

Tuesday, Feb. 28, 1928.

Report of the Newspaper Conference.

I understand that the Senate Committee is starting in to draft a flood control bill. I have talked with various members of the House and the Senate that are interested in this legislation with a view to seeing if I could not compose the differences that exist in the House and the Senate and some differences between what I would like to have and the desires of some members of the House and the Senate. My position, as I suggested the other day, was fully set out in my message, wherein I stated that I thought the property that was to be benefitted ought to bear some portion of the expense. Now, it has been suggested to me that there are some localities that are unable to bear any expense, others that can bear some of it, others perhaps that could bear all of the proposal which I made of 20%, which was 20% of 180 odd million dollars, not of the 290 odd, because there was 110 million dollars of the Jadwin plan that applied especially to navigation and only 180 odd million that was specifically for flood relief. That, as I stated, would make the 20% some \$35,000,000, which would be payable over a term of years, probably running as high as 10 years in some localities, and make the contribution about \$3,500,000 a year, which reduced to an acreage charge was about 3¢ per acre, per year, which made me think that it wouldn't be an onerous burden. But no survey has ever been made to determine just what the economic conditions are and just what communities can bear the burden and what communities can not. So I suggested to the three senior Senators from Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana, that that question might be determined by the appointment of a Commission that would make an economic survey and determine what each community could contribute, how it could be contributed, and how their costs would be financed - perhaps by the Treasury taking their bonds or something

of that kind, and that is a proposal that I would like to see worked out. I don't know but there was some confusion the other day in my not making my statement entirely clear. Of course, the matter of \$35,000,000 spread over 10 years is rather a negligible amount, so far as the U. S. Treasury is concerned, so that I said that if this Mississippi flood problem was the only thing that was to be considered that I wouldn't make very much argument about the contribution down there. It isn't the only thing that is to be considered, because there are now proposals for the U. S. Government to build levees and afford flood protection for practically all the rivers in the United States, which would be a very great cost, and for that reason I was quite anxious to maintain the principle of local contributions in the lower Mississippi. Some of the bills that have been drawn up have a section providing that the bearing of the entire cost by the U. S. Government is not to be considered as a precedent. I suggested to one man that was in that if it could be done in this case any one else that wanted flood control could also bring in a bill and put that clause in his bill that it was not to be considered as a precedent. It seems to me that the decision about that would be this - that this is something that the U. S. Government ought to do. If it was a good thing to do, to bear all the cost would be a precedent, and if it wasn't a good thing for the Government to do then it ought not to be done. But, as I stated before, I think the people interested are getting closer and closer together and will undoubtedly reach some conclusion that is fair. I wouldn't want the statement to go out too strongly that I had changed my position. The only addition that I have made to my position was the suggestion that this question might be determined by a commission that would go into the details and so take care of any communities that were not able to contribute. But of course the question comes in here of whether the land isn't already burdened with bonds and mortgages and obligations, that is all that it can

bear, and if it is so burdened 3¢ an acre, which would in the course of years run into \$35,000,000, might in some instances be more of a burden, it was argued to me, than could be borne. There is another angle to this - that if the U. S. Government is to pay all the costs the demands will be greatly enlarged. I should expect that under any commission that might be set up or any agency that might be used for the prosecution of this work, that it would be done in a business way. But it is very easy to get into something different and start out on the prosecution of a plan that as it progressed would reveal itself as one which was so ambitious that it might break down. There will be enlarged demands if the U. S. Government is to pay the cost. Some railroad men came in to see me yesterday that said that the cost to certain railroads down there, by putting these plans into operation, they estimated at about \$70,000,000, and they wanted whoever was to bear the cost to reimburse them for such expenditures as they were required to make minus any benefits that might accrue to them. Of course, if their roads were put in a position where they will not suffer from floods, that would be a distinct benefit to them and might be set off against some of the cost. They have had flood charges for repairs and damages of an ascertainable amount running over a series of years, and if they were to be entirely relieved of those of course that would be a credit to be offset against the expense of putting them in a position where they wouldn't suffer any more from floods. I merely mention that as an example of one of the things that will constantly come up as the plans progress. I think it would be the best plan, so far as I can judge, to proceed to do this work in accordance with the present law; that is, through the War Department, the Chief of the Bureau of Engineers, and the Mississippi Flood Commission. That is merely a matter of opinion. If some one can present a better method of carrying on the work, I should be glad to adopt that. But this method has worked out very well in the construction of levees and dikes. The work has been done in a businesslike

way. I think I have suggested before that there is only one of the standard levees that gave way and all of the rest held during the last great flood. The plan of having a commission, of course, undertake to determine damages would not hold up the work at all. The work could go right on and the commission report to the next Congress, and on that report the next Congress would then legislate.

Question: How would that commission be selected?

President: Ordinarily it would be selected by the President and approved by the Senate.

The first that I knew of any suggestion that I might go to Ottawa to be present at the laying of the corner stone of the American Legation building came to me through the press. I would like to go to Canada some time. You gentlemen know the difficulty, however, that there is for the President to travel and especially the difficulty about going out of the United States. The calls in this country are so great that I only would consider going into any other jurisdiction as responding to a matter of very great importance. It has been very gracious of the officials of Canada, the Governor General, the Prime Minister, and other officials, to visit the United States from time to time and helpful in the continuation of our very friendly relations. I assume it would be helpful for me to go to Canada. I haven't been able to find any time to go up there and this has been made merely as a suggestion.

Several representatives of church organizations came in yesterday to present to me some views that they brought in their representative capacity relative to the building program of the Navy. I assume that they gave to the press the statements that they made. I told them, of course, that they would be taken into consideration. I judge, though, that the views that they presented to me were in relation to the program that had been proposed by the Navy and not in re-

lation to the bill that has been reported by the House Naval Affairs Committee. Whether that would make any difference in their position, I am not able to state. I think perhaps it might modify it some. I did suggest to them that the bill as now reported by the Committee was for the purpose of a building program that was not in excess of the minimum that we had suggested at the Geneva Conference. Our suggestion there was 300,000 tons. If this program were carried out, it would leave us with a little under 300,000 tons, and on that I suggested to them that instead of alarming any other country as to its size it would probably be regarded by other countries as very moderate, because when we presented to the Geneva Conference the suggestion that the limit be 300,000 tons it was suggested to us that that was altogether too small. I think the British at that time stated that their requirements were for 595,000 tons. So that if we were engaged in a moderate building program of this nature that I did not see that it could possibly alarm any other country.

I have made some inquiries about reconditioning the Mount Vernon and the Monticello. That could be done, I am advised, at a cost of some more than \$12,000,000, but it was thought that when they were reconditioned that they would be usable vessels. I had understood that one of their sister ships, either of the Monticello or the Mount Vernon, had been reconditioned by the Germans and then discontinued after two or three years of use. I am not sure about that, but there was a rumor that had come to me from a source that I think would have been informed about it. It looks as though the Mount Vernon and the Monticello would be usable for a considerable longer term of years than that.

Question: What service are they in now?

President: They are tied up at Newport or Hampton Roads. I am not sure which. I mean down here in Virginia. They could be used now, but they were used for troop ships during the war and of course received rather hard usage, so that they

would hardly be usable now for passenger service.

Question: You don't recall their German names, do you?

President: No, I don't.

Business conditions seem to keep along about the same. There has been some increase in some lines. I think the different steel companies report increases in their business. There was a report published by the Federal Reserve Board a day or two ago that reported increases in certain lines of merchandise, some increase in movements of freight. I think the department store business was reported as not quite so good.

They are now holding, or about to hold, a continuation of the Disarmament studies in Geneva. That is the one that is held under the League of Nations. We attended that for some months last year and are proposing to continue our representation there. I do not know of any suggestion for a special Naval Conference before 1931. That is the Conference that is to be held, I think, in accordance with the Washington treaty.

That reminds me that of course I suggested to the representatives of the different church organizations that I had done what I could to secure further limitation of naval armaments, and while I had not been successful in it the building that was proposed both by the Navy and which is now included in the House navy bill was not in excess of anything that we would have been able to secure had we entered into some agreement at Geneva, so that the outcome of that conference had not involved us in any larger building program than that which would have been necessary had we been able to make any agreement there which was within the possibilities of the situation.