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"MOBILIZATION FOR HOME DEFENSE"

(The following address is for delivery by Mrs. Florence Kerr, Assistant Commissioner, Work Projects Administration, at a meeting sponsored by the Oklahoma State Department of the American Legion in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Friday, February 7, 1941, at 8 P.M., Central Standard Time.)

I am happy to speak under the auspices of the American Legion. I want to talk about community mobilization for home defense responsibilities, and I feel that speaking under Legion auspices makes my task so much easier. The American Legion is itself a spontaneous outgrowth of the sense of civic responsibility felt so keenly by the veterans of the last war. When men--who are now Legionnaires--were demobilized from the armed forces of the nation, they felt that the patriotic emotions developed during the period of common life as soldiers and sailors should not be allowed to be dissipated. They felt that these patriotic emotions should rather be directed into the social channels of national and community work. The Legion has been an influence and a power in the nation and in communities. It has had an important share in the development of national policies, and it has contributed immeasurably to civic betterment. It has helped with the boys' clubs and other work in behalf of youth. It has helped the WPA in accomplishing much needed community welfare work. When service projects of ours have needed the assistance of a co-sponsor, the American Legion has often come forward to give us its support.

Now, with the national defense program under way, we know that the Legion stands ready to give more of such community service. As a part of our national defense program, we shall be called upon for many services of this kind on the home front. There will be many opportunities to serve the nation right here on the home front. These services--in which the members of the Legion and their wives, families and friends can engage--will be in their way an important part of the defense of our American way of life.

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On this home front there are civic battles to wage against poverty, hunger, disease and ignorance. These forces of internal danger and weakness have been diminished in recent years, but have not been finally put to rout. In our cities and towns, and out on the farms, these forces of inward decay and destruction still exist. We cannot declare a truce with these enemies of our American civilization. We cannot relax our vigilance against them.

All of you will be asked to serve -- to keep on serving -- in that struggle. It is more needful than ever, today, to feed the hungry, to provide health protection, to increase educational opportunities for all, and to help the victims of poverty to become self-supporting. In doing these things, we shall be practising the democracy of which we are rightly proud.

There are many ways of helping in this work on the home front. You can help by cooperating with government agencies in providing shelter for those in need of it, through low-cost housing for low-income groups. You can help to feed the hungry by establishing in your communities the use of the Food Stamp Plan, by which surplus food of all kinds -- foods that would otherwise go to waste -- is made available to those families that most desperately need it. You can help to feed hungry children by setting up school lunches, with WPA assistance, in all schools where they are needed. If you do not know which schools need such services, you should visit them and find out.

Malnutrition is due not only to poverty but also to lack of knowledge. It is important to parents to know what kind of food children need. The WPA has been teaching proper dietary habits to the two million school children who are being fed under the school lunch program, as well as to the thousands of mothers whose children of pre-school age are in our WPA nursery schools. In connection with our nursery school program there is an auxiliary parent education service; and we find that mothers -- and fathers too -- are anxious to learn about food and nutrition, so that they can take care of their children better.

The final answer to the problem of poverty, of course, is work and wages. In the coming months many of your jobless men and women will find



private employment. In the country as a whole we can confidently look forward to a great deal of new employment. This will be heaviest, of course, in those areas in which our defense industries are centered. As you know, this increasing employment in defense industries is not distributed evenly throughout the nation, and it cannot be expected to put an end to unemployment in all communities. There will still remain an unemployment problem, and a need for providing public work for jobless workers in many localities.

Both in the construction field, and in that of community service, the WPA program has been coordinated with, and subordinated to, the defense needs of the nation. Some WPA work will be of direct value to national defense--as for example in work on airports, at Army posts and cantonments, on access roads to military sites, and in mapping and other technical projects. Other WPA work will be along what I have termed the "home front." Such work with its civic benefits, is recognized as being a fundamental contribution to national defense.

Here, in helping to plan useful WPA projects for the unemployed in your communities, you will have an opportunity to be of service to the nation on the home front. You can help to plan wisely to meet the needs of your communities. You can help to make sure that these projects are the right projects and the best projects.

Community needs change from time to time; community resources vary from year to year; and the types of labor and skill that are available for employment on WPA projects change also. These are the considerations that should govern the community in its decision as to whether, for example, to make use of WPA help in constructing, enlarging and improving public hospital facilities, or, instead, to use WPA help in providing additional services in order to make existing hospital facilities available to a larger number of people. There are matters of civic planning to which you can give your attention, your study, your careful thought. These are civic matters upon which your considered judgment will be welcomed by community officials. And in thus helping to get the best WPA projects for your community, and in making the best use of idle man power --- and woman power --- in your locality, you will be doing

a double service on the home front.

Education is another and very important part of our home front campaign. Just as food is necessary for our bodily strength, so is knowledge necessary for our mental strength. Undernourished minds, as well as undernourished bodies, weaken our national strength. We have in America a splendid free public school system. But we realize that it does not meet all the educational needs of the American people. It is not designed to meet the needs of those adults who have for any reason been unable to get their schooling when they were of school age. It is not designed to meet the needs of adult foreign-born men and women, who may require both elementary teaching in our language and in the principles which underlie our democratic institutions. This important field of adult education is being usefully served by WPA projects. I look forward to the time when adult education -- yes, and nursery schools, too -- will be a part of our regular public school system. In the meantime the WPA education projects are doing useful work which would not otherwise be done at all in our communities. And you, who in so many communities have given your practical assistance to this kind of WPA work, can judge whether and to what extent it is still needed. I think you will agree that in times like these such work is more needed than ever before.

There is another respect in which our public school system does not yet meet our growing needs. This is in the matter of vocational education. It is true that this type of educational service is being gradually extended to young people in our American schools. But it is not a nation wide school service, and it is not prepared to meet the needs of adult workers, who, as we now find, need special training, and often re-training, to be available for jobs in our defense industries and similar employment. There is a very great need for such training and re-training of our workers.

Here, again, the Federal government is showing what can be done. Under a joint program of the United States Office of Education and the WPA, many workers -- including fifty thousand WPA workers -- are being trained or re-trained for specialized jobs in the defense industries. This is a good



beginning -- but it is only a beginning. Such training and retraining, if it is to meet the nation's needs, must be carried on in every community.

In this great campaign the American Legion has already enlisted its services. I applaud the recent decision of the Legion to engage in this work, as a part of its nation-wide effort to place all available skilled labor into the defense jobs where they are needed. The Legion's national employment committee, meeting in Washington with government officials just recently, recognized that training and re-training are essential to the task.

Such a program is needed not only for the older workers who can thus be made available for defense employment -- it is needed also for large numbers of untrained young people in every community. This need will be a continuing need for years to come. We are now doing this work in an emergency fashion; but in the end it must become a part of our educational system.

I should like to emphasize also, in this connection, that the training of handicapped people for work in which they can become self-supporting is a very valuable kind of community service. I know that the American Legion has always interested itself in this type of training. Many of its own members have been, as a result of war injuries, among the handicapped, and their needs require no explaining. Legion posts have often acted as co-sponsors for projects operating under our widespread WPA program for the handicapped. Many of the handicapped people so retrained have found useful employment -- sometimes in positions of large responsibility. I am sure that you will feel that such work as this should continue.

The recreational needs of the community are closely allied to its educational needs. Through recreation we do far more than rest and refresh ourselves -- though that is of great importance. We live out in recreation a part of ourselves that needs expression. We are better workers, better citizens -- and, if we are children, better and healthier and happier children -- when we have opportunities for healthful recreation.

Such opportunities have been lacking in many American communities. In recent years we have done much to provide proper recreation facilities --

parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, and community centers -- and in providing the trained leadership necessary to make the most of these opportunities. Most of this has been done with the aid of WPA projects. We are now faced with an unusual concentration of people in various communities, because of the rapid development of defense industries. More recreation facilities and services will be needed in such places, and also in communities neighboring upon the centers of military and naval training. The American Legion, I am glad to say, has always recognized the importance of recreation.

Let me say that I was much impressed the other day with the activities of one of the Legion posts, in Washington, D. C. There the Legionnaires have organized entertainment troupes or units, that go about to the various local charitable institutions and hospitals, and bring joy to the shut-ins with their lively programs of music and drama. Perhaps you may feel that it is taking these efforts a little too solemnly to refer to them as "community service." I think the members who give these services would say that they get a lot of fun out of it themselves. I am sure they do -- but it is service just the same, given in the true community spirit.

Another kind of community service is in first-aid training. The American Red Cross, I understand, is preparing to extend its training program considerably. With volunteer aid from people trained as leaders in such work, the scope of this first-aid program can be made very wide. There is no reason why everybody in the country should not be prepared to give first-aid services.

I have tried to give you a few suggestions as to how people not of age for military training can give to the community services which are well within our powers and yet of importance to the nation. I hope that I have conveyed to you my own feeling, that these services are not of a transitory nature, but of permanent importance -- a part of our long struggle to reach the goal of our American democracy: a better life for all. In preparing to defend our democracy, we are defending not only our great past, but our even greater future. We are defending not only what we have achieved thus far, but



defending also the dream of those who founded this republic and fought to preserve it -- the dream of an America which shall be ever more glorious and more happy through all the years to come.

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