September 16, 1924.

Remarks by the President to Newspaper Men.

Here is another inquiry about the guns on the American battleships—
elevation. Nothing new developed in relation to that. I think I made my position
quite clear the other day. We want to maintain all the rights we have under the
 treaty, but as a matter of policy I doubt whether at the present time I would want
to advocate any expenses that aren't absolutely necessary on battleships. An ad-
ditional reason has developed in relation to that within the last week, by reason
of the return of the American flyers from around the world. I have read a great
many times in the course of a short life that battleships are to become extinct.
They never have. And I should hesitate some to put a lot of reliance on that kind
of a statement now and to adopt that policy. But it was reported to me that one
result of this world flight in has been a demonstration of future ability to carry
on warfare through the air and that it made the position of the large battleships
very much different than it has been in the past. The statement was that we couldn't
go to Europe now as we went in 1917 and 1918, and that it would be impossible to
pursue the policy that we had adopted of transporting troops and munitions on account
of the development of aerial navigation. Now, I should have to take that into con-
sideration before I want to authorize much of an expenditure on large battleships.
Also it is to be considered that we have 6 or 8 battleships under the treaty that
will come up to be scrapped in the course of a not very long time in the future,
6, 8 or 10 years. It is a question of whether we want to expend a lot of money on
those battleships that will be scrapped in that time. Those are the only differences
that have occurred to me in the situation between now and what it was the other day.

Mr. President, doesn't that make your position in relation to the next
disarmament conference stronger by not bringing our forces up to the stipulation in
the treaty?

I have seen considerable discussion to the effect that our navy was way
below the treaty limit. I should want to have quite a careful inventory and analysis
made of our navy before I subscribed strongly to that. You gentlemen are all familiar
with the military policy. It seems to be the classic one of securing an appropriation
for either the army or the navy. That policy doesn't have very much effect around
this office, nor I assume on the Congress, suggesting that our army is running down in
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materials and personnel, and that the navy is just ready to drop into the sea. I
couldn't go into details, but my belief is that the navy at the present time is in
perfect condition, pretty efficiently manned, entirely well equipped, and that it
is able to shoot a little better than it was ever before. Now, I don't want any-
thing said that will deter the Congress from making an adequate appropriation. I
want to see the policy of the budget maintained. I want to maintain it and the only
way that it can be broken down is through the action of the Congress. I want to try
to have the Executive Department maintain that policy, and just at the present time before
I should want to approve of a very enlarged appropriation for any department I should
want to make a very careful survey of the department to see that every possible
efficiency is being secured out of the present appropriation.

Mr. President, are we to understand that this is the reason for Mr. Wilbur's
coming back to Washington so hastily?

I wouldn't say that. Some of the press, I thought, rather overemphasized
that. I want to see him about matters in the navy and so I sent him a telegram asking
him to return. It didn't portend any crisis, or anything of that kind.

Mr. President, could you give us any information about the estimates?

For my own information I asked the Bureau of the Budget to find out how much
we were spending for aviation, and the figures are $32,174,000 total; for the Army
$12,435,000; the Navy $15,180,000; than the Advisory Board has $450,000; and the Post
Office Department $2,750,000. (The President left out a figure) That doesn't, of

Those are figures for the current fiscal year?

Last year, I believe. I think the salary of the officers and men is all in
addition. I think that is the largest amount that is expended by any government, with
the possible exception of France. I rather doubt if they are making as large an
expenditure as that. I wouldn't want to be too certain of that. Their expenditures
on account of differences in prices and so on are somewhat different from ours.

Mr. President, do you have the figures showing the increase?

I don't know. I don't imagine there is an increase over the preceding year.
The total is $32,174,000, which is a fairly large sum to expend on aviation. It is not
so very long ago that the appropriation for the Navy didn't exceed that amount.

Mr. President, what is the basis of these figures - to see whether it shall
be increased or decreased for the next year?

No, but I have seen some newspaper comment about the amounts that we were proposing to expend on aviation, and for my own information I sent out to find out what the amount was. It may be that we ought to expend more than that. It may be that that is adequate. I merely mentioned that as the only element that I thought of that would come into consideration at the present time in relation to expending a lot more money on battleships. The round-the-world flight to some minds has demonstrated that the position of the battleship has become one that is obsolete. I rather think that there would be a little lack of logic in spending a lot of money on battleships and at the same time spending a lot of money on aviation. I am not quite sure about this, but if the battleship has become obsolete because aviation has become powerful, it seems to me that we had better stop spending very much money on battleships and more on aviation.

Mr. President, will that idea be carried out in the budget?

I don't know that the idea has developed far enough yet. I wouldn't want to pass judgment on it. Of course that is a matter for the experts of the Army and the Navy. They haven't made any formal report to me, but I am just speaking about this as to what seems to me rather an inevitable result. If battleships become obsolete we wouldn't want to spend a lot of money on them, and if aviation becomes more efficient perhaps it is reasonable to spend more money on aviation.

Mr. President will you have that matter decided by the Budget experts?

Well, of course the experts of the Army and Navy have put in their estimate for the present year, last August I think. We are working on it now in the Budget Bureau. Whether that will be a matter they will take up or not I don't know. I judge it is a matter that all military establishments are considering at the present time. I don't know of any plan to bring it into the contemplation of the present budget. There may be one.

Have you any word about when Mr. Wilbur will arrive?

I think he is expected about Friday.

I don't know as I can make any comment on the record of Walter Johnson. I wrote him a letter the other day, commending him as a very high type of sportsman and athlete; a man that put the best that was in him into perhaps the most popular American sport, and mixing gave his thought, attention and energy to it and made a success of it.
May we have that letter?

I thought it had been published.

I haven’t made any decision about Commissioner Gaskill. I understand he is a very good man. I have some other applications, I think, for the place.

I never have heard a word directly or indirectly about the decision of the British Government to use the British fleet for the purpose of enforcing sanctions ordered by the League against aggressor nations. I don’t know a thing about that.

I don’t believe it has ever been taken up in any way with our Government, because we don’t come into contact with the League.

I don’t know as I can comment any on the statement that I think Chairman Butler made in relation to my making speeches in the West. I have tried to make it plain that I have no plan about it. I shouldn’t want you to be surprised, or to draw any particular inference from my making speeches, or not making speeches, out there. I don’t recall any candidate for President that ever injured himself very much by not talking.

I supposed that my appointment of Judge McMahon had been published. I signed the commission and sent it to him in the usual way, and undoubtedly he quietly took the oath of office and continued execution of his duties.

I haven’t made up my mind about Miss Sellers. I haven’t made up my mind to appoint anyone else there - otherwise I should have done so. Of course it isn’t necessary to appoint anyone else, because she goes right on in her duties. It is a case where not making any appointment is virtually continuing the present encumbent in office.

I haven’t made any request of Mr. Adams - Samuel Adams - to serve on the Agricultural Commission. He came in to pay his respects, having just returned from abroad. He was there on account of his health and came in to tell me of his trip and incidentally to inquire what he could do to help in the election.

I haven’t any plan or policy about the settlement of the French debt at present. That is all provided for by statute law, and I suppose that the only representation I would be entitled to make about it is that which I am ordered to make by law. That states in what way it may be settled, the rate of interest, and length of time the matter is to run. Of course, in addition to that we have a Commission. Mr. Hurley is a member of the Commission and a very efficient member.
If the Commission, after conference with representatives of another country should recommend to me that we should go to Congress and ask to make a settlement with a country on terms different from that provided by law, very likely I should undertake to secure consent from Congress. That was what was done with the British debt. It wasn't settled exactly in conformity with the terms of the law. The law had to be varied to meet the conditions. I couldn't pass any judgment before the event on anything that they might want to oppose. I should give great weight to the opinion of the Commission and undoubtedly would adopt any suggestion or recommendations that they might make to me, and make it my own recommendation, so far as it might be necessary, to present to the Congress.

If there were a modification of the terms now enjoyed by Great Britain we would have to modify their terms at the same time, wouldn't we?

I don't see why.

Mr. President, you couldn't expect them to pay in harsher terms than Italy, for instance, if you should make the rate of interest lower?

Well, Great Britain now is paying, and one or two other nations are paying. Some nations are not paying any. There is a difference in conditions now, and those conditions might continue. If the terms now enjoyed by Great Britain and Italy were to be altered, they might have to be brought to the same terms.

Isn't there something in the statute which provides that settlement must be made with all countries on the same basis?

Well, you may be right about that. I didn't have it in mind that the statute did provide that there must be the same terms between the nations. Perhaps it does. My recollection was that there was an original statute passed creating this Commission and directing them under what terms and conditions they should make settlement. When they came to make their settlement with the British they found the British couldn't comply with those terms, and therefore submitted a new proposal to the Congress who passed a special law. Now it may be that in that special law it is provided to apply the same terms to all countries.

If it didn't, Mr. President, you couldn't expect Great Britain to pay harsher terms than others.

Of course, the British are paying now. The others are not paying anything. It doesn't at all follow that because France or Italy or some other country can't
pay but $50,000,000 a year and we have to extend their payments over 75 years, that
the British are not abundantly able to pay their amount in 62 years. It is a ques-
tion of the ability of each country. There is great force, though, in what you say
about treating everybody alike. I should like to do that. I doubt very much if the
British would make any complaint about any settlement that we might make with any
others. They have made their settlement on what they thought they could do. What
we have constantly kept in mind in that policy is that the debt that is due to us
from one country hasn't any direct connection with the debt that might be due to us
from another country. That is why we have not mixed up the German indemnity in
any way with our own debt.

I don't know of any proposal that the Shenandoah should attempt a North
Pole flight. That is something that the navy might like to take up. It is a most
interesting suggestion, and if we are to have another ship like the Shenandoah
inxxx as I understand that the one that is coming over from Germany is, so that
we have two, well there might be a reason for putting this one to a test.

If such a flight were attempted now, would the same objections be made
that served to postpone the flight this year?

If we have two vessels or ships, we would feel a little more like
jeopardizing one of them, than if we only had one. It was rather apparent that
if anything should happen to the Shenandoah, it would be very difficult to get an
appropriation again for that kind of an airship.

I haven't made any final decision about an appointment in the International
Joint Commission to succeed Mr. Townsley.

I don't know of any pending negotiations about the refunding of war debts,
other than what is seen in the press.

I don't know as I can make any comment on the progress of the campaign,
other than to say it is going on satisfactorily. I haven't any speaking engagements
other than what are known. I think next month I am going to speak at Philadelphia
on the 26th, and before the Holy Name Society here on the 21st. Those have no
special significance. If I get cornered up by people wanting me to make speeches,
and it is represented to me that on this occasion I am the only individual that can
save the progress of civilization, and that unless I am to do it civilization is going
to fail and I shall be responsible for it, when that proposal is made to anyone it

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is rather difficult for them to say they won't make a speech.

You have received some proposals west of the Mississippi, haven't you?

I don't remember any.