

# Senator George Norris Opposes U.S. Entry into World War I



**ABOUT THE SOURCE** When World War I began in August 1914, the United States proclaimed its neutrality. American trade policies, however, clearly favored the Allies. By 1916 U.S. trade with Great Britain and France had more than tripled. American trade with Germany almost stopped completely. On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany. He claimed that German submarines had violated America's rights as a neutral power. A few politicians opposed Wilson's request. The passage below is from a speech given by Senator George Norris of Nebraska on April 4, 1917.



*As you read, note why Senator Norris believes the United States is entering World War I. The following words may be new to you: **momentous**, **vortex**, **judiciously**, **ascertain**, **contrary**, **munition**. You may want to use a dictionary to look them up.*

The resolution before the Senate is a declaration of war. Before taking this **momentous** step, and while standing on the brink of this terrible **vortex**, we ought to pause and calmly and **judiciously** consider the terrible consequences of the step we are about to take. We ought to consider likewise the route we have recently traveled and **ascertain** whether we have reached our present position in a way that is compatible with the neutral position which we claimed to occupy at the beginning and through the various stages of this unholy and unrighteous war.

No close student of recent history will deny that both Great Britain and Germany have, on numerous occasions since the beginning of the war, flagrantly violated in the most serious manner the rights of neutral vessels and neutral nations under existing international law as recognized up to the beginning of this war by the civilized world.

The reason given by the President in asking Congress to declare war against Germany is that the German Government has declared certain war zones, within which, by the use of submarines, she sinks, without notice, American ships and destroys American lives . . .

The first war zone was declared by Great Britain. She gave us and the world notice of it on the 4th day of November, 1914 . . .

Both of these orders declaring military zones were illegal and **contrary** to international law. It is sufficient to say that our Government has officially declared both of them to be illegal and has officially protested against both of them . . .

**The First World War****Primary Source**

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There are a great many American citizens who feel that we owe it as a duty to humanity to take part in the war. Many instances of cruelty and inhumanity can be found on both sides. Men are often biased in their judgment on account of their sympathy and their interests. To my mind, what we ought to have maintained from the beginning was the strictest neutrality. If we had done this, I do not believe we would have been on the verge of war at the present time. We had a right as a nation, if we desired, to cease at any time to be neutral. We had a technical right to respect the English war zone and to disregard the German war zone, but we could not do that and be neutral . . .

The enormous profits of **munition** manufacturers, stockbrokers, and bond dealers must be still further increased by our entrance into the war. This has brought us to the present moment, when Congress urged by the President and backed by the artificial sentiment, is about to declare war and engulf our country in the greatest holocaust that the world has ever known.

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Source: *Congressional Record*, 65th Cong., 1st Sess., Vol. LV, pt. I, pp. 212-213

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

1. How does Senator Norris compare the wartime actions of Germany with those of Great Britain?

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2. Why, according to Senator Norris, is the United States on the verge of entering World War I?

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3. What does Norris predict will happen if the U.S. enters the war?

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