

Legislative Message, April 25, 1861.

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT  
Nashville, April 25, 1861

GENTLEMEN OF THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

The President of the United States - elected according to the forms of the Constitution, but upon principles openly hostile to its provisions --having wantonly inaugurated an inter war between the people of the slave and non-slave holding States, I have convened you again at the seat of Government, for the purpose of enabling you to take such action as will most likely contribute to the defence of our rights, the preservation of our liberties, the sovereignty of the State, and the safety of our people; all of which are now in imminent peril by the usurpations of the authorities at Washington, and the unscrupulous fanaticism which runs riot throughout the Northern States.

The war thus inaugurated is likely to assume an importance nearly, if not equal, to the struggle of our revolutionary fathers, in their patriotic efforts to resist the usurpations and throw off the tyrannical yoke of the English Government; a war the duration of which and the good or evil that must result from it, depends entirely, in my judgment, upon the readiness with which the citizens of the South harmonize as one people, and the alacrity with which they respond to the demands of patriotism.

I do not think it necessary to recapitulate, at this late hour, the long train of abuses to which the people of Tennessee, and our sister States of the South have been subjected by the anti-republican spirit that has for many years been manifesting itself in that section, and which has at last declared itself our open and avowed enemy. In the message which I addressed to you at your called session in January last, these things were somewhat elaborately referred to, as constituting, in my judgment, the amplest reason for considering ourselves in imminent danger, and as requiring such action on the part of the Legislature as would place the State in an attitude for defence, whenever the momentous crisis should be forced upon us; and, also, as presenting to the North the strongest argument for peace, and if possible, securing a reconstruction of the Union, thus already dissolved by the most authoritative, formal, and matured action of a portion of the slaveholding States. Minor differences upon abstract questions the ardent devotion of our people to the preservation of the Union, originating with their great loyalty to the Government - and a more hopeful view of the subject than I had been able to take, coupled with the supposed peaceful intentions of the authorities at Washington, have resulted in leaving the State poorly prepared for the sad realities which are now upon us.

But unfortunate as this may be, I am nevertheless encouraged with the belief that we are at last, practically, a united people. Whatever differences may have heretofore existed amongst us, growing out of party divisions, as to the right of Secr which the people of the Northern section had elevated it to power. They have lost no time -they have neither hesitated or faltered. The low duplicity in which their Administration was inaugurated - trusting, while conceding nothing, to lull the South into a fatal security, furnishing ground for divisions in the border slave States, while constant though secret preparation for the work of subjugation was going on, is now

exposed and leaves us no alternative but independence out of the Union, or subjugation in it.

The dishonorable and treacherous practices which have so far characterized the authorities at Washington, admonish us, that in the impending struggle we are scarcely to expect the rules of honorable warfare. Having its origin in a disordered moral sentiment of the North - not finding the ordinary restraints of patriotism among their people - deriving its power from a usurpation and perversion of the functions of government - having no middle-ground short of positive subjugation of the South, or a defeat which exposes its disgrace to the civilized world - I fear the time has passed when peace can be hoped for by the more moral force of a united South, without a trial of arms.

Having succeeded in confusing and dividing the border slave States, they have had ample time for military preparations. The veil which concealed their recent movements has been thrown aside. The note of war has been sounded, and in the imperial proclamation, recently issued, the people of the Confederate States and all who sympathize with them are treated as rebels, and twenty days is allowed them to 'disperse' - and return to their allegiance to the authorities at Washington. Without waiting for the expiration of the twenty days, in addition to the regular army and naval forces, a militia force of seventy-five thousand has been called into the field to execute this edict, by the power of arms. As if purposely intended to add additional insult to the people of Tennessee, I have been called upon, as their Governor, to furnish a portion of these troops. I have answered that demand as in my judgment became the honor of the State, and leave the people to pass upon my action.

The Federal Union of the States, thus practically dissolved, can never be restored; or if ever thus restored, it must, by the very act, cease to be a Union of free and independent States, such as our fathers established. It will become a consolidated, centralized Government, without liberty or equality, in which some will reign and others serve - the few tyrannize and the many suffer. It would be the greatest folly to hope for the reconstruction of a peaceful Union, upon terms of fraternity and equality, at the end of an intestine war. There can be no desirable Union without fraternity. And if we could not have that, before the unholy crusade which is now being waged against us, we cannot have it after they shall have wantonly imbrued their unholy hands in the innocent blood of our people, from no worthier motive than a desire to destroy our equality and subvert our liberties.

Therefore, I respectfully recommend the perfecting of an Ordinance by the General Assembly, formally declaring the independence of the State of Tennessee of the Federal Union, renouncing its authority, and reassuming each and every function belonging to a separate sovereignty; and that said Ordinance, when it shall have been thus perfected by the Legislature, shall, at the earliest practicable time, be submitted to a vote of the people, to be by them adopted or rejected.

When the people of the State shall formally declare their connection with the remaining States of the Union dissolved, it will be a matter of the highest expediency, - I might almost say of unavoidable political necessity - that we shall at the same time, or as soon thereafter as may be, connect ourselves with those with whom a common interest, a common sympathy, and a common destiny identify us, for weal or for woe. That each of the Southern States, as they throw off their connection with the Federal Government, should take an independent position in

the contest, without that concert of action which alone can be secured by political unity, is a proposition which surely no one will assent to, who anticipates the dangers of the hour and the necessity for perfect harmony in the work of our general defence.

Such a political Union with the people of the Confederate States is rendered essential, by the fact, that we have made no provision for arming, organizing, provisioning, and embodying our military forces, while the Government of the Confederate States, foreseeing this invasion, has had an eye to the necessities of the emergency, and stands prepared generously to lend us its assistance in this unprovoked and cruel struggle. If we accept that assistance, we should do it in a spirit of mutual trust and confidence, prepared to share its burdens equally, while we avail ourselves of its advantages. A Government thus perfectly organized can more thoroughly command the resources and aggregate the revenues of the country than isolated States, fighting without unity, and moving without a common and responsible head. These resources, being thus concentrated, because it is natural intuition to rally round such a Government, in such an emergency, for self-preservation and defence, can be disbursed with more efficiency, and with less cost to the people than when the revenues, necessary to support the war, are scattered by divided counsels and not controlled by a common bureau. The same may be said with regard to military operations. Unity of movement, to secure unity of purpose in attack or defence, is absolutely necessary to success. The people of the whole South, thus united by a firm political compact, moving under the direction of one Government, and animated by the sense of common perils and by a unanimous determination to maintain their rights, liberties, and institutions, are invincible, and must speedily conquer an honorable peace. The war must necessarily be protracted or brief in proportion to the union among themselves.

I, therefore, further recommend that you perfect an ordinance, with a view to our admission as a member of the Southern Confederacy, which, it is evident, must soon embrace the entire slaveholding States of the South, to be submitted in like manner, and at the same time, but separately, for adoption or rejection by the people; so that they may have the opportunity to approve the former and reject the latter, or adopt both, as in their wisdom may seem most consistent with the future welfare of the State. However fully satisfied the Executive and Legislature may be, as to the urgent necessity for the speedy adoption of both these propositions, it is our duty to furnish the amplest means for a fair and full expression of the popular will.

In the opening of a revolution, fraught with such consequences, and the close of which no one can foresee, it is a matter of the highest moment that we determine, as speedily as possible our future political relations, delaying only long enough to reach the will and voice of the people. Under existing circumstances, I can see no propriety for encumbering the people of the State with the election of delegates, to do that which it is your power to enable them to do directly for themselves. The most direct as well as the highest act of sovereignty, according to our theory, is that by which the people vote, not merely for men, but for measures submitted for their approval or rejection. Since it is only the voice of the people that is to be heard, there is no reason why they may not as readily and effectively express themselves upon an ordinance framed and submitted to them by the Legislature, as if submitted to them by a Convention. The Southern States, all of whom are now engaged in resistance to the encroachment of Abolition power, will necessarily encounter embarrassments, arising from a want of unity of action, until such time as they shall all be united under a common Government.

The mode of action suggested, in addition to the advantage of its being the speediest of all others, will be attended with less expense to the State, which is of far greater importance now than at any former period of our history, owing to the general embarrassment of the people, which must continue at least during these troubles, and to the heavy appropriations that you will have necessarily to make to defray the expense of our defences.

If, however, it should be deemed advisable that a Convention, representing the sovereignty of the people, should be called by the General Assembly, in preference to submitting an ordinance of independence directly to them, though I deem the latter measure more expedient, under the circumstances, I am not prepared to say that harmony and unanimity will not thus be effected. The Senators and Representatives, coming, as they do, directly from their constituents, are the best judges of this measure. It cannot be regarded other than a question of detail, inasmuch as a very large majority of the people regard themselves as being forever absolved from all obedience to a Government that has developed the coldest and most deliberate purpose to inaugurate a civil and sanguinary war among them.

I deem it proper to remark in this connection that the Constitution of the Confederate States, while it retains all that is valuable of the Constitution of the former United States, is an improvement in many essential points upon that instrument, as conceded by those even those who were unfriendly to the mode and manner in which it originated.

The only additional matter to which I shall call your attention and first in importance - is the necessity of such legislation as will put the State upon war footing immediately. I will not insult your intelligence or question your patriotism so far as to resort to argument to prove the necessity of this measure, but content myself by recommending the passage of a law regulating the raising and thorough organization of an efficient volunteer force for immediate service, in any emergency which may arise, and a thorough and perfect organization of the militia, so that in case of necessity the whole force of the State can be speedily brought into action.

In my message to your extra session in January last, I laid before you the report of the Keeper of Public Arms, showing the number, character, and condition of the arms of the State, to which I refer you for information on that sub'ect. Since that report was made, I have ordered and received at the arsenal, fourteen hundred rifle muskets. If upon this subject further or more accurate information is desired, it shall be laid before you by the report of the proper officer.

It requires no argument from me to prove the absolute necessity of an immediate appropriation of a sum sufficient to thoroughly arm and equip such military force as the State may probably need in the prospective difficulties which lie before us. In addition to which, I respectfully recommend that you appropriate a sum sufficient to provision and maintain such force as is intended for the field, and an ample contingent military fund, to be subject to the order and disbursement of a Military Board, under such restrictions as you may see proper to impose.

The establishment of a Military Board, to consist of at least three persons, and invested with power to make all needful rules and regulations for organization and maintenance, I regard as indispensably necessary to a perfect military organization and equipment in the State, and the

fact that the Legislature cannot foresee and provide for the various contingent expenses necessarily incidental to a state of war, justifies and makes necessary the contingent military fund referred to.

I trust, gentlemen, that I have not so far mistaken your intelligence and patriotism, as to render necessary that I should invoke you in the name of all that is sacred and dear to us as a people - even the sanctity of our domestic firesides - to forget past differences, and whatever may tend in the least to distract your counsels in the present momentous crisis, in which we have been involved by the unprovoked and tyrannical usurpation of a people who, forgetting the lessons of their fathers, have overthrown the fairest government upon earth, in the mere wantonness of an unnatural sectional prejudice amounting to a sectional hate, and a disregard of those great principles of justice and equality upon which the Federal Union was based. I trust that to-day there are in Tennessee no Whigs, no Democrats; but that we are one people - all patriots, all brothers, recognizing a common interest and a common destiny; and that we will stand as one man in defence of our honor and of our rights. I pray you to cultivate a feeling of this kind, and to disseminate it amongst your constituents. It is only by such united and determined action, on the part of the people of the whole South, that we can hope to avoid the calamities of the bloodiest and most devastating civil war that has afflicted any nation in the history of the civilized world.

I trust that a few days will be amply sufficient to dispose of the business which I have laid before you. Your presence may soon be needed in the field, and if not, will be required at home for counsel among your constituents.

Trusting that an All Wise Providence may watch over your deliberations, and direct you in the adoption of such measures, as may most subserve the maintenance of the rights and liberties of the people, I submit the determination of these matters to your hands.

ISHAM G. HARRIS