

Resource Sheet #03

Document A – Woodrow Wilson’s Speech Before Congress, April 2, 1917

On February 3, 1917, the Imperial German Government announced that German submarines would attack all ships approaching Great Britain, Ireland, and other ports controlled by enemies of Germany. Below are excerpts of President Wilson’s speech before Congress on April 2, 1917.

. . . The new policy [of the Imperial German Government] has swept every restriction aside. Vessels of every kind, whatever their flag, their character, their cargo, their destination, their errand, have been ruthlessly sent to the bottom without warning and without thought of help or mercy for those on board, the vessels of friendly neutrals along with those of belligerents. . .

. . . The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind.

It is a war against all nations. American ships have been sunk, American lives taken . . . but the ships and people of other neutral and friendly nations have been sunk and overwhelmed in the waters in the same way. There has been no discrimination. . .

. . . Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved and the freedom of its peoples, and the menace to that peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people. . .

. . . The world must be made safe for democracy . . . We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but I of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.

Source: President Wilson's Declaration of War Message to Congress, April 2, 1917; Records of the United States Senate; Record Group 46; National Archives. Accessed 6/20/14. <http://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/index.html?dod-date=402>

Resource Sheet #04

Document B: Senator George W. Norris' Speech Before the Senate, April 4, 1917

Following President Wilson's speech before Congress requesting a declaration of War against Germany, Senator George W. Norris gave the following response on April 4, 1917.

... The resolution now before the Senate is a declaration of war. Before taking this momentous step, and while standing on the brink of this terrible vortex, we out to pause and calmly and judiciously consider the terrible consequences of the step we are about to take. We ought to consider likewise the route we have recently traveled and ascertain whether we have reached our present position in a way that is compatible with the neutral position which we claimed to occupy at the beginning and through the various stages of this unholy and unrighteous war. . .

... There are a great many American citizens who feel that we owe it as a duty to humanity to take part in the war. Many instances of cruelty and inhumanity can be found on both sides. Men are often biased in their judgment on account of their sympathy and their interests. To my mind, what we ought to have maintained from the beginning was the strictest neutrality. If we had done this, I do not believe we would have been on the verge of war at the present time . . .

... We have loaned many hundreds of millions of dollars to the Allies in this controversy. While such action was legal and countenanced by international law, there is no doubt in my mind but the enormous amount of mly loaned to the Allies in this country has been instrumental in bringing about a public sentiment in favor of our country taking a course that would make every bond worth a hundred cents on the dollar and making the payment of every debt certain and sure. Through this instrumentality and also through the instrumentality of others who have not only made millions out of the war in the manufacture of munitions, etc., and who would expect to make millions more if our country can be drawn into the catastrophe, a large number of the great newspapers and news agencies of the country have been controlled and enlisted in the greatest propaganda that the world has ever known, to manufacture sentiment in favor of war.

It is now demanded that the American citizens shall be used as insurance policies to guarantee the safe delivery of munitions of war to belligerent nations. The enormous profits of munition manufacturers, stockbrokers, and bond dealers must be still further increased by our entrance into the war. This has brought us to the present moment, when Congress, urged by the President and backed by the artificial sentiment, is about to declare war and engulf our country in the greatest holocaust that the world has ever known. . .

Source: Norris, George. "Against Entry Into War." *Congressional Record*, 65th Cong., 1st Sess., Vol. LV, pt. I, pp. 212-13. Accessed 6/20/14.

<http://stuff.mit.edu/afs/athena/course/21/21h.102/www/Norris,%20Against%20Entry%20Into%20the%20War.html>