy he was.

CH Was there a need for the department of commerce at the time?

VA I think then there was, and there still is, although Neil Goldschmidt wanted to get rid of it, and did.

CH He did get rid of it?

VA Yeah.

CH And was it brought back?

VA No, it's still out there.

CH What was his reason for wanting to get rid of it?

VA Well, I don't really know, but there was a lot of people that didn't particularly care for it because that's where all the licensing bureaus and the ~~purveying~~ ^{PERMITTING} were done, and people just oftentimes wouldn't get their license or wouldn't get their permit or whatever, and so they're angry with whoever it was involved in the Department of Commerce. So it was a target for

special interests that didn't happen to like the whatever it was that was going. I had two people as governor. One was Jane ~~Houston~~ ^{HUSTON} [sp?], who did a super job for me, and, then, later on Fred Heard [sp?], who also did a very fine job for me, and we really improved the operation of that department immensely. But yes, I think there was a good reason for it then, and I think there's a good reason for it now, although Neil Goldschmidt for some reason decided he - you know, it's fairly typical. One of the things you do is that you just make motions. You change things. That doesn't mean it's good, you're just changing, and somehow people think that's good. I think that's part of what you get around to mean - well, never mind. When you talk about Goldschmidt, I - he's not my favorite governor. By quite a long shot, I would add.

CH Well, we'll have a chance to talk about that, I'm sure.

The house defeated a department of natural resources during the same session. Was that a wise move?

VA I think so, because I even considered it as governor, but, you know, I really was operating on the theory if it ain't broke, don't fix it, and it was working real well. But there was a need to coordinate, and I think that was, of course, one reason to have a department. We were able to accomplish that by cabinet meetings. I had - I'm bouncing to the governorship, but I had cabinet meetings three days a week, and I would have different agencies. They were grouped. But I did have natural resources in as one group, and that's where coordination came in, and it worked very well without having a department.

CH But there wasn't an agency for department of resources?

VA No.

CH It was a grouping of agencies.

VA I would bring natural resource agencies in, in my cabinet meeting, so they were all in the room together. DEQ and Fish and Wildlife and Forestry and LCDC and, in fact, I think [inaudible]? but they were all there in the room at the same time.

CH Is it, or was it, easy to delineate between departments that are handling natural resources? I would imagine that sometimes it's probably a vague definition as to whether it's a natural resource or not. Like LCDC, for instance, is - I mean, it's...

VA Yeah, but they get involved in wetlands and that sort of thing, and you have geology and mineral industries, and they dig - people dig holes in the ground, and you've got to fill them up. So there's need for the agencies per se, but the whole point was to coordinate whatever they were doing. For example, what Forestry does, does affect what happens to the fish. We know about that. You know, muddying the streams, log jams, and things of that kind. That's only by way of passing. So the point was that there was some real need for coordination and understanding how what one agency does would affect another agency. All of that developed during my period of time while I had these cabinet meetings. I had heard that Straub never talked, never had the agencies in. Never. Nor did Goldschmidt. As a matter of fact, Goldschmidt didn't talk to hardly anybody. But it was marvelous to see this all happen. They got to call each other by their first names, they began to realize what they were doing, and oftentimes would call [and say], I'm going to do this, already knowing now that this is going to affect. And it was interesting. This is only an aside in terms of what a cabinet can do, but to show you what the dimensions - the Department of Veterans Affairs dealt in multi millions of dollars. Big, big sums. We also had the housing division, and they were dealing with bonds, but at much, much smaller levels, but what the Department of Veterans Affairs was doing would affect the ability of the Housing Department to sell their bonds. So it's just -

you know, even when you take something small, like Housing versus Veterans Affairs, it did have some affect on them, and it's just a matter of this big Veterans Affairs, they wouldn't even pay any attention to Housing, hardly even know they're there, because, obviously, they've got a big job to do. But all of a sudden they sit there and realize what they're doing does affect this other agency. Those are the kinds of things. It's a small interplay, but that's the kind of thing that happened.

Well, we'll get back to what - remember, you came back to '63.

CH Okay. The paper - one of the papers, I'm not sure whether - I think this is the Oregonian, said that one of the biggest legislative fights occurred over a bill to give insurance companies a piece of the industrial accident business, increase benefits 20 percent, and cover workers in all industries. The senate passed it but the house defeated it. Do you know why, the reason for defeating that bill? Or what the discussion or the debate was?

VA Okay. What we're talking about, what we call three-way workers' comp.

CH Three-way worker comp?

VA That's right. That was, then, involving - see, the state was the sole seller of workers' compensation insurance. This issue had been around even before I came to the legislature, and labor was adamantly opposed to it. Adamantly opposed to it.

CH Why?

VA Well, I think mainly because it was a fairly sloppy operation, and they were really milking - their workers were milking the system rather efficiently, and they didn't want any

changes from that. And they figured that if the insurance companies came in, they'd need to be concerned about a profit, and, of course, their argument was that the profit is going to come at the expense of the injured worker. You could hear that argument coming. That's where they were coming from. But that had been around, three-way workers' compensation, which meant the state, private insurance, or self insurance. Self insurance, that was defined in terms of the size of a company. Like a Weyerhaeuser, for example, if they wanted to institute self insurance, they're big enough to carry it. That kind of a thing. And I'd have to guess that labor just pure and simply defeated it. Now, this issue came up again in '65, and if you want to talk about that now or in '65, it doesn't make any difference to me, but it did pass in 1965.

CH Right. I see that we have this under our...

VA Okay. We'll get to it in an orderly way.

CH Okay. Well, labor referred to the legislature as being rather conservative and the worst in many years. Was that a result of this particular debate?

VA Oh, it could be that, and maybe some other issues. Actually, labor was kind of funny. They'd come up with some of the craziest bills you'd ever look at. These would be passed at their convention, and, of course, their leaders were supposed to push for them in the legislature, and a lot of them were not productive.

CH Well, one of the things they were pushing for was the minimum wage of \$1.25 an hour, and also a - to ban importation of workers to replace strikers. And apparently that lost, didn't it? Both of those.

VA Yeah.

CH But they did get their bill passed to prevent employers from using lie detectors. That was a big issue, wasn't it?

VA Yeah. I say yeah sort of half-heartedly. It's not that big a deal. They had a whole lot of them, and they'd lose a lot of them, and some of them they didn't care whether they lost or not, but they had to go and fight for them because they wanted to retain their leadership in the organization.

CH Public employees got the right to bargain collectively. Had there been any state employee strikes that had - at that point?

VA Well, I know it came awfully close while I was governor. It didn't happen. I'm trying to recall. I think there may have been a day or two under Neil Goldschmidt. I can't recall. It seems he came closer than I did. I came close, to the point, incidentally - I was going through some papers - we had a rather large contingency plan in the event of a public employee strike. But unless it happened under Neil's administration, I don't - it's come close several times, but I don't think it's actually occurred.

CH I notice that there was a bill to remove the death penalty, which was put on the next ballot. Wasn't there an issue about that time about Governor Hatfield commuting the sentence of somebody?

VA I vaguely remember that, but not enough to even talk about it. He was opposed to a death penalty.

CH That was part of his religious convictions, wasn't it?

VA Yeah, he's just opposed to it.

CH And how did you feel?

VA I support death penalty. Incidentally, you talk about philosophy. My position was that it wasn't that I really wanted to kill anybody, that is, execute someone. I really believe that the presence of a death penalty is a deterrent. So I want to save a life, not lose a life, and that's where I'm coming from. And I had to face it because it was law when I was governor, so I had to make a decision, you know, what am I going to do about that. But we'll get to that.

CH And beaches, ocean beaches, were declared recreation areas. The - and we've talked a little bit about this. The beach laws really were not in one term, they were sort of over a number of terms, and when the ocean beaches were declared recreation areas, was there a definition at that point as to what the beach consisted of? Because this became important later on.

VA Yes, I know the issue, I know what we did about it, but I can't recall at what point. And I know Lee Johnson was involved in it because at that point we actually did it by describing - we went beyond vegetation line. I don't mean the beaches went beyond it. We got into more descriptive latitudes and longitudes and all kinds of things to say this is it, this is public, this is what the beach is. But I can't recall at what point this all occurred.

CH The Legislative Council Committee was given power to review rules and regulations at state agencies. What was the domain, generally, of the Legislative Council Committee?

VA Basically, to write bills for the legislators, to write amendments for them. These were all lawyers. You would prefile, if you wanted - actually, any bill would go to Legislative Council. I'd say, I've got an idea. I want to do such and such,

and then they'd put it in a bill form.

CH But in this case they were given the power to review rules and regulations of state agencies. That seems like a much bigger...

VA You bet it's bigger. Actually, from what I understand, if we take the books of the Oregon Revised Statutes, they probably would cover, I don't know, maybe three feet on a bookshelf, and the rules and regulations that relate to the laws that are written are twice that size. You would get to a point where you believe that the rules actually would subvert the laws that you passed, or go beyond the laws that you passed.

CH So was this done as a way of assisting the legislature in...?

VA No, it was a matter of protecting the people. You know, I know what I had in mind, but that's not what's happening.

CH Another odd thing that happened here was that there was an anti-obscenity law which was made to apply to movies. Do you know what precipitated that? Was there a specific...?

VA No, but I'm smiling. I don't think it passed. I don't recall whether it did or didn't.

[End of Tape 7, Side 1]