

# Mr. Kitchin's Letter on "Preparedness"

Scotland Neck, N. C., Sept. 4th, 1915.

Mr. H. E. C. Bryant,  
New York World Bureau,  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Bryant:

I am in receipt of your letter. I didn't intend my little hurried talk of three or four minutes, just as I was leaving Washington for North Carolina the other day, with a personal friend, a newspaper man of my state, relative to the big naval and military program, now being agitated throughout the country, to be published, though I did not caution against it. Since, however, my position has been so frequently misrepresented by the press, no doubt, unintentionally, it would seem not improper for me to state my position, rather, my views, with more clearness, in compliance with your request.

I at once wish to say that I have never stated, as appears in the clippings you kindly sent, that I would oppose any appropriation exceeding \$10,000,000 to \$20,000,000 for national defense. I have been voting for the last several years for appropriations in the annual naval bill exceeding \$120,000,000 and for nearly \$100,000,000 in the military bill; nor did I say that congress would not vote for increased appropriations for naval and military purposes and that it would take the position which I do. I am confident that the next congress will vote for larger appropriations and will not take the position as to the naval and military appropriations which I will. In other words, I admit that I will be a minority on the question. Nor have I said, as the press would have it, that the present European war has demonstrated the uselessness of the battleship or dreadnaught. I have said, though, and repeat it now, that it has demonstrated, beyond any doubt, that our navy was lacking in submarines, destroyers, scout-ships and other auxiliaries, including air craft, far more than in battleships, or dreadnaughts, a view which many members of congress, including myself, held and expressed long before the European war. While I was a member of the naval committee I insisted that the navy department was paying too much attention to and had too much faith in dreadnaughts and paying too little attention to and had too little faith in submarines, torpedo destroyers, etc. I, together with other members of the committee, urged, in vain, an increase in such smaller craft, in order to have a better proportioned and more efficient navy. The war has certainly demonstrated the wisdom of this position. However, I assert now that the lessons of the present war furnish many good reasons for the probability that the war will demonstrate that the dreadnaught, nine of which we have now under construction and authorized, costing over \$120,000,000 and which the big navy propagandists insist that the next congress should largely increase, will not hereafter be the prime weapon of offense or defense in naval warfare, and some reason to believe they will become obsolete after the termination of this war, if not before. A year ago Sir Percy Scott, one of England's ablest and wisest officers, declared that the submarine was the most effective ship for the navy of the future, and advised a cessation in the rapid construction of dreadnaughts and the utilization of the money thus spent in building a larger number of submarines. And this long before the two or three German submarines had played such havoc with the British fleet. Has not the war demonstrated conclusively the correctness of his opinion and the wisdom of his advice? If reports from the British, German and other belligerent ship yards are true, are not England, Germany, and other warring nations now acting his advice? So far, this war has proved that the most dangerous naval weapon of offense, and certainly the surest and most efficacious weapon of defense, is the submarine.

When the real, sea-going submarine, one that can go through the seas and attack an enemy fleet thousands of miles from base, many of which are now being built by Germany, according to reports, (the last congress authorized the construction of three for our navy) is put into service in this war, it may, and probably will,

revolutionize the war-ship construction policy of the world. The dreadnaught advocate in our country repeatedly asserts that the war has demonstrated the absolute usefulness and necessity of the big dreadnaught or battleship; that the superior battleship fleet of Great Britain and her allies swept the German fleet and German commerce from the seas. If Great Britain and her allies had not had a battleship, German commerce and the German fleet would have been swept from the seas exactly like they were. Great Britain and her allies had enough torpedo boats and destroyers and enough submarines to have sent after each battleship, battle-cruiser, and armored cruiser of the entire German navy, ten torpedo boats and destroyers and three submarines; enough to have destroyed, or driven to harbor, under protection of submarines and mines, as the German fleet was, the combined battleship fleets of the world, if located where the German fleet was. Great Britain alone had four destroyers and two submarines for each of the big warships of the German navy.

Now, a more direct reply to your letter: I am opposed to the big navy and army program now being agitated with so much energy throughout the country, especially by the jingoes and manufacturers of war equipment and their subtle, ramified, organized and powerful influences. I shall not support in the next congress the eight, six, or four battleships or dreadnaught proposition, nor the 500,000 or 250,000 army increase proposition, nor the \$500,000,000 (more than double the annual appropriations heretofore) appropriation proposition for the army and navy. Whether congress will vote for such an immensely increased appropriation depends on the President's attitude. If he insists on the increase, congress will vote for it. If he does not insist, in my opinion, congress will not vote for it. This answers your specific questions.

In further answer to your general inquiries, I shall not vote for any increase in the naval appropriation bill for an extra-battleships program. If the government has any extra money to spend, and must spend it on an extra increase of naval construction, then, in my judgment, it should be spent on the increased construction of submarines, torpedo destroyers, scout-ships and other auxiliaries, including air craft, and in enlarging our capacity to manufacture and lay mines—mainly on submarines and mines—(the laying of mines is a function of the army, and not of the navy, however) and not on additional dreadnaughts or battleships. If no increase in the naval appropriation bill over the last bill is made, I think it wiser that every dollar authorized and appropriated for new construction should be for submarines and other smaller craft above mentioned. For the cost of one or two dreadnaughts put into such craft, including the auxiliaries, we would have a better proportioned and more efficient navy than if put into dreadnaughts, and most certainly more efficient for defense. If this war has not as yet demonstrated the uselessness of the modern dreadnaught, it has surely demonstrated the marvelous usefulness and absolute necessity of the submarine as a weapon of offense and defense. For the cost of one dreadnaught, with the submarines we now have, and those building and authorized, we could build enough to keep the combined battleship fleet of the world hundreds of miles from our shores. We would have the largest submarine fleet in the world, larger than Great Britain's and Germany's combined at the outbreak of the present war. For the cost of a dreadnaught we could build from twenty-five to thirty submarines, as many as Germany had at the beginning of the war. Who, unprejudiced and disinterested, in or outside of the navy, in the light of the experience of the present war, does not know that twenty-five, or even ten or five, well equipped and well manned submarines, are more efficacious for offense and defense than one, or even four dreadnaughts? The dreadnaught costs \$14,000,000 and upwards; requires a thousand men and officers to man her; a million and a half dollars or more for her annual up-keep including crew; while a submarine costs only from \$400,000 to \$600,000; requires only about twenty-five men and officers to man, and its up-keep is negligible as compared with a battleship. Of all war craft it is by far the cheapest in men and money and most effective protection. Hasn't the submarine in this war fully vindicated itself? Have not three little German

submarines, costing each less than half a million dollars, and manned by not over twenty-five men, destroyed nearly 10 per cent of the big warship fleet of Great Britain, costing over \$75,000,000 and over two thousand lives, and, in addition destroyed many thousands of tonnage of smaller war craft and merchant vessels? To accomplish what these three submarines, costing a little over a million dollars, with seventy-five men, did, would take, in a naval engagement, more than a dozen battleships and cruisers, costing, according to what we pay, more than \$100,000,000, and from 7,000 to 10,000 officers and men, with the probability, even if successful, of losing many of the vessels and thousands of lives. Did not one little submarine, costing less than half a million dollars, with only twenty-five men, worming itself through thousands of miles of sea, creep into the Dardanelles, send to the bottom five warships of the Allies and disable the others, driving the straggling, crippled, remnant of the Allies' fleet out, while it survived, unharmed and untouched? To accomplish this, it would have taken eight or ten warships, costing from \$60,000,000 to \$100,000,000, and from 7,000 to 10,000 men, with the risk of many ships being destroyed and many lives lost. Germany has her big, magnificent fleet of battleships, cruisers, etc., lying unmolested in her harbor. Great Britain and her allies have a battleship fleet nearly four times as large and powerful and a torpedo fleet over four times as large. Why don't the Allies go in and destroy the German fleet? Your answer, submarines and mines. That answers largely the question of our "defensive preparedness." If a few submarines and mines (and Germany hasn't as many submarines as we have) can protect, and keep unmolested, the German fleet and her harbor and hold at bay for hundreds of miles a fleet four times as big and as powerful, why couldn't submarines and mines protect with equal assurance our fleet and our shores?

But why should we be in such a hurry to make big appropriations for the army and the navy? Why should congress make such a wild rush to tax the people more? Where is the necessity or the wisdom? If there ever was a time in the history of our government when the administration, congress, and the people, could consider with deliberation, and without excitement and without haste, a military and naval construction policy, it is now. Just stop and give a moment's calm thought to the situation:

1st. Our navy and army is stronger, better equipped, with more ammunition and in every respect more efficient today than ever before. We have now under construction and authorized for the navy more vessels than ever before—50 per cent more in money and in numbers than ever before; more dreadnaughts under construction than ever before—nine in number. During the two years of the Wilson administration congress authorized the building of dreadnaughts to cost over \$70,000,000; the last two years of Taft's administration dreadnaughts costing about \$26,000,000 were authorized. This ought to satisfy the dreadnaught jingo and trafficker, certainly 'till we construct other more useful and necessary craft. The dreadnaughts authorized in the last congress will not be completed until three or four years, and the dreadnaughts, if authorized by the coming congress, can not possibly be completed within four or five years—and the war goblins could eat us up alive by that time. Relatively, considering the requirements and demands of the present war upon all other navies, we have the strongest and most powerful navy on earth—sufficient to defend our country and protect our rights on the seas or elsewhere against any nation or any possible combination of nations during the continuance of the present European war. After the war terminates, what nation will have the design or the power to attack us?

2nd. We are in less danger from a foreign foe than ever before in the history of our country. Even if we were not, he has less power to harm or strike us than ever before. We are now absolutely in no danger of attack or invasion. In fact, the invasion by a foreign country from across the sea and the landing of an army upon the soil of another, equipped with mines and submarines, is a thing of the past and an impossibility, and no nation will ever attempt it. Every nation capable in the least of coping with us has its hands "full to its elbows"