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Letter From Francis Mairs Huntington-Wilson to John W. Weeks, January 22, 1918

Francis Mairs Huntington-Wilson

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Record
Washington, D. C. January 22, 1918.

Honorable John W. Weeks,
United States Senate,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Senator Weeks:-

I beg leave to enclose herewith copy of a draft of an amendment *of a kind* that should in my humble opinion be attached to the Chamberlain bill providing for a War Council or Cabinet. The fact that you were sponsor for the earlier bill to bring about a Congressional Committee on the conduct of the war, together with our old acquaintance and my strong convictions on the subject, emboldens me to ask you to bear with a few remarks about this matter.

It seems to me the hour has struck, the President has frankly challenged Congress and the country either to submit to unchecked autocratic and secret rule or by appeal to the people to force him to carry on this war with some semblance of efficiency and with due regard to the rights of the public to have their Senate and House of Representatives speak for them upon the conduct of the war, and insist for them that it be conducted through the use of able men and the adoption of some methods of democratic efficiency.

I believe we all know in our hearts,--taught by experience and knowledge of the President's nature,--that it is his firm intention to conduct this war as an autocrat and just as inefficiently as may happen to result from his methods. We are, therefore, in a position to know that the President will either prevent a War Council being created or else he will, through bad appointments or refusal to use it, make the War Council nugatory. If we will but be frank we know this and we know also that the weapon of publicity and a dramatic appeal to the public opinion of the country are the only methods by which the President's course, so detrimental to the national interests, can be changed. Therefore, a Congressional Committee, at least morally ancillary to the War Council, is absolutely required if we are to get anywhere. Hence to my mind the necessity of some such amendment as that which I venture to suggest along the lines of your earlier idea.

It may be objected that it is doubtful whether you can get through the War Council now and that to seek more at this time might bring sure failure to get even what the Chamberlain Bill asks. I think a complete answer to this objection is in the fact that if the War Council is capable of being made nugatory by the President's attitude (even if he cannot prevent its passage) then the Chamberlain bill assures the country no benefit. Therefore, really to accomplish anything for the national interests, it is the duty of the Congress and most especially of the Republican Party, to go fearlessly ahead and amend the Chamberlain Bill in a way to indicate what the national interests really require. One might as well "be killed for sheep as for lamb" and I think Congress, and especially the Republicans, owe it to the country to point the right way and to have this issue out with the Administration in so dramatic a form as to awaken a slumbering public opinion.

People say that the public acquiesces in the President's habitual neglect to consult the Senate on Foreign Affairs, or the standing Congressional Committees upon matters touching their respective spheres. Very true; but the public ignorantly supposes that the much misunderstood Commander-in-Chief idea has put in abeyance for the duration of the war, the President's normal obligations to consult Congress. Of course, the impression is wrong; but it

is a fact. It is my belief that the spectacle of the President endeavoring to ignore a Congressional Committee specifically created to counsel with him upon war matters, would evoke a very different reaction.

I am disappointed to find you out of town until Thursday. The fact that I must return to Philadelphia tomorrow and so cannot have the pleasure of seeing you has necessitated my setting forth my impressions on this subject at some length, but I hope without wearying you too much.,

I am, my dear Senator Weeks, with kind wishes,

Sincerely,

Kuoc
P. S. I have sent copies of this letter to Senators Lodge, Johnson of California, Gallinger, and Penrose. Should you care to address me I can be reached by addressing me in care of Philadelphia Public Ledger, Independence Square, Philadelphia, Pa.