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Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thetean/vol42/iss1/4

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Reed Smoot and the League of Nations: Duty to Church and Party

Brandon Hellewell

Senator Reed Smoot (R-UT) lived his life with two great devotions, the Republican Party and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In 1919, he held high positions in both. At that time, and in his seventeenth year as a senator, Smoot served as a member of the Senate Finance Committee. He also served as an Apostle of the LDS Church. These two parts of Smoot's life created tensions at several junctures, including 1919 when the Republican Party and LDS Church took opposing sides in the battle over United States membership in the League of Nations. The Church supported League membership, commending President Woodrow Wilson's program as the answer for peace. The Republican Party believed membership in the League would sacrifice portions of American sovereignty. For over a year, from February 1919 to March 1920, what contemporaries called "the League fight" raged across the United States and especially in Utah. The treaty ultimately failed to reach the necessary two-thirds majority for ratification for a second and final time on March 19, 1920.

This article will explore the conflict between Smoot's loyalty to the Republican Party and to the LDS Church for the duration of the League fight. It argues that Smoot's personal religious convictions, political beliefs, and loyalty to the Republican Party trumped his loyalty to the LDS Church, as he chose to oppose the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations. Smoot believed that Mormon scripture and prophecy clearly stated that peace would not reign on the earth until Jesus Christ returned to establish his kingdom again on the earth.
Therefore, membership in a peace league could never make good on its promises, because inevitable wars would continue until the Savior’s coming. Smoot did not want to join a league that would fail. Smoot also believed that America was a chosen land that God had ordained to be free from all nations. To join the League of Nations would place American sovereignty under the jurisdiction of a council of nations rather than the freedom America currently enjoyed. Smoot’s political objections to the League were straightforward. He did not want to give up the Monroe Doctrine, as it had proven rather effective, and he would not consent to have American armed forces be dictated to, even slightly, by any other nation. The LDS Church, on the other hand, saw the League as part of a solution for world peace. Smoot’s loyalty to the Republican Party, combined with his personal religious feelings, was strong, so he went against the LDS Church in voting for the reservations to the Treaty of Versailles and refusing ratification without them. In the broader sense, this article serves as an example of how foreign policy decisions are greatly affected by both religious beliefs and domestic politics.

Only two scholarly works explore Smoot’s role in the League fight. Milton R. Merrill’s political biography of Smoot, Reed Smoot: Apostle in Politics, is the most complete work on Smoot’s political life but includes only sixteen pages on Smoot and the League of Nations out of the 401 pages on his political career. One of the greatest shortcomings of Merrill’s work is that he did not have access to Smoot’s personal diaries when he finished his work on the Senator in 1957, as the diaries were not made available until 1964. This article makes extensive use of the diaries to provide additional insight into the senator and Apostle’s deepest thoughts. The most glaring omissions in Merrill’s work regarding Smoot’s role in League fight deal with his efforts in the Senate to get the Lodge Reservations passed. Much of that work was not through written communication contained in the Smoot Papers, but recorded in Smoot’s journal. The other published commentary on Smoot’s role in the League fight is a BYU Studies article entitled, “Personal Faith and Public Policy: Some Timely Observations on the League of Nations Controversy in Utah” by James B. Allen. Allen’s purpose is to demonstrate that members of the Mormon hierarchy have at times disagreed on political issues. Even with those disagreements, they kept their conversation civil. As such, the article only scratches the surface of Smoot’s dilemma and focuses on how he and other Church members cordially disagreed rather than the reasons behind those disagreements.
ORIGINS OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

The League of Nations idea originated with former President Theodore Roosevelt in 1910. While accepting the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in negotiating a peaceful end to the Russo-Japanese War, Roosevelt called for the great powers of the world dedicated to peace to form a "League of Peace, not only to keep the peace among themselves, but to prevent, by force if necessary, its being broken by others." Peace would be achieved when the great nations of the world with no desires for aggression worked together to temper the aggression of nations that did.¹ Five years later a group of veterans, lawyers, professors, and editors founded a group called the League to Enforce Peace (LEP) to advocate and lobby for the realization of Roosevelt's idea. With former President William Howard Taft serving as its president, the LEP quickly became the strongest advocate for American membership in the League. The LEP made extensive use of publications to help sway public opinion and lobbied to gather support in Washington.²

Woodrow Wilson was initially quiet on the League idea while the Republicans and the LEP began endorsing it. The Democratic Party had not come forth with an official stance, although William Jennings Bryan, former presidential candidate and Wilson's former secretary of state, was opposed to the League idea on the grounds that it relinquished American sovereignty.³ It was not until May 1916 that Wilson threw his support behind the League idea in a speech to the LEP. He said, "The United States is willing to become a partner in any feasible association of nations formed in order to realize" open diplomacy among nations, freedom for all countries to choose their own sovereignty, and the right to be free from all forms of aggression.⁴ After his reelection in 1916, Wilson began to take a much bolder stand on the League of Nations. He began seeking a negotiated peace and began offering American membership in a League of Nations as an attempt to entice Germany and the Allies to reach a peace agreement.⁵

⁵ Cooper, 19.
Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA), who would later become the major opponent to Wilson’s League and author of the Lodge Reservations, was the first elected official to put his support behind the League idea in June 1915. Lodge endorsed the League idea in a speech when he said, “peace can only be maintained by putting behind it the force of united nations determined to uphold it and prevent war." He would later regret his strong endorsement of the LEP when Wilson began endorsing the negotiated peace between Germany and the Allies with a League of Nations as part of that peace. Lodge felt the general call to peace was easy but the implementation was too difficult. Smoot would follow the lead of Lodge who was the Senate majority leader in opposition to Wilson during the League fight.

Smoot’s feelings on the League are unknown during the early phases of the League’s transforming from an idea to an integral part of the Treaty of Versailles. Even though Smoot had deep convictions and a great interest in foreign policy, his personal area of expertise was on financial measures involving taxes, tariffs, and appropriations. It would have been out of character for Smoot to speak out or even spend much time writing to anyone about foreign policy issues before they became an issue that warranted his attention and vote in the Senate.

Immediately following the end of World War I on November 11, conflict over the peace negotiations between Republicans and Democrats began with Wilson’s appointments to the peace commission. As expected, Wilson appointed himself as the head delegate, believing that no one else could adequately represent him. His other appointments angered the Republicans. Wilson did not include a single senator, figure of national stature, or prominent Republican. The exclusion of any individuals from these groups was not an oversight on Wilson’s part, but a carefully calculated decision. He chose relatively weak companions to avoid any opposition within his own commission so that he could negotiate on his own terms upon his arrival in Paris.

Wilson’s announcement that he would attend the peace negotiations incited the first comments Smoot would make on the League in his diary on

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8 Henry Cabot Lodge in Congressional Record, 64th Cong., 2nd Sess. (Feb 7, 1917), 2364-2370.
10 Cooper, 33-37.
November 18. He wrote, “I felt sure he would [go to the peace conference] for he thinks it can make the American people believe he would be the one person to dictate the terms. He wants the formation of a League of nations with himself as President.” A few weeks later President Wilson gave a speech to the Senate. Smoot describes the president’s reception as “very cold” with “very little applauding during his reading his message.” Smoot’s initial opposition was probably no surprise to anyone. Merrill explains that because of Smoot’s political interest in protecting America through the tariff, it was a foregone conclusion that Smoot would either oppose the League completely or at least seek reservations to it.

A day after his first diary entry critiquing Wilson’s League, Smoot received a telegram that would change the whole complexion of the League fight in Utah and for Smoot. President Joseph F. Smith—Smoot’s best friend and closest, most powerful ally—passed away. Taking his place was the staunch Democrat and vocal League supporter, Heber J. Grant. That night Smoot wrote in his diary that Smith’s death would “make a mighty change in the affairs of the Church and Utah.” Smith had been a powerful ally for Smoot. President Smith believed that Reed Smoot was of more use in Washington than in Salt Lake City. A major part of his mission as an Apostle was to use his connections in the Capitol to further the work of the Lord and the Church. It was Smith who accepted and encouraged the resignations of two Apostles who had performed polygamous marriages post-Manifesto in order to ensure Smoot’s seating in the Senate.

Smoot was not as close to Grant as he had been to Smith. Grant was a Democrat and had been especially hostile towards Smoot in 1909 during a push for Prohibition in Utah. Grant had been especially zealous in pushing forward the Prohibition movement while Smoot feared backlash from non-Mormon voters if he were to push Mormon policies upon them. Smoot communicated his objections to Prohibition to President Smith, who fully supported Smoot in his actions privately while staying quiet publicly. While Smoot and Grant did differ politically, they shared a mutual respect and love for each other. When Smoot was asked by George D. Pyper, Sunday School General President, about Grant, he said:

11 Smoot Diaries November 18, 1918, Reed Smoot Papers in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University Library, Provo Utah. (hereafter: Smoot Papers).
12 Merrill, 251.
13 Smoot Diaries Nov. 19, 1918, Smoot Papers.
14 Merrill, 57–59.
15 Ibid, 194.
No man living is blessed with a greater degree of charity than he, as thousands can testify having received assistance from him and at a time when assistance meant everything to them. No trouble of another was ever too great or small to command his attention. His willingness to take the troubles of others seemingly has no limit... Hypocrisy is a thing abhorrent to him.\textsuperscript{16}

For the first time in his career, the man who Smoot saw as the mouthpiece of God on Earth had different political views than his own.

The Republicans responded to Wilson’s choice of delegates by contacting Allied leaders directly. Lodge wrote to Arthur Balfour, the British former secretary, to explain that Republicans sought for the unconditional surrender of Germany and absolute loyalty to England and France.\textsuperscript{17} Lodge’s other weapon to fight Wilson emerged within the Senate. Lodge drafted a document, later dubbed the “Round Robin” that had thirty-seven signatures from Republican senators, including Smoot, expressing opposition to the League of Nations as a part of the peace agreement. The nearly forty signatures were more than enough to effectively kill the treaty and prevent ratification. The League fight was on.

\textbf{REED SMOOT AND THE LEAGUE FIGHT}

The Round Robin was the first time Smoot’s feelings on the League issue were made public. The decision to sign it was not easy. In his personal journal he describes himself as “very much disturbed” as to what he should do because he “knew how the people of Utah felt” on the League but he ultimately concluded that the action was correct and signed it.\textsuperscript{18} This is the first instance where Smoot’s loyalties begin to pull him in different directions. Smoot’s disturbance does not appear to be a moment of reflection on the correct policy, but rather the negative effects that might befall him if he were to sign it. His constituents in Utah were overwhelmingly supportive of the League. During an LEP meeting in Salt Lake City following Wilson’s presentation of the first draft of the League of Nations, there were 9,999 votes for the League of Nations and only one against it.\textsuperscript{19} In a letter to RNC Chairman Will Hays, Smoot estimated that about 95 percent of Utah was in favor of the League.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16} Smoot to George D. Pyper, Dec 1, 1919, Smoot Papers.
\textsuperscript{17} Cooper, 39.
\textsuperscript{18} Smoot Diaries, March 4, 1919, Smoot Papers.
\textsuperscript{19} Salt Lake Tribune February 23, 1919.
\textsuperscript{20} Smoot to Will Hays, November 24, 1919, Smoot Papers.
With such overwhelming support for the League, the senator could not ignore the voters’ demands. He was up for reelection in November 1920 and victory was hardly guaranteed, if not improbable. Utah, a Republican stronghold since admittance to the Union in 1896, had recently undergone a radical shift towards the Democratic Party. Up until 1915, Joseph L. Rawlins, who served one term in the Senate before being ousted by Smoot, was the only Democrat to serve as a US Senator, US Representative, or governor of Utah. Utah had been one of only two states to vote to reelect Taft in the 1912 election when Wilson beat Taft and the Bull Moose Roosevelt. The shift began in 1914 when James Henry Mays was elected to the House of Representatives. That year Smoot was reelected by a mere 3,000 votes. Utah elected Democrats to the other House seat, the Senate, and governorship in 1916. Smoot was already discussing reelection with LDS Church Presiding Bishop C. W. Nibley, a trusted friend and advisor, before the end of World War I.

Despite these worries about his constituents in Utah, Smoot signed the Round Robin. The reasons for this are embedded in the foundation of Smoot’s political views. Smoot was first and foremost a loyal adherent to the Republican Party platform. Summarizing Smoot’s political beliefs, Merrill wrote that Smoot believed Republicanism was the “closest approximation to revealed truth that the human mind could produce. There might be weaknesses, often in men, occasionally in minor principles, but they were like the human frailties of a well-loved friend or a revered parent.” Smoot saw little reason for political independence. The best way to promote change was through a united party platform. Smoot explained the importance of following the party line in a letter during his first Senate campaign in 1902.

I much prefer to run on straight party lines and if we get whipped all well and good, we then have the satisfaction knowing that no one could say that we thought more of an office than our principles. When we win on straight party lines we always know how it was accomplished and on what platform. I would a thousand times rather lose a fight on what I knew to be right that to win it and have even a chance for reflection on my motives or character.

21 Merrill, 132.
22 C.W. Nibley to Reed Smoot, 12 November 1918, Smoot Papers. The correspondence between Smoot and Nibley was constant during the League fight and thereafter continued on a regular basis throughout Smoot’s tenure in Washington. Nibley was Smoot’s chief informant on the inner-workings of the other Apostles and advised him on the best course to take regarding public opinion.
23 Merrill, 200.
24 Reed Smoot to Horton F. Harder, July 16, 1902, Smoot Papers.
In addition to the philosophical reasons to remain loyal to his party, Smoot had benefitted directly from party loyalty. Having been elected by the Utah Legislature in 1902, Smoot stood trial before the US Senate, bringing the LDS Church with him. Given the Church’s history of breaking laws and fighting the federal government, the Senate debated whether or not Smoot, as an apostle, should be allowed to take his seat. Smoot was ultimately allowed to take his seat with the backing of fellow Republicans, especially President Theodore Roosevelt, who hoped the Apostle could make Utah a Republican stronghold in the West. Following his seating, Smoot took any task asked of him by his party, serving on many committees and through hard work became a loyal, trusted party member, earning a place on the prestigious Senate Finance Committee.

Three days after signing the Round Robin, Smoot wrote a letter to explain his actions to his constituents that were certain to disapprove. Portions of the letter were published in an article in the Salt Lake Tribune on March 17. Smoot explains that the League Covenant as presently written was “repugnant to the traditions of the American people and the constitution of the United States” and that it would cause “more than one future war.” The League would force America to give up the Monroe Doctrine, which gave them sole guardianship of the western hemisphere and force them to be part of a group in guarding both. As such the United States could be stopped by France, Italy, and Japan from interfering in matters of national security interest to the United States that would have little effect on those European and Asian countries. If America needed to pacify anarchy in Mexico or revolt in Cuba, the League could be prevent America from doing so. If America were needed in another international conflict, it would not shirk its responsibility because “America has never failed in her duty to the world and she never will.” The League of Nations was a direct attack on American sovereignty, and Smoot would not consent to giving up any portion of that sovereignty.

About a month after Smoot’s explanation was published in the Tribune, the First Presidency of the Church published the Church’s first official stance in the Deseret News (owned and operated by the LDS Church) advising that all Latter-day Saints living in Utah should gather on Sunday, April 13, to better

25 Kathleen Flake, The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 35. The best coverage of Smoot’s Senate Hearing is available in Flake’s book. She discusses how the trial shaped American and Mormon religion post 1900. She argues that Smoot and Joseph F. Smith, Mormon prophet, helped transform Mormonism from defining itself through its polygamous marriage structure to the use of Joseph Smith’s vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ that modern Mormons emphasize.

26 Salt Lake Tribune March 17, 1919.
inform themselves on the League of Nations "so that they may form sound views and crystallize sentiment throughout the State in favor of the establishment of a League of Nations that will be effectual in making war as nearly impossible as may be for all time to come." This publication would have a profound effect on the complexion of the League fight in Utah because of Smoot's position as Apostle and due to the rather large portion of the population that adhered to the LDS Church (over seventy percent). Before the publication in the Deseret News, Smoot disagreed with a large portion of his constituents in Utah, but now he disagreed with the Church. With the Church involved, it was bound to become a religious issue as much as it was political.

While LDS Church leaders got involved with the League of Nations, the Senate separated itself into three factions over the spring and summer months of 1919: irreconcilables, reservationists, and supporters. The irreconcilables were a mixed group of Republicans and Democrats (though a majority were Republicans) who opposed any form of the Treaty of Versailles with or without amendments, reservations, or both. They were a rather diverse lot from all regions of the country. Most of them were isolationists. Some simply had an extreme partisan distaste for Democrats and a loathing of Wilson. They had many different reasons to oppose the treaty but were united in opposition to the treaty in any form—no matter which amendments or reservations were attached to it. Smoot and the reservationists, led by Lodge, were willing to ratify the treaty with the Lodge Reservations attached. The most important reservation dealt with Article X of the League of Nations Covenant. Nearly all of the reservationists were Republicans. Wilson's supporters wanted the treaty ratified without reservation or amendment, and many of them opposed any form of ratification with the Lodge Reservations attached. Most Democrats fell into this category, joined by only one Republican.

Lodge best articulated the reservationist view in a debate with Harvard University President Lawrence Lowell. Lodge argued that he was not specifically against a League of Nations but rather questioned if Wilson's League was the best way to establish peace while protecting American sovereignty. The main disagreement for Lodge, Smoot, and the other reservationists stemmed from

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27 Deseret News April 12, 1919.
28 Richard D. Poll, et al., eds., Utah's History. (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1989), 692. Roughly seven in ten residents were Mormons although some of them had little to do with the Church. Another 20 percent or more of the population belonged to no Church. Roman Catholics made up about 3 percent of all Utahns and members of Greek Orthodox Church made up a little over 1 percent. Other Churches made up well under 1 percent of the population.
29 Cooper, 127-129.
Article X of the League Covenant, which guaranteed territorial integrity and freedom from aggression for every member nation. Did America really want “to send the best of our youth forth into the world on that errand?” Lodge made an impassioned plea for peace based upon the League of Nations under an altered covenant separate from the peace treaty—a league that would preserve American sovereignty. Article X of the Covenant would have to be altered to receive his support. Lowell admitted there were faults in the covenant, but the imperfect document was a step in the right direction in order to help prevent another great war.30 John Milton Cooper explains that the group of reservationists emerged out of the Lodge-Lowell debate not because it was groundbreaking intellectually but that it shifted the balance of “middle-of-the-road opinion, especially among Republicans.” Lodge’s impassioned words for peace and support for a League that was organized differently helped unite most Republicans, including Smoot, under the same banner. They pushed for reservations to the treaty and the League.31 The reservationists wanted peace but would not sacrifice American sovereignty to do it. Reed Smoot was completely on board.

The public stance of the First Presidency was only the beginning of the religious opposition on the League for Smoot. In June during the general conference of the Church, where the leaders of the Church impart the word of God, Apostle Anthony W. Ivins gave an address calling for support of Wilson and the League of Nations.32 In his address, Ivins said that many men had wrongly criticized President Wilson who “stood as the representative of the American people, and American ideals.” He insisted that Wilson had been confronted with the greatest and most difficult questions “which have ever confronted a President of the United States,” and that “the Lord be praised that he has managed them as well as he has.”33 Ivins and fellow Apostle George F. Richards would speak at a stake conference the following month, endorsing the League as “inspired.”34 Ivins’s and Richards’s words in the conference combined with the First Presidency notice given in April created a picture of a unified front of support for the League within the Church hierarchy.

31 Cooper, 77.
32 The conference is usually held in April and October each year but due to the spread of the Spanish influenza as troops returned home from Europe the conference was delayed until June. Smoot was not in attendance.
Following that general conference, Smoot received many letters from Utah Republicans complaining of his opposition to the League of Nations, demonstrating the strong sentiment of support for the League. One such letter arrived in Smoot’s mailbox on July 18 from C. N. Lund, the editor of a local newspaper in Ogden, Utah. Lund accused Smoot of strong political bias and urged him to pay closer attention to his beliefs in Jesus Christ. He asked Smoot, “Why do you not see the hand of Providence in this mighty effort in our own day and time to bring about peace to a war weary world? Why can you not see the same God who inspired Washington and Jefferson and Lincoln does also inspire Woodrow Wilson in this the greatest step ever contemplated by the human race?” Lund then warned that failure to support the League would bring a solid repudiation from voters in the next election. Lund assumed that the League would establish peace for the entire world, and the only motive the opposition could have would be partisan. The Lund letter’s harsh form of questioning was very similar to many other letters the senator received. This particular letter received a twenty-page response from the Apostle-senator.

Smoot’s response to the Lund letter would define his position on the League of Nations for the remaining months of the League fight on both political and religious grounds. Smoot began his letter asserting that he was not basing his vote upon “prejudice or political bias” but that “certain reservations” were needed in order to “maintain our present form of government and enable America to fulfill her destiny as God intended her to do.” He follows with familiar arguments dealing with the Monroe Doctrine and the possibility of being pulled into a war in some obscure part of the world that would have no bearing on American interests. The most controversial portion of the letter, and what separated him from the rest of the Senate, was Smoot’s religious explanation for his opposition. Smoot wrote:

I cannot understand why you take it for granted that the League of Nations will do more for the world than the teachings of the Saviour have been able to do. I ask you to read the many passages in the Book of Mormon referring to this nation as well as to the many revelations given to the Prophet Joseph Smith as to the destiny of the same...I am doing what I believe to be my duty to my God, my country and my Church. I would not do otherwise if it cost me every vote in the state of Utah.

This letter was the first time Smoot publicly expressed a religious opposition toward the League. Smoot later clarified that the scriptures he was specifically...

35 Smoot Diaries, June 14, 1919, Smoot Papers.
36 Salt Lake Tribune August 24, 1919.
37 Ibid.
referring to were 2 Nephi 10:11-2, Ether 2:12, Ether 8:22, and D&C 87:1-6. \(^{38}\) These scriptures explain two simple beliefs common to the Mormon faith. First, North America and specifically the United States is a land founded under God’s direction, and thus no other nation should rule over it (which the League of Nations, in Smoot’s opinion, would do). Second, there will be a series of wars that plague the Earth until the return of Christ and his Millennial reign. Thus, the League of Nations would undoubtedly fail.

With such a large portion of his electorate solidly against him on the League issue, Smoot sought to have his reply to Lund published in the local papers in order to let his opinion change the minds of the people. This was easier said than done. The lack of a solid Republican newspaper in Utah friendly to Smoot had been an obstacle for the senator from the beginning of his political career. The one friendly newspaper in Salt Lake City, the Salt Lake Herald-Republican, had such a small number of clients that it failed to turn a profit. Smoot declared that the Herald had cost him personally $35,000. In 1920, President Grant, the good Democrat that he was, withheld Church funding to the Herald-Republican, and it was sold at a great loss to the shareholders. \(^{39}\) The Salt Lake Tribune and the Church-owned Deseret News, the largest newspapers in the state, were not friendly towards Smoot. The Tribune was owned by former Republican Senator Thomas Kearns, who had had a personal falling out with Smoot over the direction of the party in Utah. Kearns failed reelection because Smoot supported another candidate to take his place in the Senate. \(^{40}\) The Tribune was highly critical of the senator for the duration of his career and originally planned not to publish the Lund letter until the editors reconsidered.

The task of publication in the Deseret News was especially difficult. The Deseret News had never been pro-Smoot, despite his position as Apostle, because the editors were usually Democrats, and as non-partisan as one would expect. \(^{41}\) Bishop Nibley explained in a letter to Smoot that he had a “rather strenuous time in getting our side of the League controversy before the brethren” because most of them were Democrats who had actively urged the people to “swallow what President Wilson had prepared and also to swallow President Wilson with

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\(^{39}\) Merrill, 137–138.

\(^{40}\) Ibid, 60. This was the election of 1904. At the time the state legislatures elected the Senators and Smoot had stacked the legislature with his own supporters who followed his lead in ousting Kearns from his seat. A more complete explanation of the election is found in Merrill’s book.

\(^{41}\) Ibid, 139.
it, as the one raised up to save the peace of the world." Smoot, Joseph Fielding Smith, and David O. McKay were the only reservationists in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles or First Presidency, thus making them outnumbered 12–3 by supporters of the League. With pressure from the other Apostles, the News decided it would be unwise to publish Smoot’s reply. After Nibley argued with the brethren for over an hour, they finally agreed to publish Smoot’s letter. A week later on September 6, the Deseret News heartily endorsed the League of Nations as “the best remedy that has ever yet been prepared by the hands of men” to prevent war and called for the Treaty of Versailles’s ratification “without an hour more of delay than is necessary.”

B. H. Roberts, a member of the First Council of the Seventy, best defined the views shared by the Apostles who were Democrats regarding the League of Nations. He declared that the League of Nations did not guarantee peace but that it was the “world’s best hope for peace” and as such it “ought to be given a trial.” Indeed anything that offered a “reasonable promise of preserving the world’s peace” was acceptable enough to be tried and implemented. Roberts did not share Smoot’s fear of giving up American sovereignty because the United States would have a veto power to prevent the League from declaring war on the offending country. In the event such a decree passed through the League Council, it was only a recommendation. Roberts responded to Smoot’s use of scripture by offering alternative interpretations. One of Smoot’s references was D&C 1:35–36 where the Lord states that peace would be taken from the earth. Smoot interpreted that peace would never come until the return of Christ. Roberts, however, stated that the prophecy was already fulfilled when the peace had been taken from the whole earth during World War I and that “that revelation is in no way against a league of nations to insure peace.”

The Lund letter also brought a response from Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, son of the recently deceased President Smith. Smith, like his father, was a Republican and agreed wholeheartedly with Smoot’s religious and political arguments as presented in the Lund letter. Smith wrote two very similar letters on August 26 to both Smoot and Grant outlining his religious views on the League. Smith explains to Grant that “With me it is not a matter of politics nor

42 Joseph Fielding Smith to Reed Smoot, September 13, 1919, Smoot Papers. There is no explanation of McKay’s views in the Smoot Papers, only the hint that he was aligned with Smith and Smoot in this letter.
43 Nibley to Smoot, August 26, 1919.
44 Deseret News September 6, 1919.
45 Salt Lake Tribune September 13, 1919.
46 Ibid.
party affiliation, but of crying ‘Peace, peace, when there is no peace,’ the Lord himself having declared that such a thing cannot come until his second coming” to earth. This argument was very similar to the prophecies quoted by Smoot in the newspapers. Smith then expressed worry about how many of the Apostles were out teaching that the League would bring on “the long expected day of universal brotherhood and good will.” Since Smith did not agree with the premise, he asked the President to either correct him or to tell the other Apostles that such was not the case. Smith then expanded upon Smoot’s use of scripture to include more prophesies given in the Doctrine and Covenants by former leaders Joseph Smith, Jedediah Grant, Wilford Woodruff, John Taylor, and from Matthew 24 that spoke of the inevitability of war in the last days leading up to the Savior’s return.47 In a rather shrewd move, Smith used an extensive quote from the former Apostle Jedediah Grant, Grant’s father, discussing the end of the world. He quoted Jedediah as having said:

Treaties and peace may be made and war will stop for a season, but there are certain decrees of the Gods, and certain bounds fixed, and laws and edicts passed in the high courts of heaven beyond which the nations cannot pass; and when the Almighty decrees the wicked may become ripe in the world and exert their influence to sheath the sword of war, and make treats of peace to calm the troubled surface heavens darkening the earth and threatening the world with desolation... the Gods in yonder heavens have something to do with these revolutions...these mighty revolutions and convulsions that shake creation almost to its center.48

This was the strongest case Smoot, Nibley, or Smith would make regarding the religious opposition towards the League. If treaties would “threaten the world with desolation” why should the United States become a member of the League of Nations? Smoot and Smith believed it should not. Smoot replied to Smith’s letter to thank him for his support and asked that Smith send him any additional references in defense of their reservationist stance on the League that he might find in further research.49 There is no record of a reply from Grant.

With Smith’s support, Smoot now had an ally within the Quorum of the Twelve to fight for him and for the reservations to the Treaty of Versailles. As

47 Joseph Fielding Smith to Heber J. Grant, August 26, 1919, Smoot Papers. The letter written to Smoot the same day was much shorter because Smith tried to be more tactful in speaking with President Grant. In the letter to Smoot, Smith congratulated him on the Lund reply and listed the same references to Mormon prophecy. The specific references in the LDS Doctrine and Covenants were 1:35–36, 97:22–23, 29:17, 45:68–69, and 97:21.
48 Jedediah Grant Speech, General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints April 2, 1854, in Joseph Fielding Smith to Heber J. Grant August 26, 1919, Smoot Papers.
49 Reed Smoot to Joseph Fielding Smith September 8, 1919, Smoot Papers.
helpful as Nibley had been, his place as Presiding Bishop precluded him from attending many meetings reserved for Apostles. Smith wrote another letter to Smoot describing the opposition within the quorum. Many of the Apostles felt that Smoot should be heavily censured for his use of scripture passages in opposition to the League. They felt Smoot’s actions created the appearance of a “great division among the General Authorities regarding the interpretation of scripture.” There was a proposal for the First Presidency to issue a statement saying that the standard works of the Church could not be used in opposition to the League. Smith moved for an amendment that scripture could not be used to support the League either, which caused a “vigorous discussion” and brought Smith “severe criticism” from many of the other Apostles. The argument was never settled and the decision was left to the First Presidency to decide how to proceed.50

The outrage many of the Apostles had towards Smoot stemmed from his correspondence with a “newspaper man” a few days after the Lund correspondence was published. The reporter asked Smoot for the specific references to scripture Smoot had implied in his letter to Lund. Smoot gave him the passages (listed previously) and a few days later an article entitled “Mormon Bible Becomes Issue in League of Nations Fight” outlined Lund and Smoot’s letters and listed the passages of scripture Smoot had given the newspaper man was published in the San Francisco Chronicle.51 A huge conflict brewed between Smoot and the other Apostles. They had started the scriptural debate through their speeches in Church meetings. Now, thousands of miles away, in Washington D.C., Smoot used the national press to fight back. The same story was published in multiple newspapers across the country, receiving enough widespread publication to gain the attention and disapproval of President Grant.

It is difficult to ascertain from the arguments—both religious and political—that Smoot presented why he was a reservationist and not an irreconcilable. All of the religious arguments he presented are equally valid within the irreconcilable and reservationist arguments. Some of the Apostles even tried to show that Smoot was really an irreconcilable disguising as a reservationist.52 While Smoot never declares why he is a reservationist as opposed to an irreconcilable, Smith does. Smith hoped the Senate would approve of the treaty, with or without reservations, and the League of Nations because “if they fail to do so and war and bloodshed come, which they will, then the good people everywhere would

50 Joseph Fielding Smith to Reed Smoot, September 13, 1919, Smoot Papers.
52 Joseph Fielding Smith to Reed Smoot, September 13, 1919, Smoot Papers.
say if the league had not been rejected the result would be otherwise.” However, if approval were given for the League, war and trouble would “come just the same, and perhaps even quicker” because the prophecies of the Lord would be fulfilled.53

Smith’s beliefs likely had little to no influence on changing Smoot’s stance, as Smoot was already entrenched in his arguments before beginning his correspondence with Smith. Smith’s support likely strengthened Smoot’s resolve. Knowing he had another Apostle to defend him was probably very comforting and relieving. Smith’s beliefs, however, do not provide a clear answer to why Smoot voted as a reservationist rather than an irreconcilable. In his diaries Smoot praised the speeches offered by Borah (a leading irreconcilable) and Lodge with equally great fervor. Smoot did not seem to believe that one was better than the other. One can only infer from the lack of disappointment he showed when the Treaty failed to be ratified that Smoot chose to be a reservationist based on his history of party loyalty. This idea will be expanded upon later in this article.

Despite Wilson’s best efforts to convince Republicans to support the treaty, he was nowhere close to the two-thirds majority needed for ratification. Wilson was unwilling to compromise with the Republicans, especially on Article X. By late summer, the American people grew less interested in foreign policy and more concerned about domestic issues. Wilson decided to tour the country. He would travel from Washington to Los Angeles and back, speaking at stops along the way. By appealing to the American people, he hoped to galvanize popular support for the League and improve his bargaining arrangement with Lodge.54 Wilson began the tour by giving wide-ranging surveys of the peace settlement, but after receiving lukewarm responses from his audiences he began to attack his detractors aggressively. His forceful style invigorated the crowds in California but hurt his chances for compromise in the Senate.55 Senator Poindexter criticized the president for his attacks on his opponents, and Smoot reported that the president was “indulging in vituperation” against his Republican opponents.56

On the day Wilson left on his tour, the reservationists agreed on the drafts of the Lodge Reservations. The wording of the reservations would be altered slightly over the course of the next two months leading up to the vote on the treaty, but the main tenets of Lodge’s four reservations relating to the League Covenant remained intact. The four resolutions asserted (1) the right to withdraw

53 Joseph Fielding Smith to Reed Smoot, September 13, 1919, Smoot Papers.
54 Cooper, 153.
56 Smoot Diaries, September 8, 1919, Smoot Papers.
from the League at any time, (2) immunity from League interference in domestic affairs such as immigration and the tariff, (3) removal of the Monroe Doctrine from League jurisdiction, and (4) that the United States would not be under any of the obligations of Article X to ensure the territorial integrity of other nations without the approval of Congress. The League fight had been going on for well over six months and the arguments remained the same. The reservationists’ (and thus Smoot’s) major issue with the League of Nations Covenant was still the loss of American sovereignty that might come with League membership.

Even with the reservations outlined, Lodge did not have adequate support in the Senate to push them through. He began negotiations with other senators, seeking to get the necessary number of votes to attach the reservations to the treaty and then ratify it. The task was not easy. A small group of Republicans started to soften on the reservations and were considered “mild reservationists.” There were enough of them that the passage of the reservations was in jeopardy when they were combined with the irreconcilables that opposed any form of the treaty. Wilson’s absence complicated the matter because the mild reservationists and Lodge could not adequately communicate with the Democratic leadership because they did not know what Wilson wanted. Smoot played a critical role in trying to bridge the gap between the reservationists and the other factions within the Republican Party. When seeking to work with the mild reservationists, Lodge asked Smoot to speak with Taft while he was lobbying in Washington and inform him of the exact situation in the Senate and convince him to use his influence as LEP president to get the reservations passed with the warning that “He [Taft] had better use his influence to the passage of the reservations if he wants a League of Nations.” Smoot was also instrumental in efforts to get the irreconcilables to vote for the reservations. Lodge held a meeting at his home in Washington where he and Smoot tried to convince five irreconcilables to vote for the reservations. Smoot explained to them that “if the treaty was defeated as proposed” with the Republican reservations, the “mild reservations prepared by the Democrats would be adopted and ratified” with help from the mild reservationist Republicans. Smoot “would not stand for such a program.” Smoot’s comments in his diary show that Smoot was much closer to being an irreconcilable than a mild reservationist. He would see the treaty killed before he would stand for the weak reservations to be passed. Smoot was remaining

57 Cooper, 165-166.
58 Ibid, 178.
59 Smoot Diaries, October 1, 1919, Smoot Papers.
60 Smoot Diaries, November 6, 1919, Smoot Papers.
loyal to his party and working hard to support Lodge’s leadership in furthering the party agenda.

To add to Smoot’s difficulty in getting votes in the Senate, President Grant finally decided to respond to Smoot’s use of scripture to oppose the League with a public statement one day before Wilson was to speak in Salt Lake City on his tour. Grant made a speech in the Tabernacle where he regretted that the standard works of the Church were brought into the partisan controversy. He then responded directly to Smoot’s use of scripture outlined in the newspaper article and stated, “The position of the Church . . . is that the standard works of the Church are not opposed to the League of Nations.” 61 Grant had specifically invalidated Smoot’s use of scripture, but he stopped short of saying the standard works were in favor of the league, thus leaving the option for resistance to the League on other grounds. Had he said the standard works directly supported the League, Smoot might have been forced into a moment of intense reevaluation of his personal beliefs.

Smoot received a telegram the same day from J. P. Casey informing him that Grant had criticized his use of the scriptures against the League of Nations. 62 Smoot showed little worry in the diary about the consequences of the action, but the next day he predicted that Wilson would “receive a great reception” during his speech in the Mormon Tabernacle. 63 The meeting was everything Smoot hoped it would not be. Utahns were extremely excited to see Wilson. Fifteen thousand people packed themselves into the unventilated Tabernacle. Wilson focused this particular address on the Lodge Reservations and responded to each one. First he addressed the reservation to be able to leave the League at any time. Wilson said that the current policy of leaving after two years notice was adequate and that when embarking into a new agreement the focus should not be on how to escape the agreement but how to continue to fulfill it. The second reservation Wilson discredited was the demand that the League not meddle in domestic affairs, something Wilson contended that the current draft of the League Covenant already did not allow. When discussing the current draft of the League on the question of the Monroe Doctrine he said that the League did not do away with it but rather that it adopted “the Monroe Doctrine as the principle of the whole world.” 64

61 Smoot to Grant, September 29, 1919, Smoot papers. The only appearance of this talk in the Smoot papers is found quoted in Smoot’s response to Grant’s speech.
62 Smoot Diaries, September 22, 1919, Smoot Papers.
63 Smoot Diaries, September 23, 1919, Smoot Papers.
64 Wilson speech at Salt Lake city, September 23, 1919, in Link, ed., Papers of Wilson, LXIII, 449-463.
The most substantial portion of the speech dealt with Article X. Wilson described and explained the necessity for Article X:

This is the heart of the Covenant and what are these gentlemen afraid of? Nothing can be done under that article of the treaty without the consent of the United States. I challenge them to draw any other deduction from the provisions of the Covenant itself. In every case where the League takes action, the unanimous vote of the Council of the League is necessary. The United States is a permanent member of the Council of the League. Its affirmative vote is in every case necessary for every affirmative, or for that matter, every negative action.

Any reservation that would weaken Article X would effectively erase the moral obligation of the United States and play into Germany’s hands. Wilson was interrupted on multiple occasions to raucous applause, and the crowd was highly engaged, responding to his questions with shouts of “No! No!” and “Yes! Yes!”65 The reports back to Smoot state that the President had been “well received” by an “unusually large” gathering in the Tabernacle.66 Support for Wilson in the Mormon heartland was still strong. Wilson’s speech and denunciation of the reservation to Article X enraged Smoot. He told Senator Karger that he had planned to vote for the reservations but not the amendments before Wilson’s speech in Salt Lake City, but that now he intended to vote for all of them.67 Smoot’s reaction is less than surprising, based on his unfavorable opinion of Wilson. Defeating Wilson’s version of the treaty in the League fight would only add to the incentive to support the reservations.

The tour was an extremely tiring trip for Wilson, who was suffering serious bouts of headaches and asthmatic attacks. These headaches developed into a stroke a week after the president’s speech in Utah. The tour ended prematurely, and Wilson was shipped back to Washington to recuperate.68 The type of stroke that Wilson suffered occurred gradually over the course of several hours. He was left paralyzed on his left side and suffered double vision. He did not leave his bed and could not pay attention to anything for more than a few minutes.69 The White House was able to effectively keep the exact details of Wilson’s condition from the Senate, but rumors constantly circled around the Legislature. Smoot

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65 Ibid.
66 Telegram from Nibley to Smoot, September 24, 1919, Smoot Papers.
67 Cooper, 194.
68 Ibid, 188–189.
69 Ibid, 199.
recorded the updates in his journal on a regular basis. Wilson’s condition only made it more difficult to negotiate.

Democrats in Utah had a heyday trying to present Smoot as an Apostle in bad standing with the rest of the Church. Nibley wrote to Smoot, “The Democrats are very busy trying to make this League of Nations a Church question. Some of them are claiming that . . . President Grant and other leading officials have declared for the League, and that you and I . . . are in opposition to the Church. Of course, the Democrats are making the most of it.”

When B. H. Roberts gave his sermon in the Tabernacle on September 8, President Grant “appeared to be in complete agreement with everything Roberts said, clapping vigorously and often.” This public display of allegiance from President Grant held considerable sway within the Mormon community. The Democrats, like Roberts, were able to effectively use that support to project the image that Smoot had fallen out of favor with the rest of the Brethren on the League issue.

The discord between Smoot and the Democratic Apostles would never be more striking than in the 1919 October General Conference. The conference could easily have been mistaken for an LEP rally. Speaker after speaker and Apostle after Apostle supported the League of Nations. Nibley, too, lamented that more politics had been discussed in the past six months at general conference under Grant than had happened in the previous seventeen years under President Smith. Apostle Orson F. Whitney offered a prayer on Wilson’s behalf asking the Lord to “raise [Wilson] up to continue the mighty work unto which Thou has called him.” Unlike the past conference where Ivins had not mentioned Smoot specifically, the other Apostles showed no such restraint. Charles Penrose took the first jab at Smoot when he said, “I take great pleasure in announcing that so far as I know, all our close associates, the First Presidency, the Council of the Twelve who are here at home—some of them are away [implying Smoot, who was in Washington]—are in accord with” Grant’s censure of Smoot’s use of scripture to oppose the League. George F. Richards remarked that God was instrumental in forming the peace treaty. The most unfavorable speech towards the reservationists was given by Apostle Richard Lyman. He shared a positive review of the League and then expressed hesitation to speak.

70 See Smoot Diaries from October 2, 1919 through February 14, 1920, Smoot Papers. The entries dealing with Wilson’s health report the rumors that circulate, changing on a regular basis from reporting Wilson’s great improvement one day to saying that his mind has been greatly affected a few days later.

71 C.W. Nibley to Reed Smoot, September 6, 1919, Smoot Papers.

72 David A Smith to C. W. Nibley, September 9, 1919, Smoot Papers.

73 C. W. Nibley to Reed Smoot, October 12, 1919, Smoot Papers.
out on the League "because my views do not agree with those of my lifelong friend the Honorable Reed Smoot, whom I have admired from my childhood." The actions by Smoot’s colleagues here show the great extent that the League fight divided the LDS Church. Unfortunately for Smoot he found himself in the minority among his brethren and was unable to defend himself due to his absence from the conference. The League fight had become so hostile that the Apostles were willing to throw one of their own under the bus for political gain. In ultimate irony, the day following the conference Smoot received a telegram from Grant asking Smoot to sign and deliver a message to Wilson that included Orson Whitney’s prayer and a strong endorsement for the League from Grant. Both Smoot and Senator King (D-UT) felt “it was not in very good taste.” Smoot was the messenger boy for the Church he loved, delivering a message he violently opposed, to his hated rival. Smoot’s loyalties to his personal beliefs, his Church, and his party came crashing together in the delivery of that message to President Wilson.

As Wilson returned home, his stroke had an extremely negative effect on Lodge’s efforts for compromise. The stroke prevented Wilson from making well-informed judgments. The stroke’s most damaging effect to Wilson was the effect on his psychological balance, a typical symptom of that type of stroke. Wilson was unable to adapt to changing circumstances and became the greatest obstacle to his own treaty. Lodge gathered enough support from the Republicans and the Democrats to attach his reservations to the treaty, as only a 50 percent majority was required, but the treaty with the reservations attached failed to reach the two-thirds majority required for ratification. The main reason for the failure was Wilson’s insistence that the Democrats should not compromise on Article X.

The second round of the League fight began immediately after the treaty failed to be ratified in the Senate, but the outcome of the second round was eerily similar to that of the first. Wilson was still suffering the effects of his stroke. Wilson’s inability to adapt to change made him believe that public opinion was still with him, as it had been before the stroke six months earlier. The reservationists had hoped to get more irreconcilables to move over to their side and achieve some form of compromise. Smoot held a conference discussing

75 Smoot Diaries, October 4, 1919, Smoot Papers.
76 Cooper, 264.
77 Ibid, 262.
78 Ibid, 317.
compromise on the reservations but he had little success because “The Senators opposed to any kind of league are making trouble for Lodge and are opposed to any kind of a compromise. They think they can prevent ratification in any form.” Smoot’s willingness to hold meetings and conferences illustrate his strong commitment to the party platform. He worked hard to get the reservations passed. This was in direct line with his strong party loyalty. He no doubt wanted to support the party and also expected more prestige within the party as he gained even more of Lodge’s trust as a senator who would work tirelessly to support the party platform.

A decisive blow to the validity of Wilson’s uncompromising attitude came on January 31, 1920 from England. The British foreign secretary, Lord Grey, released a letter supporting the actions of the Senate Republicans and suggested that the United States adopt the Lodge Reservations and that the rest of the world would be happy to admit them to the League of Nations even with the reservations. When Wilson heard about Grey’s letter he went on an angry tirade and did not want to hear what was going on, clearly because of the imbalance caused by his stroke. President Woodrow Wilson, a man of renowned intellect and political savvy, could no longer adequately serve as the leader of his country. Compromise never materialized over the next month and a half to the satisfaction of enough Democrats, and the vote to ratify the treaty fell short by seven votes on March 19, 1920.

CONCLUSIONS

Smoot’s decision to vote as a reservationist was influenced mostly by loyalty to his party, with a strong influence from his personal religious convictions and political beliefs. Smoot believed that Article X of the League Covenant threatened to dissolve the sovereignty of the United States, binding the country to the will and whims of foreign countries. It deprived the United States from acting in its own best interests by forcing it to conform to the policies of the other member nations. The word of God as given in holy scripture and from the mouth of his holy prophets declared that peace would not come on earth until the return of the Savior to the earth and that America was to remain free from all other nations. To support membership in such a compact was out of the question. Why then was Smoot a reservationist and not an irreconcilable? All of Smoot’s arguments, religious or political, could be transferred to the irreconcilable school

79 Smoot Diaries, December 27, 1919, Smoot Papers.
80 Cooper, 321.
of thought with no alteration. Smoot’s religious arguments are a more accurate representation of the isolationist sentiment expressed by the irreconcilables.

Smoot never provided an argument as to why the reservationist stance was superior to that of an irreconcilable. The Lodge Reservations effectively weakened the very core of the League Covenant, Article X. With the Lodge Reservations, Article X no longer bound the United States to act in any way, and thus preserved American sovereignty. The League was weakened enough that Smoot would not object to being a member. If the situation were ever to become undesirable, the United States could withdraw and would never be committed to a course of action that was not deemed in its best interest by Congress. Without Article X, the League was a weak debate group that gave advice rather than a policing force. Another possible explanation for Smoot’s belief as a reservationist is that he agreed with Joseph Fielding Smith’s view that the treaty should be ratified so that Smoot could avoid the blame when the inevitable war and bloodshed came. Smoot never gave an indication that he felt this way but the impetus for the belief was present.

Since he had no strong feelings of opposition to membership in the weakened League, Smoot followed the party line as a reservationist. Smoot must have been aware of the political advantage to being a reservationist. With the majority of his constituents in favor of the League, Smoot could spin that he was also in favor of the League but disagreed with Wilson’s structure to it. With some modifications he would wholeheartedly support it. To choose the other path of complete opposition to any form of the League would have further isolated him from the voters and his fellow Apostles. Smoot was also aware of the political advantage passing the reservations could have. The Republican Party would be able to thwart Wilson’s incredibly popular peace treaty and appear as the winners of the League fight. The Republicans had placed themselves in a win-win situation. If the treaty failed, Wilson looked the part of a fool. If the treaty did pass with the reservations, Wilson had given in to their demands and they were the winners. Had they been vehemently opposed to any form of the League, they would not have had such an advantageous position.

The LDS Church also held a substantial sway in Smoot’s decision, though not in the way that most Mormons would have liked. While the majority of the Church supported the League for religious reasons, Smoot’s personal interpretations of scripture and prophecy led him to believe that the League of Nations would ultimately fail and was not correct for the United States. Smoot valued his own interpretations more than those of his fellow Apostles, the majority of whom were League supporters. Smoot survived the controversy between himself and the other Apostles much like he had done before on the issue of
Prohibition. Smoot's loyalty to the Church was not strong enough to overcome his own interpretation of scripture and prophecy.

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