

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

August 8, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt discuss and respond to a listener's letter regarding the GI Bill and the benefits to be received by veterans of the Korean War. In a closing segment, ER reads an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence.

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt and Elliott Roosevelt

[ER:] This is Eleanor Roosevelt speaking. Our program is coming to you from my living room here at the Park Sheraton hotel in New York City. I am very happy to have this little while with you each day and I hope you enjoy the guest we invited to be with us today. And now for a moment I am going to turn the program over to Elliott.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] With the endorsement of the Public Advisory Board, Orin Lehman, a member of this board, last March took off on a tour of South East Asia. He went for the purpose of viewing first-hand the work being done there by the Economic Cooperation Administration. His observations are not only very intelligent, but also very interesting. And he's here today with Mrs. Roosevelt to tell us about them. We will hear from Mr. Lehman after Mrs. Roosevelt and I have a discussion on a current question. And now here is our announcer with a few words for us.

[Break 1:00-1:19]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Today Mother, one of our staff has a question she'd like to ask you to comment upon, she saw an article in the paper written by Frances Langford who is touring the country to entertain war wounded. The article reads, "There will be a lot of credit handed out to United Nations and US officials when and if the Korean shooting stops for good. I would like to see some credit also extended to the GIs who have really made peace possible, credit they urgently can use when they become civilians again. This credit was liberally dispensed to veterans of World War II in the form of the GI Bill of Rights. Why it should not be extended to veterans of the Korean War is indeed a tough one to figure out. Aren't the foxholes and enemy bullets of the Korean War just as disagreeable as those of World War II? Doesn't it seem grossly unjust to you to see our sons asked to suffer as soldiers and then made ineligible for soldiers' benefits because our political masterminds deem this war a police action? Members of the police force or not, we have taken a couple of years out of their lives with more to follow. These years can never be restored to them nor can many of the things they might have done for their communities and themselves. I've talked with several vets wounded in Korea who are in this category. These men have their thinking beamed on education. They want to be doctors, lawyers, research men, and this thirsting for knowledge is a good thing for them, for an academic atmosphere is swell for emotion readjustment, it gives them the feeling they are on the road to overriding their physical limitations. The GI Bill of Rights would be a great boon to them. The most intelligent and comprehensive veterans' legislation ever drawn, it is especially helpful to education minded veterans. Without this help, their dreams of academic betterment in many cases will never be realized. For they can't buy food, clothing and shelter for themselves and their families and college too on their meager pensions." What are your thoughts on this matter, but I'd like to add in addition to that, what about after the Korean War, the boys who are drafted and are put into the armed services for two to three years, what are their rights for a GI Bill of Rights, how do you feel about that too? (3:58)

[ER:] Well let's deal with the Korean veterans first, there is no question in my mind that they ought to have exactly the same rights that World War II boys had and eh uh calling it a police action is not uh any excuse for not giving our veterans of the Korean War exactly the same benefits that World War II Veterans had, and I think the educational part of that program was one of the things that worked the best-- worked the best for us as a nation because it permitted a great many people who really had the desire to learn to learn and the more educated our people are, the better they will be in the democracy as citizens. Now as to your question of what should happen to boys now that we are going to have universal military training, and they will be uh removed from uh their ordinary pursuits for a given period of time, now it's very difficult I think to say that boys who do not go uh to war shall have exactly the same benefits meted out to them as boys who actually go to war because what you are asking, under universal military training, is that every citizen get trained to defend his country and of course unless we are willing to do that uh we might very easily lose our country, the people who are not willing to do that, and therefore um it's quite possible to argue that the value of the training is all that should uh be the reward. On the other hand, that kind of training may have great value if it's very carefully planned and if the people-- if time is taken to screen the people carefully and put them where their particular aptitudes are going to get the best possible development during that period and then there comes the question of the length of the period. [ER clears throat] Now if it's going to take out of a man's life as much as two or three years, then no matter how good the training that he gets in the army, it may not be actually the training that he will need for the future that he is planning for himself and he may have to begin again. [ER clears throat] My own feeling would be that there should be for everyone who is in universal military training some kind of educational um adjustment after the war so that anyone who wanted to take advantage [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] of a chance to get the education or the-the training that he particularly wanted uh would have the opportunity to do it [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] but I don't think that you could give a man who was simply part of a universal military training system the type of uh coverage that you would give eh an actual war um partici--an actual participant in war. (7:50)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well now, that's a very interesting question that you have raised about uh seeing to it that the armed services put the men into the type of service that their aptitudes uh-uh are best qualified for and then uh that they give them the type of training which can help them after war do you--or after their service do you think that-that uh our military machinery is going to take that much trouble with its manpower?

[ER:] Well it never has but then we've never had universal military training we've always had up to this time only uh the-the hurried call to come in and get ready to fight and then no one could afford to plan or to take uh the time to do uh the kind of a job that you might do um under a universal military training program. Now um if uh there is time and thought put on it, I think it could be of great value to many boys who perhaps would never otherwise have gone beyond the high school that they have finished before they are drafted, uh um they may-- it may become um very valuable to them--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You see, [ER: as training] it seems to me that there's such a short sighted view take and I-I entirely agree with you and with this article by Frances Langford that the full benefits of the GI Bill of Rights should be made available to veterans of the Korean War. But, uh it seems to me that uh the whole question of universal military training has been gone into on a catch-as-catch-can basis that no thought has been given to the uh use of boys uh-- for instance if a boy goes through high school and he doesn't want to go to college then there is no question but what he should go right ahead with his military training but on the other hand the boy that wants to go to college, why can't he be enrolled in a universal military training program and devote uh a portion of his time while he is in college that does not interfere with his college education and then when he is finally through, uh he then goes ahead and serves his full term or a part term uh with the outfit that he is trained for? (10:31)

[ER:] Well now most uh most people feel that it would be better to take a boy uh and most uh of the educators I've talked to and let them have two years of college and then let them have whatever the period is for universal training and then come back to college. The feeling is that um a man trains better when he is still the age he would be with only two years but that having had two years of college, he is uh started on the use of his mind [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] and a boy who goes straight from high school and doesn't go to college very likely will never go to college because it's too much trouble to begin again developing his mind, but if he's had two years of it, then it's not so hard to go back to it and most of the educators think-- and you see the military likes the age of eighteen to twenty because that's the best age to train. [Elliott: easy to teach and easy to control] Yes. Now um therefore it would appear to be um better to let them have the-- according to the people that I have talked to, two years of college then go in and then go back that then they get the maximum out of their last years because they're in a hurry to start living. They know what they want and they will put more serious uh work into those last two years. (12:13)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now do you feel that they should have any particular benefits for instance, uh we have uh-uh the Korean War uh at an end and then we have troops that will be on foreign soil on foreign occupation duty for a long period of time. Uh those troops are continually alerted for the possibility of war, should they have no benefits at all?

[ER:] I think they should have--they will have automatically [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] certain benefits, certain health benefits and certain uh-- I mean once you've been in the armed forces you have a right to go to an army hospital, you have certain benefits of that kind. But I think the only benefits they actually should have are educational benefits beyond that.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright I think that answers my question and I see that our time is drawing to a close for this part of the program and we'll go on to our interview of the day in just a few minutes.

[Break 13:14-13:33]

[Unknown speaker:] Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt has just concluded another of her interviews with persons prominent in the world of international affairs. Our guest was Mr. Orin Lehman member of the Public Advisory Board just returned from a tour of South East Asia. Now before we say good afternoon for the day and for the week, here again is Mrs. Roosevelt.

[Break 13:55-14:02]

[ER:] Before I say goodbye for today, I would like to leave with you another thought. On July fourth, 1776, by unanimous decision, the thirteen United States of America declared their independence. Here in part is what they said, "When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights governments and institutes-- are instituted among men deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it; and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety and happiness. [Here ER skips much of the text of the Declaration] And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor." [I've followed the punctuation of the original, but not its capitalization patterns--CR]

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