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Ernest Gruening: A Q&A session on the Vietnam War and hopes for peace, 3/31/68

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Notes: Originals on 7 inch reels. Master and circulation copies on CD.

The speaker explains how he has changed his introduction speech because of the unexpected announcement by President Johnson that Johnson would not run again. The speaker introduces Gruening, saying that Gruening must be given some credit for helping to create the sort of environment that would encourage the president to make the decision not to run again. It is mentioned that Gruening and Senator Morse were the only two to vote against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and that Gruening is the most vocal in his criticism of American policy in South East Asia. The speaker ends his introduction by reading from a poem by Robert Frost.

Ernest Gruening speaks about his hopes for peace, an end to the bombing in Vietnam, and a complete cease fire. He speaks about Eugene McCarthy's, Richard Nixon's, and Robert Kennedy's plans for peace in Vietnam, as well as his own plan for peace. Gruening speaks about the draft, his proposed amendments to the draft act and the ways in which the Vietnam War differs from WWI, WWII, and even the Korean War. He mentions that John Kennedy said in the closing weeks of his life, "It is not our war. It is their war. We can help them, but they've got to win it." Gruening states that the Vietnam War is not hurting Communism, but helping it, as neither the Russians nor the Chinese had committed a single soldier to combat while American troops are dying fighting a small peasant people. He also mentions that "the possibility of Nixon is unthinkable and horrible" and states he strongly hopes for a Democratic president.

The question and answer session starts.

A man asks who is likely to be running now that Johnson says he will not. Gruening answers he imagines that Eugene McCarthy, Hubert Humphrey and Robert Kennedy will.

Another man asks why Johnson chose this particular timing to announce that he would not be running again. Gruening answers he thinks Johnson realized things were going from bad to worse, that the country was in an uproar, that the senate was rambunctious and wanted to be consulted, that more troops would be sent down, that there was the prospect of a very hot summer with a lot of riots, that the gold situation was critical and that things were collapsing all round him. Gruening considers Johnson's decision very wise and an act of great statesmanship.

A man says that between 1959 and 1963, Gruening came to the Kodiak High School twice and promised a swimming pool. The man wonders why they still don't have a swimming pool. The audience laughs. Gruening answers that he believes in self-government, saying, "The people of Sitka got themselves a

solved. He continues by saying that at the present time the cost of nuclear power is still not lower than the cost of hydro power.

A man asks what steps should be taken against foreign fishermen fishing in the waters of Alaska. Gruening says that we cannot prevent, but we should not encourage foreign fishermen to fish off Alaskan waters.

A man asks what Gruening's position is on the sale of lumber to Japan. Gruening believes the lumber should be processed before sending it out. He is opposed to sending out round logs and says they currently square logs are being sent out. He thinks that is a wise policy as it provides work locally.

A man says Gruening has stated that the US has no commitments in Southeast Asia and asks if we have commitments in the rest of Asia, in Africa, in Europe or anywhere else in the world and whether would Gruening call himself an isolationist.

Gruening answers that if isolationism means taking care of America's own pressing problems first, like lowering unemployment, making sure everyone gets a good education, and getting rid of the slums, then he is an isolationist. The audience applauds.

A man asks what Gruening's view on the Gulf of Tonkin incident is. Gruening responds that we were tricked into the war; it was not an unprovoked attack on an American vessel peacefully cruising in international waters, as was alleged at the time when President Johnson asked for the vote that would allow him to use all the forces of the U.S. as he saw fit. It was a provocation on America's part and there is no justification whatsoever for the misrepresentation that was given to congress.

Around minute 29, the tape cuts out. There is about a minute of silence and the tape starts over again from the beginning.