

tween any faction in my party and the interests of the nation, I must always choose the latter, irrespective of what the effect will be on me or my personal fortunes. What we are contending for in this matter is of the very essence of the things that have made America a sovereign nation. She cannot yield them without admitting and conceding her own impotency as a nation and the surrender of her independent position among the nations of the world."

Respectfully, Tumulty

TLS (WP, DLC).

¹ H.R. 143, introduced by Jeff: McLemore of Texas on February 17. It requested the President "to warn all citizens of the United States to refrain from traveling on armed merchant vessels." *Cong. Record*, 64th Cong., 1st sess., p. 2756.

² There was no "Fifth."

To William Joel Stone

My dear Senator: The White House February 24, 1916

I very warmly appreciate your kind and frank letter of today, and feel that it calls for an equally frank reply.

You are right in assuming that I shall do everything in my power to keep the United States out of war. I think the country will feel no uneasiness about my course in that respect. Through many anxious months I have striven for that object, amidst difficulties more manifold than can have been apparent upon the surface; and so far I have succeeded. I do not doubt that I shall continue to succeed. The course which the central European powers have announced their intention of following in the future with regard to undersea warfare seems for the moment to threaten insuperable obstacles, but its apparent meaning is so manifestly inconsistent with explicit assurances recently given us by those powers with regard to their treatment of merchant vessels on the high seas that I must believe that explanations will presently ensue which will put a different aspect upon it. We have had no reason to question their good faith or their fidelity to their promises in the past, and I, for one, feel confident that we shall have none in the future.

But in any event our duty is clear. No nation, no group of nations, has the right while war is in progress to alter or disregard the principles which all nations have agreed upon in mitigation of the horrors and sufferings of war; and if the clear rights of American citizens should ever unhappily be abridged or denied by any such action, we should, it seems to me, have in honour no choice as to what our own course should be.

For my own part, I cannot consent to any abridgement of the

rights of American citizens in any respect. The honour and self-respect of the nation is involved. We covet peace, and shall preserve it at any cost but the loss of honour. To forbid our people to exercise their rights for fear we might be called upon to vindicate them would be a deep humiliation indeed. It would be an implicit, all but an explicit, acquiescence in the violation of the rights of mankind everywhere and of whatever nation or allegiance. It would be a deliberate abdication of our hitherto proud position as spokesmen even amidst the turmoil of war for the law and the right. It would make everything this Government has attempted and everything that it has achieved during this terrible struggle of nations meaningless and futile.

It is important to reflect that if in this instance we allowed expediency to take the place of principle, the door would inevitably be opened to still further concessions. Once accept a single abatement of right and many other humiliations would certainly follow, and the whole fine fabric of international law might crumble under our hands piece by piece. What we are contending for in this matter is of the very essence of the things that have made America a sovereign nation. She cannot yield them without conceding her own impotency as a nation and making virtual surrender of her independent position among the nations of the world.

I am speaking, my dear Senator, in deep solemnity, without heat, with a clear consciousness of the high responsibilities of my office, and as your sincere and devoted friend. If we should unhappily differ, we shall differ as friends; but where issues so momentous as these are involved we must, just because we are friends, speak our minds without reservation.

Faithfully yours, [Woodrow Wilson]¹

CCL (WP, DLC).

¹ There is a WWsh draft of this letter in WP, DLC, and a WWT draft in the C. L. Swem Coll., NjP. Wilson's letter was widely printed in the newspapers, e.g., the *New York Times*, Feb. 25, 1916.

From Newton Diehl Baker

Cleveland, Ohio, Feb. 24, 1916.

The country is with you. The reported attitude of democrats in Congress is disheartening beyond words. Stand firm. God bless you.

Newton Baker.

T telegram (WP, DLC).