

Tape 6, Side 1

CH This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland, Oregon. The interviewer, for the Oregon Historical Society, is Clark Hansen. The date is 12/9/92, and this is Tape 6, Side 1.

What assignments did you want going back for your second term for the 1961 session? Were there things that you wanted this term that you didn't have the term before, or what changes did you want to make?

VA Actually, at those early stages - you always had an opportunity to ask for committees, but at the early stages the presiding officer is going to give you whatever they wanted to. The only one I really wanted was tax. Whatever - I don't recall what I marked down out of the committee assignments, but I really wasn't - you know, whatever was going to happen was okay with me. But the only one I really wanted was tax.

CH You got onto Food and Dairy that term. What was that like for you, and what kind of issues and legislation came up for you that term in that area?

VA That session I remember the big issue there was a minimum price to the producer of milk. There had been - I'm trying to recall some history, because there'd been some big deal, somebody had, I think, gotten petitions signed that related to that, but...

CH Wasn't there somebody from Hood River - or maybe that was later on - that was interested in having prices - minimum prices for milk established?

VA Yeah. I'm trying to recall. It had been a big issue, apparently languished a little. Anyway, it came back in '61.

The thing I remember about that is sitting and listening to the testimony, and the room was filled with people, and I never, with one other exception, felt such tenseness in the room. It was just like it was ready to explode, and, you know, we were right at the edge. There was proponents and opponents, and they were all trying to be sort of somewhat gentlemanly about the whole thing, but there was no gentleness in their hearts. It was the Safeways and the big ones that didn't want this to happen, and, of course, all the dairy farmers wanted it to happen. The short of it was that we did pass a minimum price to the producer, which has a follow-up story in the '63 session, which we'll get to.

CH If you wanted to talk about that now, it would be fine. I notice here that there was a minimum price fixed on milk in 1963.

VA Now to the manufacturer. This was the next step. And the - in 1963 I was chairman of that committee, and this time we had two bills, but one of them was the minimum price to the ~~the~~ <sup>PRODUCER OF MILK</sup> the other was balloon bread. We can wait till '63 on that one. But we're talking about milk now. This was the only time that I was ever offered a trade. Now, people think this goes on all the time, and it does, but not with me. I never traded, ever, ever. And it does relate a little bit to the balloon bread bill, which I'll get more detailed later on, but the bill was - I can tell you this was the Department of Ag came and said, We just can't enforce this. We're going to lose in court all the time. Would you please do - either repeal this part of the law or fix it. So we went through that whole ceremony - we decided we were going to fix it - passed it, sent it to the senate. It went to Harry Boivin's committee. I'm chairman of the committee, so I go over and testify on this balloon bread bill. In the meantime, a minimum price to the manufacturer came from the senate to my committee.

CH Was the timing on that coincidental?

VA Maybe to my committee it was - it may have been coincidental or not, I don't know. I never thought about it. But the fact is, I had his bill and he had my bill. So I went and testified, and I could tell we were beginning to get near the end of the session. "Harry, are you going to deal with that bill?" "Well, yeah, we're going to get to it." A little time would pass by. "Harry, you know, you better do something because - you know, repeal it or fix it." We decided to fix it. "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." Then, about the third time I went to see him, I guess Harry thought that I really wanted this badly. "Vic," he says, "I've got a little, old bill in your committee. It really isn't going to go anywhere, but could you get it out?" I said, "Harry -" this was the minimum price to the manufacturer for milk. "Harry, this is a lousy bill. It's never going to get out of my committee. Now, you can do whatever you want, but I think you should either repeal this balloon bread bill or pass what we sent you, but your bill is not going anywhere" [laughter].

CH What was Harry's reaction to that?

VA Well, I guess you could say he figured, well, he tried. Anyway, the bill came out - the bread bill came out and passed. But that's the only time that - I can tell you that story because it sticks out because that's the only time I even was offered a trade.

CH But did you see that going on between other legislators?

VA I know it happened. It was happening. You could tell. People were voting on bills that there's no way they would vote on a bill like that.

CH But was it justified by people?

VA No. But the point is that once you start, you can't stop.

Once you do that, then you're on that trail. You can't get off that trail. Incidentally, all of that finally, when we get into being [inaudible], got into even the Rajneesh where they wanted a quid pro quo, and my chief of staff said, "You're going about this the wrong way. The governor doesn't do things like that." So even years later...

CH You were on Rules and Resolutions. Was that the speaker's committee at that time?

VA Always, yeah.

CH It wasn't State and Federal Affairs. Now, let's see. The speaker was Bob Duncan.

VA That's right.

CH Why would he put you on the Rules and Resolution Committee when he wanted very dependable - I'm not saying you weren't dependable, but dependable meaning you're a Democrat, and you're a Republican. Why would he put you on that committee where he needed very dependable people?

VA Well, first of all, he had a majority of his own party.

CH On that committee?

VA On that committee. So that's all he really needed. But second, we became good friends, and he felt that, you know, if there was something reasonable that he could come to me with, he could talk to me, and we could at least talk to one another about something in a noncombative way. So because we became friends and he could talk to me, and he had his own majority anyway, I think that's why it was.

CH What about with Monty Montgomery? Did he also feel that same way about...?

VA I think so.

CH I noticed that Sid Leiken was on that committee as well.

VA Yes.

CH What was your impression of Sid Leiken?

VA Sid was a bright guy. We got along pretty well. He's Jewish, and I'm Arab background. I remember on the Six Day War, he was talking about the Egyptians reviewing the fleet from a glass-bottomed boat, and things like that. We were golf partners once and kept talking about getting out of sand traps and things of that kind. Sid was a very bright guy, he worked hard, he didn't take life too seriously, he didn't take his job too seriously - himself seriously, I should say. But I got along together very well with him.

CH And I also notice that on that same committee Ed Fadeley was there. What was your impression of Ed Fadeley?

VA Ed Fadeley was never one of my favorite legislators, and I think it became more apparent later on, and if we get back into the senate, we'll talk about it at that time. But I can always recall him, during the course of testimony, he's sitting and writing press releases, he's not really listening. I can recall him not treating people that appeared before the committee very nicely. Those things I didn't like. He just was not one of my favorite legislators.

CH He had a reputation by some people as being sort of an outsider and unpredictable. Did you feel that way?

VA Yeah, I think that's pretty good. Ed was himself. Incidentally, he didn't treat his wife very well either. Who was his secretary? I guess all those things, I said, that guy - you know, I don't really care for this guy. So, yeah, he was a loner.

CH What of significance went through the committee that term, do you recall?

VA No.

CH Do you recall any major legislation that was stopped at that point?

VA No.

CH But it was the control point for the speaker.

VA It was the control point for the speaker, right.

CH We may have talked about this before, but, you know, legislatures have - around the country, generally, they have an all-powerful rules committee. Did we talk about that, or a strong speaker committee?

VA Yeah, we did. Remember I told you that I was opposed to that idea, this was an open - but if we ever had one, I wanted to be on that committee?

CH That's right. I remember that now [laughter].  
On Taxation, was it Dick Eymann that was chair of that?

VA Dick Eymann was chair in '63. Clarence Barton was still there, and in '63 Clarence became speaker and Dick Eymann was chairman. Dick Eymann - let's see. Let me think about this. I

think Dick Eymann was a resource to the committee or he was a clerk to the committee or something like that. Anyway, Dick Eymann became chairman of the Tax Committee in '63.

CH What was your impression of him as a chairman?

VA Well, first of all - but we agreed we just do not agree philosophically on a whole lot of issues. But that aside, Dick Eymann, as chair, he wanted to hear every bill interminably. We had the longest, most tedious Tax Committee hearings under Dick Eymann. Just senseless, absolutely senseless. And that was Dick Eymann. That was the way he operated. There were some things that just didn't make any sense at all, they just didn't make any, but he wanted to listen to everybody on every subject as long as they wanted to talk.

CH What is the best way of being an effective chairman?

VA Well, you run the meeting, you don't - you get to what points that you need to make. Sometimes a speaker will ramble, and you tell them they're rambling, or we've already covered that on the same point you're talking about, because anytime anybody wants to speak, they'll sit there in the audience, and they've signed up to talk, and they'll say exactly the same thing that somebody's already said. If they want to get up and say, I agree with what the speaker just said, that's all they need to say, but no, they've got to say the same thing. I can recall years later, when I was chair of the interim education committee, one guy came to appear before the committee, and I knew him, and he was really down on education. So you talk about how you run a committee, he sat down - I've forgotten his name. Let me call him Cliff. I don't recall what his name was. "Cliff," I said to him, "Now, we know that education is no good in your view, so let's just put that aside. Now, tell us how we can fix it." Well, that shortened his testimony down to about five minutes. He didn't

have any fixing remedies, he just had criticism remedies. So at least we saved that much time.

CH What's the best way for a speaker - and I've been a lobbyist in Salem a little bit, so I've often wondered about this. What's the most effective way of being a speaker before a committee? What impresses a committee the most, or what is the best way to go about supporting or arguing against given legislation?

VA Understanding that the committee members have a lot of their own thoughts, their own views, their own prejudices, whatever it may be. Their own way of doing things. All I can tell you is what I appreciated the most, and what I appreciated the most was somebody that said, I like this because bang, bang, bang, or I don't like this because of bang, bang, bang, bang, whatever it is. Clear, reasonable arguments. To get up there and say, Well, if you don't pass this bill, you know, I represent 560,000 people, and we will defeat you at the next election. That's never been persuasive for me, and, of course, I'm exaggerating right here. But to me a lobbyist is there because of their knowledge on that subject, and that's what I'm looking for. You may sit down and say, I think this is the greatest bill that ever came to the Oregon legislature, and somebody that follows you thinks this is the lousiest bill that ever came to the legislature. And now I'm using broad contrasts. I'm saying to myself, okay, somewhere in the middle here is the right answer, and I'm searching for what that might be. Or I might decide it's the lousiest or the best, I don't really know. But it's the - I'm listening for why we should pass it or why we should defeat it or why we should change it. So that's what I feel a good lobbyist should do. The ones that have been, I think, most effective are the ones that have been straightforward, give straight answers with clear definition of why they're supportive or not. They are the ones that don't yield to the temptation to make somebody else look bad to make yourself look good, and

that's a common practice. You know, You shouldn't vote for this because Jim over here is a no-goodnik. That's not - but that style is to make him look bad, to make you look better. And if you're consistent, they get to know that you are really knowledgeable about a subject. Like I mentioned Don Ellis. Very knowledgeable about taxation, very bipartisan. He would say, This is no good, and here's the reason, or this is okay, and here's the reason, and he became a very dependable and trustworthy lobbyist. That makes a good lobbyist, of which I never wanted to be.

CH What was your impression of Bob Duncan as speaker?

VA I thought he did an excellent job. Very fair.

CH And Monty Montgomery?

VA Monty Montgomery? I thought he was a good legislator.

CH But not a good speaker?

VA Oh, speaker. I never served with him. He became speaker when I went to the senate.

CH Oh, that's right. That was in '65?

VA Monty did a good job. It was Bob Smith that kind of rode roughshod over the proceedings. Monty did a good job, I think in the character of Bob Duncan.

CH How did Bob Smith run sort of roughshod?

VA Oh, he just - we were in the majority, and, by George, this is the way things are going to be. He was a cowboy [laughter].

CH And at this point your relationship with the executive branch, in '61, was?

VA It all continued in very good order.

CH You were - well, going back in terms of chairman, what about Ben Musa as chairman of the Rules and Resolution Committee? What was your opinion of how he ran that?

VA Well, as I had mentioned earlier about Ben, Ben was - had a very large ego. I had stronger impressions later on than during this period of time, about him and how he performed when he was president of the senate and all the rest of that.

CH You were also on a mileage committee. What was that about?

VA Oh, that's just nothing. In those days, the salary was \$600 a year, and one trip, during the two-year period, from home to Salem and back at ten cents a mile. In my case, it was nine dollars. So one session I get \$609, and the next session I get \$600. Some guys would go from Burns and have - that was the mileage. You know, who's going to figure out how many miles it is from wherever to - it was one of those things. You know, you just sign a paper.

CH You were also on the Legislative Fiscal Committee, then, too, weren't you?

VA Yeah.

CH So was it necessarily because of your connection with the taxation issues that you were brought into the Fiscal Committee?

VA I think I was beginning to gain credibility. The mileage thing was just sort of a throw-in. But beginning to get

credibility, and they understood I was working at my job, and I presume they - that was one of the beauties, really, when I look at the Oregon legislature and then I look at the Congress, and this whole idea of seniority just never prevailed. When I say that to you, as I became more senior, you know, I could say I want these committees, and I'd get those committees, or this is the desk I want to sit at, and I'd get that desk. That worked. But in terms of how we viewed each other, it wasn't a matter of seniority, how long you were there, as to whether you were going to be chairman or not. It did relate to - well, after Bob Smith, basically, it did relate to what party you belonged to. Before Bob Smith, actually, there were Republican chairmen. I was a Republican chairman in a Democrat control. And that's the way things were kind of going. Bob is the one that changed that. He said, Baloney. We are in charge. All Republican chairmen, no Democrat chairmen. And so, of course, when the Democrats took over, by that time it was institutionalized. Okay, if that's the way it's going to be. And so that changed after Bob Smith. But still, seniority wasn't a major factor.

CH In the 1961 session, Hatfield presented his government reorganization plan, and the legislature chewed into that pretty deeply. How did you feel about that plan?

VA I was somewhat ambivalent. I can recall seeing the charts up on the wall of the things that they wanted to do. At this stage, I didn't really know that much about who did what and why. I wasn't unwilling to be supportive of Mark Hatfield in that regard.

CH Who would support - who would be the representative of Hatfield in the legislature?

VA Well, in this case Warne Nunn was the one that was doing a lot of that work, a lot of the reorganizational work. And it was

just about making things more efficient. It wasn't a major issue with me whether it lived or died, it just - oh, that makes some sense. I guess that's okay, I'll go along with that.

CH Did Governor Hatfield ever come before the legislature?

VA No.

CH That's unusual, isn't it?

VA Yes.

CH Did you do it as governor?

VA Yes, I did. I was kind of sneaky. When I went there, I knew, first of all - most of it dealt with taxes, and I first of all knew that I - they knew I knew more about it than they did. Second, you know, I'm the governor, so they can't really attack you while you're there. Third, a lot of them were my own friends. So I felt like I was - I felt I was in pretty good shape whenever I appeared before a committee. I wasn't worried they were going to do something to me they shouldn't. No, no governor that I know of - I don't recall McCall, even on the big thing, which was land use during this period of time, or Straub...

CH Was it not considered appropriate? Or why wouldn't they push for their own program? It seems like if they were a popular figure in the state or in the legislature that they could be persuasive.

VA Well, Straub was for a while in the legislature, but mostly out of it. McCall never was, Goldschmidt never was. Barbara was, and she's doing some funny things for a former legislator. But certainly in terms of McCall and Straub, I don't think they

had that much familiarity with the legislators, and I think in many cases they really didn't know their subject that well. They also had very protective staffs. They were called palace guards, and we can refer to that when we finally get to my term as governor. So many of them are worried about that the governor was going to say something they ought not to say. I really very deliberately avoided palace guard. I didn't completely eliminate it - you can't do it because you're dealing with personalities of people and their own feelings - but we had probably less palace guard of anyone that I know of, in my term. So if I wanted to go testify, I'd go testify.

CH Wouldn't that be a good way to draw publicity to a cause or get momentum behind a cause that you would want attention drawn to?

VA It would be all helpful in the process, but not necessary. If I were to send Gerry Thompson [~~sp~~] down to testify in my behalf, they know that that's what my view is.

CH I'm surprised that somebody like Governor McCall, who was very familiar with the media and how to manipulate the media, so to speak, by doing certain things, that he wouldn't have done more of that with the legislature to get his program across.

VA Oh, I think he did his on the outside. Sort of à la Reagan, I'll-go-to-the-people kind of thing. And McCall was really great, not necessarily in prepared testimony, but in his ad libs. I was kidding Ron Schmidt one time. I said, "Why don't you make a deal with the governor?" "What's that?" I said, "Why don't you have him write his own speeches and you write the ad libs?" But Tom had his own style, and it didn't necessarily relate to appearing before the legislators. And he was - he caught on to the idea of being governor rather quickly. When I say that, [authoritative voice] I'm the governor. You know, he really

grabbed it. It took me a long time to call myself Governor Atiyeh. You know, I just - I'm there, I know I'm the head of the state, but I've got a job to do. And so the title part of the job wasn't nearly as important as what I wanted to do. So it was kind of tough. I called - you know, I'd call an agency or somebody: Well, who is this? Well, this is Victor Atiyeh. I didn't say Governor Atiyeh. So it took me a while to get the feel of it.

CH I'd heard a story, and I believe that it was about Governor Hatfield, that there was a microphone that had been sort of secretly set up in the legislature and he would listen in on the arguments.

VA He was listening in, that's right. And somebody - who was it - walked in and tore the thing out of the wall. Who was it walked in there and tore it out? Was it Musa or somebody? I've forgotten now, but, yeah, that's right. They became less sensitive. While I was governor I had a - we had closed-circuit television, and I could just turn it on and watch what's going on, the committees or on the floor of the house or senate.

CH There was a reapportionment that was approved. That was always a partisan issue, wasn't it, reapportionment?

VA Yes.

CH And people would maintain loyalty to their party under that specific issue, wouldn't they?

VA Yeah. But there were so few that really understood, really, the sheer mathematics and - but you had your advisers on the Republican side and the Democrat side. And incidentally, the legislature failed to do a reapportionment, and we went to special session to do that job.

CH This is in 1961, and apparently the reapportionment was approved. Was there not a real big argument about reapportionment this particular...?

VA Not in this go-round. There was some, but apparently the Republicans got some of what they wanted and Democrats got some of what they wanted. I don't know what all came out of it, but enough to keep them all under the same tent.

CH Funds were approved for the bridge at Astoria. That was a major project. Wasn't that one particular person's...?

VA Bill Holmstrom. Now, are you ready? [Singing] Holmstrom, <sup>well</sup> ~~will~~ build a bridge for you. That's what they were talking about, front page Astoria newspaper. Just like war is declared. Bridge passes, bridge wins. I voted against that.

CH You did? Why?

VA I didn't think we ought to be telling an agency of the government where they ought to put their bridges.

CH Why?

VA That's just - that's what I call micro managing, and I didn't think that was a role of the state legislature.

CH Was there more behind it than just that?

VA Of my view? No. No, I just didn't think we ought to be telling an agency of the government what they ought to be doing, where - what this gets into is pork barrel.

[End of Tape 6, Side 1]