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Former first lady speaks to Greeley

COLIN LINDENMAYER,

Greeley was graced with the presence of influential former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt on Saturday – sort of.

Roosevelt – played by Susan Marie Frontczak – captivated a crowd of nearly 1,000 people Saturday night at High Plains Chautauqua at Aims Community College in Greeley.

Roosevelt, the wife of President Franklin Roosevelt, continued working in government after her husband died in 1945. She is remembered for her independence and her contributions to human rights, most distinctly through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was created by a committee she chaired. The United Nations adopted the declaration on Dec. 10, 1948.

Tribune: “You were first lady from 1933-1945, in the midst of the Great Depression. Do you have any advice for today's recession sufferers?”

Roosevelt: “I will tell you a story, and you can decide how to digest it. I had tea with a woman who was very distressed at how much money she had lost. And she explained to me that of her five homes, she had to close up and sell two of them. As she stepped out of the room for a moment, I had a conversation with the maid. And I found out that this maid, while still employed, her husband had lost his job. And her sister and her sister's husband had moved in with them because they had lost their jobs. By absolute number of dollars, the wealthy woman lost much more. But which do you think is hurting most and bearing more of the burden? If you have hard times, how much do you really need? And how can you help others that have more need than you?”

Tribune: “You opposed the Equal Rights Amendment.”

Roosevelt: “I've opposed it for a long time because so much progress has been made in the states. And I want equal treatment for all workers, but I'm afraid that if this amendment passes, in the states, this will be a big step backward. It's very complicated, but I don't know that it's the best thing for women in the United States.

“I believe that all workers should be paid the same, regardless of race or creed or color or sex or age if they're doing equal work. But we don't need an amendment for every one of those.”

Tribune: “Where do you stand in history pertaining to women's rights?”

Roosevelt: “I was not a suffragist. It was when my husband said that he believed women should vote, I thought if he thinks so, well I suppose I think so too. But it was after his polio, when he was in Warm Springs trying to recover what use he could of his limbs, that I had this blossoming of interest in the Women's Trade Union League for garment workers, in the League of Women Voters, in ratifying the Child Labor Amendment, which by the way, didn't really come to pass until my husband was in office in the White House.

“My own human rights were somewhat abused in 1924 when the women had put together a platform for the Democratic Party. We were invited to do so, and they invited me to be the chairman of this committee. But when we got to the Democratic National Convention, the men locked the door, and they would not let the women in. They would not even let us slide our papers under the door sill. And we waited there until dawn three times during the

night. They voted 22-18 to keep the door locked against the women. You may remember Democrats lost that election.”

Tribune: “What is your legacy?”

Roosevelt: “I hope it will be the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That is my proudest achievement.”

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