

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S FIRST MESSAGE TO CONGRESS

Seventy-five years ago on July 4, 1861, Abraham Lincoln delivered his first message to Congress. It seems as if some recognition of this event should be made, as it was without question one of the most important sessions of Congress which ever convened. Limited space will allow only a brief outline of the President's message and a few excerpts from the address:

Outline

FIRST MESSAGE TO CONGRESS JULY 4, 1861

Introduction

"Fellow-citizens of the Senate and House of Representatives: Having been convened on an extraordinary occasion, as authorized by the Constitution, your attention is not called to any ordinary subject of legislation.

- a. Special session authorized by Constitution.
- b. Functions of Federal Government suspended in several states.
- c. Government possessions seized.
- d. Officers of Federal Army resign.
- e. Purpose to sever Federal Union avowed.
- f. Combined government of separated states invoked recognition.

Argument

I. Procedure Thus Far

- a. Policy chosen looked to exhaust all peaceful measures.
- b. Military opinion about defending Fort Sumpter.
- c. The fall of Sumpter and the issue of immediate dissolution.
- d. Influence on world civilization.

II. Calling Out the War Power

1. Reaction of belligerent and border states
2. Action of government
 - a. Call made for 75,000 militia
 - b. Proclamation closing ports
 - c. Suspension of the "writ of habeas corpus."
 - d. Constitutional provision
3. Attitude of foreign nations

III. Appeal for Legal Sanctions of Congress

1. Number of men and amount of money required
2. The legal status of a State in the Union

- a. Origin of the states
- b. Rights reserved to them by Constitution
- c. Responsibilities to the Union

IV. Opinion of the Individual

1. Popular sentiment at point of bayonet.
2. Voluntary service in the militia
3. Essentially a people's contest
4. Loyalty of the plain people

V. The Preservation of the Government

1. Internal attempts to overthrow it
2. The course of procedure after peace
3. Constitutional guarantees
4. The duty of employing war power regretted.

Conclusion

"Must a government, of necessity, be too strong for the liberties of its own people, or too weak to maintain its own existence?"

Excerpts

"The attention of the country has been called to the proposition that one who has sworn to 'take care that the laws be faithfully executed' should not himself violate them."

"Surely each man has as strong a motive now to preserve our liberties as each had then to establish them."

"A right result at this time will be worth more to the world than ten times the men and ten times the money."

"In a word, the people will save their government if the government itself will do its part only indifferently well."

"What is 'sovereignty' in the political sense of the term? Would it be far wrong to define it 'a political community without a political superior?'"

"The States have their status in the Union, and they have no other legal status. If they break from this, they can only do so against law and by revolution. The Union, and not themselves separately, procured their independence and their liberty. By conquest or purchase the Union gave each of them whatever of independence or liberty it has. The Union is older than any of the States, and, in fact, it created them as States. Originally some dependent colonies made the Union, and, in turn, the Union threw off their old dependence for them, and made them States, such as they are."

"These politicians are subtle and profound on the rights of minorities.

They are not partial to that power which made the Constitution and speaks from the preamble calling itself 'We, the People'."

"The result of an election held in military camps, where the bayonets are all on one side of the question voted upon, can scarcely be considered as demonstrating popular sentiment."

"It may be affirmed without extravagance that the free institutions we enjoy have developed the powers and improved the condition of our whole people beyond any example in the world."

"Whoever in any section proposes to abandon such a government would do well to consider in deference to what principle it is that he does it—what better he is likely to get in its stead—whether the substitute will give, or be intended to give, so much of good to the people?"

"It is a struggle for maintaining in the world that form and substance of government whose leading object is to elevate the condition of men—to lift artificial weights from all shoulders; to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all; to afford all an unfettered start, and a fair chance in the race of life. Yielding to partial and temporary departures, from necessity, this is the leading object of the government for whose existence we contend. I am most happy to believe that the plain people understand and appreciate this."

"Our popular government has often been called an experiment. Two points in it our people have already settled—the successful establishing and the successful administering of it. One still remains—its successful maintenance against a formidable internal attempt to overthrow it."

"He desires to preserve the government, that it may be administered for all as it was administered by the men who made it. Loyal citizens everywhere have the right to claim this of their government, and the government has no right to withhold or neglect it."

"No popular government can long survive a marked precedent that those who carry an election can only save the government from immediate destruction by giving up the main point upon which the people gave the election. The people themselves, and not their servants, can safely reverse their own deliberate decisions."

"And having thus chosen our course, without guile and with pure purpose, let us renew our trust in God, and go forward without fear and with manly hearts."