it reaches them they may make a public statement on it in order to clear up their position regarding the United States and prove their good faith to their allies.

T' telegram (SDR, RG 59, 862.20212/69, DNA).

1 Heinrich von Eckhardt.

Franklin Knight Lane to George Whitfield Lane

My dear George, Washington, February 25, 1917

On Friday we had one of the most animated sessions of the Cabinet that I suppose has ever been held under this or any other President. It all arose out of a very innocent question of mine as to whether it was true that the wives of American Consuls on leaving Germany had been stripped naked, given an acid bath to detect writing on their flesh, and subjected to other indignities. Lansing answered that it was true. Then I asked Houston about the bread riots in New York, as to whether there was shortage of food because of car shortage due to vessels not going out with exports. This led to a discussion of the great problem which we all had been afraid to raise—Why shouldn’t we send our ships out with guns or convoys? Daniels said we must not convoy—that would be dangerous. (Think of a Secretary of the Navy talking of danger!) The President said that the country was not willing that we should take any risks of war. I said that I got no such sentiment out of the country, but if the country knew that our Consuls’ wives had been treated so outrageously that there would be no question as to the sentiment. This, the President took as a suggestion that we should work up a propaganda of hatred against Germany. Of course, I said I had no such idea, but that I felt that in a Democracy the people were entitled to know the facts. McAdoo, Houston, and Redfield joined me. The President turned on them bitterly, especially on McAdoo, and reproached all of us with appealing to the spirit of the Code Duello. We couldn’t get the idea out of his head that we were bent on pushing the country into war. Houston talked of resigning after the meeting. McAdoo will—within a year, I believe. I tried to smooth them down by recalling our past experiences with the President. We have had to push, and push, and push, to get him to take any forward step—the Trade Commission, the Tariff Commission. He comes out right but he is slower than a glacier—and things are mighty disagreeable, whenever anything has to be done.

Now he is being abused by the Republicans for being slow, and this will probably help a bit, though it may make him more obstinate. He wants no extra session, and the Republicans fear that he will submit to anything in the way of indignity or national humiliation without “getting back,” so they are standing for an extra session. The President believes, I think, that the munitions makers are back of the Republican plan. But I doubt this. They simply want to have a “say”; and the President wants to be alone and unbothered. He probably would not call Cabinet meetings if Congress adjourned. Then I would go to Honolulu, where the land problem vexes.

I don’t know whether the President is an internationalist or a pacifist, he seems to be very mildly national—his patriotism is covered over with a film of philosophic humanitarianism, that certainly doesn’t make for “punch” at such a time as this.

My love to you old man,—do write me oftener and tell me if you get all my letters.

F.K.L.

Printed in Lane and Wall, eds., The Letters of Franklin K. Lane, pp. 239-41.

An Address to a Joint Session of Congress

26 Feb'y, 1917—1 P.M.1

Gentlemen of the Congress: I have again asked the privilege of addressing you because we are moving through critical times during which it seems to me to be my duty to keep in close touch with the Houses of Congress, so that neither counsel nor action shall run at cross purposes between us.

On the third of February I officially informed you of the sudden and unexpected action of the Imperial German Government in declaring its intention to disregard the promises it had made to this Government in April last and undertake immediate submarine operations against all commerce, whether of belligerents or of neutrals, that should seek to approach Great Britain and Ireland, the Atlantic coasts of Europe, or the harbours of the eastern Mediterranean, and to conduct those operations without regard to the established restrictions of international practice, without regard to any considerations of humanity even which might interfere with their object. That policy was forthwith put into practice. It has now been in active execution for nearly four weeks.

Its practical results are not yet fully disclosed. The commerce of other neutral nations is suffering severely, but not, perhaps, very much more severely than it was already suffering before the

1 WWhw.
first of February, when the new policy of the Imperial Government was put into operation. We have asked the cooperation of the other neutral governments to prevent these depredations, but so far none of them has thought it wise to join us in any common course of action. Our own commerce has suffered, is suffering, rather in apprehension than in fact, rather because so many of our ships are timidly keeping to their home ports than because American ships have been sunk.

Two American vessels have been sunk, the Housatonic and the Lyman M. Law. The case of the Housatonic, which was carrying food stuffs consigned to a London firm, was essentially like the case of the Fry,

She was, of course, William P. Frye, sunk by a German auxiliary cruiser on January 28, 1915.

in which, it will be recalled, the German Government admitted its liability for damages, and the lives of the crew, as in the case of the Fry, were safeguarded with reasonable care. The case of the Law, which was carrying lemon-box staves to Palermo, disclosed a ruthlessness of method which deserves grave condemnation, but was accompanied by no circumstances which might not have been expected at any time in connection with the use of the submarine against merchantmen as the German Government has used it.

In sum, therefore, the situation we find ourselves in with regard to the actual conduct of the German submarine warfare against commerce and its effects upon our own ships and people is substantially the same that it was when I addressed you on the third of February, except for the tying up of our shipping in our own ports because of the unwillingness of our shippers to risk their vessels at sea without insurance or adequate protection, and the very serious congestion of our commerce which has resulted, a congestion which is growing rapidly more and more serious every day. This in itself might presently accomplish, in effect, what the new German submarine orders were meant to accomplish, so far as we are concerned. We can only say, therefore, that the overt act which I have ventured to hope the German commanders would in fact avoid has not occurred.

But, while this is happily true, it must be admitted that there have been certain additional indications and expressions of purpose on the part of the German press and the German authorities which have increased rather than lessened the impression that, if our ships and our people are spared, it will be because of fortunate circumstances or because the commanders of the German submarines which they may happen to encounter exercise an unexpected discretion and restraint rather than because of the instructions under which those commanders are acting. It would be foolish to deny that the situation is fraught with the gravest possibilities and dangers. No thoughtful man can fail to see that the necessity for definite action may come at any time, if we are in fact, and not in word merely, to defend our elementary rights as a neutral nation. It would be most imprudent to be unprepared.

I cannot in such circumstance be unmindful of the fact that the expiration of the term of the present Congress is immediately at hand, by constitutional limitation; and that it would in all likelihood require an unusual length of time to assemble and organize the Congress which is to succeed it. I feel that I ought, in view of that fact, to obtain from you full and immediate assurance of the authority which I may need at any moment to exercise. No doubt I already possess that authority without special warrant of law, by the plain implication of my constitutional duties and powers; but I prefer, in the present circumstances, not to act upon general implication. I wish to feel that the authority and the power of the Congress are behind me in whatever it may become necessary for me to do. We are jointly the servants of the people and must act together and in their spirit, so far as we can divine and interpret it.

No one doubts what it is our duty to do. We must defend our commerce and the lives of our people in the midst of the present trying circumstances, with discretion but with clear and steadfast purpose. Only the method and the extent remain to be chosen, upon the occasion, if occasion should indeed arise. Since it has unhappily proved impossible to safeguard our neutral rights by diplomatic means against the unwarranted infringements they are suffering at the hands of Germany, there may be no recourse but to armed neutrality, which we shall know how to maintain and for which there is abundant American precedent.

It is devoutly to be hoped that it will not be necessary to put armed force anywhere into action. The American people do not desire it, and our desire is not different from theirs. I am sure that they will understand the spirit in which I am now acting, the purpose I hold nearest my heart and would wish to exhibit in everything I do. I am anxious that the people of the nations at war also should understand and not mistrust us. I hope that I need give no further proofs and assurances than I have already given throughout nearly three years of anxious patience that I am the friend of peace and mean to preserve it for America so long as I am able. I am not now proposing or contemplating war or any steps that need lead to it. I merely request that you will ac-
ADDRESS TO CONGRESS

cord me by your own vote and definite bestowal the means and
the authority to safeguard in practice the right of a great people
who are at peace and who are desirous of exercising none but
the rights of peace to follow the pursuits of peace in quietness
and good will,—rights recognized time out of mind by all the
civilized nations of the world. No course of my choosing or of
theirs will lead to war. War can come only by the wilful acts and
aggressions of others.

You will understand why I can make no definite proposals or
forecasts of action now and must ask for your supporting author-
ity in the most general terms. The form in which action may be-
come necessary cannot yet be foreseen. I believe that the people
will be willing to trust me to act with restraint, with prudence,
and in the true spirit of amity and good faith that they have
themselves displayed throughout these trying months; and it is
in that belief that I request that you will authorize me to supply
our merchant ships with defensive arms, should that become
necessary, and with the means of using them, and to employ
any other instrumentalties or methods that may be necessary
and adequate to protect our ships and our people in their legiti-
mate and peaceful pursuits on the seas. I request also that you
will grant me at the same time, along with the powers I ask, a
sufficient credit to enable me to provide adequate means of pro-
tection where they are lacking, including adequate insurance against
the present war risks.

I have spoken of our commerce and of the legitimate errands
of our people on the seas, but you will not be misled as to my
main thought, the thought that lies beneath these phrases and
gives them dignity and weight. It is not of material interests
merely that we are thinking. It is, rather, of fundamental human
rights, chief of all the right to life itself. I am thinking, not only
of the rights of Americans to go and come about their proper
business by way of the sea, but also of something much deeper,
much more fundamental than that. I am thinking of those rights
of humanity which without which there is no civilization. My theme is of
those great principles of compassion and of protection which mankind has sought to throw about human lives, the lives of non-
combatants, the lives of men who are peacefully at work keeping
the industrial processes of the world quiet and vital, the lives of
women and children and of those who supply the labour which
ministers to their sustenance. We are speaking of no selfish
material rights but of rights which our hearts support and whose
foundation is that righteous passion for justice upon which all
law, all structures alike of family, of state, and of mankind must

rest, as upon the ultimate base of our existence and our liberty. I
cannot imagine any man with American principles at his heart
hesitating to defend these things.⁶

Printed reading copy (WP, DLC).

⁶ There is a WWT undated outline; a WWsh draft with no composition date;
and one WWT draft of this address in WP, DLC. Wilson's final WWT draft,
which he sent to the Public Printer, is in the T. W. Brainerd Coll., NHPH.


The following statement was given out by the President this eve-
nong:

A situation has developed in the Congress to which I deem it
my duty to call the attention of the country in the plainest words.
Every effort to legislate for the safety of the nation in these last
hours of the Congress is being met by dilatory tactics on the part
of certain (Senators) members of the House and Senate which
are intended to make it impossible and to throw all action over
until another Congress can be assembled and organized (in which
there will exist a most uncertain balance of parties and organiza-
tion may be long delayed). It should cause the gravest concern
to everyone who knows anything of the real posture of our
foreign affairs that it is in the power of a few men at this truly
critical moment (in) when the fortunes of the nation may hang
in the balance to put obstacles which may prove insuperable in
the way of the immediate adoption of measures (notably the
army and navy appropriation bills) whose main and only pur-
pose is the national defence and which should be at once put
into force. For myself I protest in the most earnest and solemn
manner and in the name of the people themselves against this
dangerous betrayal of the (nation's) country's most sacred in-
terests. Nothing can excuse such action, and the partisan pur-
pose by which it is apparently prompted evidently gives it the
most sinister meaning. There is here injected into our politics,
when the common safety should be the common interest of every
man who professes to be a patriot, the most dangerous influence
that could be conceived,—a sinister thing injected, not from the
outside of our national circle, but at the very heart of it. I hope
that the country will speak what it thinks.⁷

WWT MS (WC, NJP).

⁷ Republican senators had already made it clear that they would filibuster
on various bills in order to force Wilson to call a special session of Congress.