THE BATTLE BEFORE THE WAR:
War In Europe and the 1940 U.S. Senate Elections

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Dedicated to my grandfathers

Peter G. Andrews (1920 - )
Temporary Lieutenant (E), Royal Navy, 1940-1946

and

Francis L. Lanctot (1932 - 2009)
Mayor of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, 1989-1995
“Americans today are called upon to save no democracy except their own. They are under no obligation to anybody except other Americans. Their great function, perhaps their one function, in these days of crisis is to demonstrate to all the world that they can make their own democracy work and that those who live under its shining aegis can be happy, peaceful, and contented.

Americans have no mission and no purpose to reform other nations or to alter their pattern. If the Germans want naziism let them have it. If the Russians like communism or the Italians prefer fascism that is their privilege. If the Japanese think they fare best under army rule who are we to tell them that they are misguided?”

Wilmington (Del.) Journal-Every Evening, September 20, 1939
Published in the Congressional Record by Senator John Townsend, October 4, 1939

“Our boy, while he measures 6 ft. 1 in. in height and weighs 192 pounds, is not yet 21 years of age. He is full of hope for the future and all he wants is to be let alone so that he may work out his own destiny, as we had a chance to do and as he has every reason to expect. [...]”

Jack will be taught how to salute, and will be hardened that he may march many miles a day carrying full equipment. Or he may be taught to fly an airplane and to drop tons of bombs. He will be shown just how to put his full weight back of a bayonet’s thrust; to make sure to stab his enemy so that his weapon will not be caught in the other fellow’s ribs—and nice things like that.

All these are hard to contemplate during peace times, but events of the past year show us what to expect from dictator controlled countries.

Why in the hell does a just God allow Hitler to live?”

Letter to the editor from Jack Horner, resident of Ocean City, Maryland
Published in the Wilmington (Del.) Sunday Star, October 6, 1940
Introduction

World War II began in Europe during September of 1939, more than two years before the United States would ultimately join the conflict — and the debate over the appropriate role that the United State should play in the conflict began well before the official declaration of war. Tensions between two major ideological camps defined the contours of public debate. On one side were the interventionists, led by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who came to believe that the United States had an extensive role to play in the war and should actively oppose the threat of Nazi Germany. On the other side was a broad, loosely connected coalition of isolationists, who believed for various reasons that the United States should stay out of the conflict in Europe.¹ Much of the historical scholarship surrounding the first United States federal election held after the outbreak of war, in 1940, focuses on the national race between President Roosevelt and Republican challenger Wendell Willkie. The consensus argument is that the two key issues were Roosevelt’s desire to escalate American involvement in the war and his unprecedented desire to seek a third term in office.² Little work, however, has been done on federal elections at the state level, which would improve our understanding of how both elected officials and the American

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public viewed the conflict between the interventionist and isolationist impulses at this crucial moment in the war.

In this thesis, I investigate the foreign policy rhetoric used by candidates in two elections to the United States Senate in 1940. First, by examining the history of the 76th Congress on legislation related to the war in Europe, I develop a political framework for understanding the rhetorical developments that occurred between the outbreak of war and the beginning of the electoral campaign. I then apply this framework to the Senate elections themselves. From this investigation, I conclude that candidates who could be broadly identified as “internationalist,” by the time of the election, had adopted a position of preparedness — the notion that the United States should be socially, economically, and militarily prepared to enter the war in Europe, although entry into the war was not the goal. Candidates who believed in some degree of isolationism, in contrast, framed their position as pro-democratic, attempting to make President Roosevelt’s decision to seek a third term evidence of a sinister, anti-democratic plot. These rhetorical pivots demonstrate what politicians perceived as an American public fraught with contradictory impulses — a fear of both being caught up in foreign entitlements and a fear of tyrannical government occupying most of Europe.

To support the claims made above, this thesis takes the form of two case studies, closely examining two different U.S. Senate races in 1940. When beginning this project, I considered a wide variety of criteria in selecting a pair of effective case studies to investigate. First and foremost I chose elections that were relatively close — margin of victory under ten percentage points — because a more hotly contested election is more likely to produce sharp rhetorical differences. It was also important to choose two states where an incumbent was running for reelection, in order to have a record from the previous Congress to examine. One incumbent
would be chosen to represent the more isolationist side of the 76th Congress, and the other would be isolationist. Because geographic differences across the entirety of the United States are far too dramatic to grapple with in a paper of this length, I decided to restrict the analysis to two states that are in the same region of the country.

With this criteria in mind, the two case studies in this thesis will be the elections in New York and Delaware.\(^3\) The incumbents up for reelection in these races represent the two extreme sides in the debate over Europe — isolationist (Delaware’s John Townsend) and interventionist (New York’s James Mead). These elections were hotly contested, as the winning candidates triumphed by a margin of less than ten percentage points.\(^4\) More broadly, these two states share geographic, economic, and social similarities that make them ripe for comparison. New York and Delaware were among the original 13 colonies and are located in the northeastern part of the United States. Their Atlantic coastline and natural harbors created a ripe environment for industry and trade. Throughout American history New York City and Wilmington have both been crucial centers of shipping activity.

In New York, incumbent Senator James M. Mead, a Democrat, defeated Bruce Barton, a Republican member of the House of Representatives. Mead was a longtime supporter of President Roosevelt and an ardent advocate of labor and the New Deal. Accordingly, he quickly adopted the rhetoric of preparedness in foreign policy and waged his campaign as an advocate of the administration’s position. Barton, a moderate isolationist, centered his electoral strategy

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\(^3\) As an aside, it is worth noting that I am a native of Delaware and am currently studying in New York. Though the two elections strongly fit the criteria listed above, my familiarity with these two states made them an even more compelling choice for this project.

\(^4\) In New York, James Mead prevailed with 53.26% of the vote to Bruce Barton’s 46.66%, a margin of 6.6%. The margin in Delaware was thinner, where the challenger James Tunnell captured 50.63% of the vote to John Townsend’s 47.3% — a margin of 3.33%. See Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788-1997* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1998), 540-541.
around an attack on President Roosevelt’s claim for a third term, arguing that preparing for the war in Europe was little more than a screen for dictatorship. Mead swept to his second term in the Senate, recording more than 200,000 more votes than President Roosevelt in New York.

In contrast, the incumbent in the Delaware Senate race was an isolationist. Two-term Senator and longtime politician John Townsend sought a third term, but was defeated by Democratic challenger James Tunnell. Rather than focusing on any specific foreign policy prescription, Townsend ran a campaign based around his long record of public service, personal integrity, and judgment. However, Tunnell used Townsend’s long record of votes in Congress to argue — using the preparedness framework — that Townsend weakened the national defense. Townsend’s campaign also struggled to overcome the rhetoric of Wendell Willkie, who based much of his Presidential campaign on a condemnation of Roosevelt’s claim to a third term. Townsend, too, was running for a third term, one the voters of Delaware ultimately chose not to give him.

The research methodology of this paper is simple. In the first chapter, which details the legislative process towards foreign policy in the 76th Congress, I used a number of secondary analyses of the specific pieces of legislation at hand, guided by David L. Porter’s thorough overview *The Seventy-Sixth Congress and World War II*. To investigate the two state-level campaigns, I focused primarily on contemporary newspaper sources. Examining media outlets is beneficial in a number of ways. Firstly, it allows direct access to the words of candidates at rallies, speeches, and other public appearances. Secondly, it offers us the reaction of voters and other institutions through mechanisms such as letters to the editor, political cartoons, editorials.

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Finally, it offers us a richer look at campaign rhetoric through advertisements placed in these papers by candidates and their campaigns. Through an analysis of newspaper coverage from September through November of 1940, I am able to construct a nuanced and detailed picture of campaign rhetoric in the two statewide elections. These media sources are supplemented in all three chapters with evidence from the *Congressional Record*, which gives us access to even more information regarding the positions of the politicians I am examining.

**The Preparedness Framework**

It is important, early on, to define thoroughly what I will be referring to as the “preparedness framework.” Broadly speaking, the foreign policy perspectives in the United States between the First and Second World Wars can be divided into two major groups, isolationists and internationalists. Isolationism is a long-existing thread of American political thought, which holds that the United States should stay out of entanglements with foreign nations. As ideological support for their position, isolationists might point to George Washington’s farewell address in 1796, where he argued that the fledgling nation should avoid alliances or other agreements with European powers and consequently forge our own destiny, as support for this position. Generally isolationists wanted the United States to stay out of World War I, advocated opposition to the League of Nations, and believed that a strict policy of neutrality towards conflicts in Europe was the best path for American foreign policy.

Interventionists covered a much more ideologically diverse group of perspectives. These people generally believed that the United States should take active steps to prevent conflicts in

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Europe — or, when these did not succeed, to intervene in conflicts to defend American principles such as democracy or a nation’s right to self-determination. The sub-threads of interventionism covered within this broad term were various; they may include people otherwise referred to as liberals, anti-Communists or anti-Fascist, internationalists (who supported concepts such as international law of the League of Nations), or imperialists.

The “preparedness advocate” could be seen as one of these sub-threads. More accurately, it is a rhetorical position used to justify intervention. An interventionist would believe that the United States should take active steps to assist certain countries in other parts of the world, such as in the case of aid to Finland following invasion by the Soviet Union in the winter of 1939. A preparedness advocate, in contrast, would argue that the United States should be prepared to assist other countries — or, centrally, to defend themselves. These distinctions are, to an extent, two sides of the same coin. Certainly an interventionist would be more inclined to support something like military expansion or the open sale of arms to nations involved in a conflict, as it would improve the U.S.’s position to make an intervention, though not all interventionists supported every measure that fell under the banner of preparedness.

In the first chapter, I trace the evolution of the preparedness framework through the three major pieces of legislation related to foreign policy in the 76th Congress (1939-1940). The first bill, a revision to the Neutrality Acts of the 1930s, introduced preparedness to the political discussion. President Roosevelt initially viewed it as a way to unite the nation, and other interventionists saw how it could present intervention in Europe in a way that was much more palatable to public opinion. The second bill, which authorized aid to Finland, demonstrated the limits of the preparedness framework, as interventionists were largely stymied in their attempts to provide substantive aid to the Finns. Finally, a bill which established the peacetime draft
represented “the triumph of preparedness,” to borrow a phrase from Porter. A concept that had never before been seen in America was pushed through the Senate in large part due to the rhetorical potency of preparedness.

The concept of preparedness as a legislative position is most clearly spelled out by Porter, an idea which is largely developed in chapters 6 and 7 regarding the selective service bill. My analysis expands on Porter by tracing “preparedness” back to the neutrality bill and tracking it through the duration of Congress. From there, this concept is brought to entirely new territory in my analysis of the 1940 Senate elections. By looking at the rhetoric of two races in detail, we can see how incumbents and challengers, isolationists and interventionists, politicians and voters interacted with preparedness and used it to achieve their different political gains.

**Historiographical Note**

The historical scholarship on the elections in 1940 is almost exclusively focused on the national election, contested between Franklin D. Roosevelt and Wendell Willkie. Historians have been extremely interested in the extent which American entry into World War II impacted the presidential election in 1940 — as opposed to domestic issues or Roosevelt’s decision to run for an unprecedented third term. The two most recent works, both published in 2013, are Richard Moe, *Roosevelt’s Second Act*, and Susan Dunn, *1940*. Moe places foreign policy, and particularly Roosevelt’s belief that Germany and Japan represented an existential threat to the United States, much more centrally than Dunn. Dunn argues that because Willkie was also an

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7 Title of chapter 7, Porter, 76th Congress.

interventionist, foreign policy was key but not as important to the election as the issue of Roosevelt running for a third term. Donald Johnson’s much earlier work, *The Republican Party and Wendell Willkie*, complicates the understanding of this election with his portrait of the evolution of the Republican campaign in 1940, showing that many in the party (including Congressional leaders) were opposed to Willkie’s candidacy. Johnson demonstrates that Willkie, while pledging not to involve America in the war, was not ideologically an isolationist, suggesting that isolationist Senators might have lacked rhetorical support for their traditional arguments coming from the top of the Republican ticket. In light of the existing historiography, attention will be paid in this work to the effect of the third term question on the Senate elections in New York and Delaware.

These works, however, offer little evidence regarding the impact of World War II on Congressional races. There is negligible interest in the much more complicated role of the legislative branch — how voters felt about its performance, how Senators viewed their political roles, and how ideological positioning affected electoral outcomes. An exclusive focus on executive elections ignores the role of the U.S. Congress in determining foreign policy. Roosevelt was a very active president in 1939-40, setting the agenda and putting pressure on Congress to support his more interventionist policy aims. But Congress was not a rubber-stamping body, as the debates over legislation about the war in Europe consumed much of the energy and drove much of the debate within the body.

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The central work I have found that addresses the relationship between the Senate and World War II is David Porter, *The Seventy-Sixth Congress and World War II*. Porter argues that the two years during which the 76th Congress sat saw a shift in the body’s stance on foreign policy from a generally pro-isolationist perspective to a much more interventionist stance at its conclusion. Porter also identifies three key bills that defined this relationship — neutrality revision, establishing a selective service, and aid to Finland during the Russo-Finnish War — and traces the contours of the debate in Congress over each piece of legislation. More importantly, Porter provides the conceptual framework around which I center most of my analysis — the move towards “preparedness” generally. This work offers a comprehensive guide to the activities of the Senate in 1939 and 1940, which is invaluable in contextualizing the argument made in this thesis. However, Porter also sidesteps the role of the electoral process to members of Congress. There are no major works which address the topics which I set out to investigate — specifically, Senate elections in 1940 and the rhetorical decisions of Senators relating to the Second World War. In that context, this thesis makes a contribution to the historiography by complicating our understanding of the 1940 election, and by examining the contrasts between legislative and political rhetoric during a crucial period in American history.

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Chapter 1

The Legislative History of the 76th Congress

To understand the rhetorical positions of candidates for Senate, it is first necessary to analyze and assess the preceding Congress’s legislation on the war in Europe. The 76th Congress passed three major pieces of legislation between 1939 and 1940 which significantly shaped American foreign policy towards the war in Europe. Following the outbreak of war, Congress approved a revision to the preexisting Neutrality Acts in November 1939, which softened America’s stance of complete neutrality towards the war. Congress also approved very narrowly targeted aid to Finland in the winter of 1939-40; while it did not do anything to slow the advance of the Soviet Union, it did mark the first legislative action taken towards the European situation. Finally, Congress approved the first peacetime draft in American history in the fall of 1940, signaling a shift to a mentality of preparedness and setting the stage for a campaign that would be fought on wildly different ideological and rhetorical grounds than would have been conceivable in 1938.

Neutrality Revision: The Introduction of Preparedness

During the 1930s, the American government responded to a rising tide of war in Europe with a series of bills which solidified neutrality as the position of the United States on the world stage. The repeal of these measures in September of 1939 began the transformation of legislative rhetoric in Congress towards the 1940 election. One post-World War I consensus, as put forward by Woodrow Wilson, was that the United States should work to actively stop wars from starting. However, during the 1930s an entirely different sentiment took hold in Congress and in the public: the United States “should adopt a stern policy of neutrality designed to insulate the nation
from the wars of the future”\textsuperscript{12} This began with the passage with an arms embargo in 1933 and expanded to the 1935 Neutrality Act, which responded to the advancement of both isolationism and pacifism within the United States.\textsuperscript{13}

Beginning with the 76th Congress in 1939, however, President Roosevelt set out to unite the nation “behind a program of national preparedness” which would begin with revisions to the neutrality law.\textsuperscript{14} This is the first movement towards the rhetoric of preparedness; Roosevelt conceived of preparedness as a doctrine that could unite both parties while still preparing for what Roosevelt wanted, which would be to offer assistance to Britain and France. Despite an initial defeat of revisions to the neutrality law in Congress in August, the outbreak of war in Europe in September of 1939 brought the legislation back to the table.

In an address to Congress on September 21, Roosevelt laid out the case for the repeal of the arms embargo, framing his interventionist principles within the language of preparedness — Divine goes so far to call it a “brilliant political speech.”\textsuperscript{15} Framing the repeal as a return to traditional American practice, Roosevelt went out of his way to avoid revealing “his deep concern for the fortunes of England and France.”\textsuperscript{16} This was a new rhetorical tack for the interventionists, signaled by the most powerful man in the United States. The new belief was that calling for preparedness would be more productive in turning public opinion to their side. Events would prove Roosevelt correct, as the public began to coalesce around the repeal of the arms embargo. Divine indicates that most major indicators of national opinion showed strong support

\textsuperscript{12} Robert A. Divine, \textit{The Illusion of Neutrality} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 58
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 58.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 230.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 296.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 297.
for the repeal, never falling below 56 percent of the country after Roosevelt’s speech.\textsuperscript{17} This figure supporting repeal includes both interventionists and isolationists. Other groups, including newspaper editors, international lawyers, and members of the Republican Party began to move towards repeal of the arms embargo.\textsuperscript{18}

The debate within Congress notably began with the interventionists controlling congressional decision making for the first time — but, much like Roosevelt, they concealed their concerns about the war in Europe. Key Pittman, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, framed the legislation as “prevent[ing] our citizens from subjecting themselves to destruction in the mad war raging in Europe.”\textsuperscript{19} The isolationist side debated with more sound and fury than solid argumentation, not developing their critique of repeal from the debate earlier in the session.\textsuperscript{20} Those favoring the repeal of neutrality appealed, like Roosevelt, to a foreign policy based on international law. In Divine’s analysis, the preparedness framework meant that within Congress, the “debate had an artificial quality, with the real issue at stake being carefully hidden by profuse oratory portraying the [neutrality revision] bill as a measure designed solely to keep the nation out of war.”\textsuperscript{21}

When the time came for a vote, Senator Mead of New York voted in favor of the measure repealing the arms embargo, while Senator Townsend of Delaware dissented. The bill was finally passed and sent to the President in November of 1939, the interventionists feeling that they had won a great victory. Despite understanding that the United States was not committed to

\textsuperscript{17} Divine, Illusion of Neutrality, 307.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 308-310.
\textsuperscript{19} Porter, 76\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 68.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{21} Divine, Illusion of Neutrality, 218.
direct intervention in World War II, the isolationists further understood that they had suffered a
great defeat. The internationalists had succeeded in pushing the United States towards the war for the first time. Neutrality revision legislation demonstrates a number of things about the 76th Congress. Congress was responsive to conditions in the European theater, reconsidering legislation as the facts on the ground changed. The neutrality bill also showed the strength of the rhetoric of preparedness, as isolationists and their allies lost a debate in Congress for the first time in several years. The final vote in the Senate was a decisive victory, with 55 members voting in favor and 24 opposed. Most importantly of all, though, the debate over the bill demonstrated the complicated forces shaping public opinion: citizens “torn between two incompatible notions — their fear of war and their desire for a German defeat.”

**Finnish Aid: Limitations of the Interventionists**

Though preparedness advocates had won the debate over the neutrality measure, not every situation offered such a clear-cut opportunity to push the United States towards interventionism. The second major piece of legislation considered by the 76th Congress — a bill that would send aid to Finland, at the time under attack by the Soviet Union — was much more difficult to for interventionists to frame as a question of preparedness. The Congressional debate over Finland demonstrates the much weaker status of interventionism vs. preparedness. In the face of profound tension between the desire to intervene to right a wrong — Finland losing its territory at the hands of a much stronger enemy — versus the innate caution and sense of isolationism felt by many in Congress, interventionists were not able to put together a winning argument. Forced to make arguments that appealed to ideology rather than self-defense, the

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interventionists could not secure a piece of legislation that effectively helped beleaguered Finland.

The war in Europe in 1939 and 1940 was, in reality, a number of smaller sub-conflicts. Following the conquest of Poland, much of the continent entered a period of “phony war,” where little combat actually seemed to be occurring. Neither the Germans nor the Allies conducted any large-scale land operations following the conquest of Poland in October 1939 until the eventual invasion of Norway in April 1940 and the Low Countries in May. It was — surprisingly enough — in the little Scandinavian nation of Finland where war would erupt next, and would provide the U.S. Congress its next opportunity to weigh in on foreign policy in Europe. After years of debate and negotiation over the border between Finland and the Soviet Union, the Soviets declared war against Finland rather suddenly in the fall of 1939.

The Finnish history with Russia, with whom the Finns share a border, dates back hundreds of years, but for the purposes of this discussion the pertinent information is that Finland had been annexed by the Tsarist state following the Finnish War of 1808-9. After a century of Russian rule, Finland declared and won their independence following the fall of the Tsarist regime and the institution of a Communist government in Russia. In the years following Finnish independence, the fledgling nation could count on the United States for support. Following the First World War, Finland and the United States cooperated amiably and began to build a strong diplomatic relationship. The United States pushed for early recognition of Finnish sovereignty by the nations of the world in 1919 and provided loans to support the state. Further diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Finland included an extradition treaty signed in 1924,

arbitration and conciliation treaties in 1928, “a treaty of friendship, commerce, and consular rights” in 1934, and a trade agreement signed in 1936.\textsuperscript{24}

However, as the situation in Europe teetered toward war and the United States shifted more subtly towards isolationism, the relationship with Finland suffered. The Soviet Union continued to pressure Finland into ceding territory. The Finns made a request for diplomatic support from the United States in April of 1939, but their request was declined.\textsuperscript{25} The Finns and the Russians negotiated through the fall of 1939, but they were unable to come to a mutually beneficial outcome. Three days following an incident where artillery was fired along the Finnish border near a Soviet village, the Winter War broke out, with the USSR launching “a well-planned and co-ordinated attack by land, sea, and air against Finland.”\textsuperscript{26}

Despite a courageous resistance put up to the Russian invasion — Finnish citizens were fond of mockingly stating “There are so many [Russians] and our country is so small, where shall we find the space to bury them all?” — the Finns sought aid however they could, particularly from the United States.\textsuperscript{27} The United States was certainly sympathetic to Finland. Jakobson describes Russia’s actions as arousing more indignation in America than anywhere else in the world; “The Finns were America’s pet nation in Europe: they had always paid their debts and committed no known sins against the laws of nations.”\textsuperscript{28} At this point, the American public still saw the Soviet Union as an enemy — much of the public remained deeply skeptical of

\textsuperscript{24} Andrew J. Schwartz, \textit{America and the Russo-Finnish War} (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1960), 2.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 16.


\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 191.
Communism. Further, the Soviets were at the time non-belligerent against the Axis, as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact secured Soviet cooperation with the Nazis in the initial phase of the war.\(^2\) Despite this, Roosevelt proceeded very cautiously, and referred the matter for Congress to decide, pushing an increase in the apportionment of the Export-Import Bank with the understanding that it would be used to aid Finland.\(^3\)

Within Congress, the interventionists made arguments which stressed anti-Communism and anti-totalitarianism.\(^4\) In the floor debate, the interventionists cast the actions of Russia as far outside the realm of acceptable behavior, the ideological opposite of the United States.\(^5\) However, isolationists were fearful of the possibility that the loan would be a small step towards direct involvement. This is exemplified by Senator Rush Holt’s statement that “I cannot cast my vote for a step, even though it may be a small step that might mean the death or destruction of American boys.”\(^6\) Crucially, the interventionists could not muster any arguments about this legislation improving American preparedness for war, as the bill directly offered assistance to one side in the conflict.

Senator Townsend did speak during the debate on this measure, but his argument veered far off of the usual arguments for intervention and non-intervention. As we shall see in a succeeding chapter, Townsend’s national political focus was on changing America’s gold and silver policies — in short, he wanted to stop the purchase of gold by the United States. In his floor remarks on February 8, Townsend began by stating: “we are all seeking the most practical

\(^2\) Not until June 1941, when Hitler ordered a surprise invasion of the Soviet Union, did the USSR firmly join the Allied cause.


\(^4\) Ibid., 104.

\(^5\) Ibid., 109.

\(^6\) Ibid., 106.
way to help Finland. In my judgment, the most practical way to help Finland is to find some way to stop sending to Russia materials with which to destroy Finland.”34 Townsend went on to cite an article describing the landing of a freighter containing $5,600,000 in bar gold from the Soviet Union earlier that day. The sale of gold, the Senator stated, was of direct benefit to the Soviet Union. “I say,” he concluded, “the most practical manner in which we can help Finland is to find some method by which we can stop sending to other countries materials to destroy Finland, and taking in return gold for which we have no use.”35

The Senate bill eventually provided $20 million in aid to Finland, though it came with the proviso that the money could not be used to buy arms. The final vote was 58-29 in favor. The 29 votes in opposition are seen by Sobel as evidence of the depth of belief held by many on the isolationist wing of the Senate — if you couldn’t support Finland, what nation would you support?36 Both Mead and the isolationist John Townsend voted in favor of the bill, perhaps evidence of how much the isolationists were able to restrict the scope of the legislation. The President did not sign the bill until March 2; by then it was too late for Finland, who were forced on March 12 to surrender and sign a treaty that placed them under Russian domination.37 As Jakobson puts it, the vote was evidence that the U.S. “not yet the great arsenal of the democracies.”38 The interventionist faction had been gaining strength, but in a situation that did not fit within the rhetorical position of preparedness it proved difficult to steer the ship of state in

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34 86 Cong. Rec. 1205 (1940).
35 Ibid.
37 Porter, 76th Congress, 124.
38 Jakobson, Winter War, 196.
their preferred direction. Nevertheless, the bill was still the first attempt to directly intervene in the European conflicts, and signaled the slow evolution of Congressional opinion.

**The Peacetime Draft: Preparedness Victorious**

The final piece of legislation relating to the war in Europe considered by the 76th Congress instituted a peacetime draft in the United States. The conscription measure offered much more advantageous ground to the interventionists, who argued for the bill explicitly as a necessary tool so that the United States would be prepared if forced to enter the war. The ultimate passage of the bill completed a shocking transformation in the political approach to the war in Europe, with Congress backing this unprecedented measure to prepare the United States for war.

Before 1940, a peacetime draft had never been instituted in American history. In the shadow of crisis in Europe, however, the concept of conscription in America during peacetime moved from almost unthinkable to reality at a shockingly rapid pace. As late as the Democratic convention in July, President Roosevelt called only for “some form of selection by draft” rather than mass conscription.\(^39\) The public was extremely polarized on the topic. Though polling data suggested that a slim majority supported the draft, mail received at the White House totaled two to one against conscription.\(^40\)

Within Congress, the debate over the draft shifted the ideological camps in a internationalist direction. Porter argues that the conversation “changed from a debate between interventionists and noninterventionists to one involving preparedness advocates and rearmament

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\(^{40}\) Ibid., 12.
The delineation between an “interventionist” and a “preparedness advocate” is most clearly demonstrated with this legislation, as support for the draft was seen by some Senators as perfectly consistent with the rejection of Finnish aid or other interventionist measures. However, as we shall see in succeeding chapters, the “preparedness advocate” framework would be used rhetorically by interventionist politicians to frame their positions less aggressively — in order to appeal to a citizenry skeptical of foreign entanglements. This effect was maximized in the region of the country examined in this thesis; northeastern delegations, such as New York and Delaware, were much more supportive of the selective service legislation than other regions.42

As members of Congress debated furiously, the nation followed suit, as both preparedness advocates and rearmament opponents engaged in massive campaigns to sway the nation to their side. Supporters of the draft lobbied the nation’s newspaper editors with great success — in July, 87 percent of newspaper editors favored the draft.43 Meanwhile, opponents of the draft flooded offices with direct mail. Republican Representative Bruce Barton claimed that letters came into his office 10 to 1 against selective service.44 Strong constituencies lined up to oppose the draft — organized labor, major religious groups, and educational institutions all had major issues with the proposed legislation.

When the measure came to the floor, isolationist Senators monopolized the floor debate. When supporters of preparedness did speak, they confined their remarks to themes of security.

41 Porter, 76th Congress, 127.
42 Ibid., 138. The exact numbers can be found in the appendix, table 23: 6 of 8 New England Senators supported the draft, and 7 of 8 from the Mid-Atlantic delegation.
43 Flynn, The Draft, 11.
44 Porter, 76th Congress, 142.
The deteriorating situation in Europe, with the collapse of France in June, added potency to these Senators’ remarks. Tom Connally chose the most evocative language, stating that he didn’t want American youths “to have to wait until we are plunged into war to receive their training in the battlefield amidst blood and slaughter.”\(^{45}\) Porter notes that in this debate, interventionists and preparedness advocates did not overlap neatly, with some interventionists citing the draft as a violation of democratic principles, a boon to northeastern industry, or a distraction from more pressing economic concerns in their opposition.\(^{46}\)

Porter and Flynn diverge somewhat on what finally led to the passage of the peacetime draft legislation. Flynn argues that passage was mainly a response to the events in Europe in 1940, catastrophic as it was to the Allies.\(^{47}\) Porter, on the other hand, points to supportive statements by both Roosevelt and Republican Presidential nominee Wendell Willkie as finally breaking the deadlock, though it could certainly be argued that this support flowed from the situation in Europe.\(^{48}\) Ultimately, by the end of August, the Senate passed the bill, importantly including two amendments to narrow the age of selection to only citizens aged 21 to 31 and to limit their service to the Western Hemisphere.\(^{49}\) As one would expect based on their ideological leanings, Senator Mead voted for the bill and Senator Townsend voted against.

The passage of the peacetime draft bill completed the political and rhetorical shift which dominated the 76\(^{th}\) Congress’s engagement with the war in Europe. Within a year, a body which was unwilling to accept even minor revisions to the Neutrality Acts was instituting the first

\(^{45}\) Porter, 76th Congress, 147.
\(^{46}\) Ibid., 138.
\(^{47}\) Flynn, The Draft, 17.
\(^{48}\) Porter, 76th Congress, 150.
\(^{49}\) Flynn, The Draft, 16.
mechanism for peacetime conscription in American history; America’s youth would learn “just how to put his full weight back of a bayonet’s thrust.”\textsuperscript{50} As one-third of the Senate headed into an election, along with the full House of Representatives and the President of the United States, an entirely new rhetoric of security through preparedness, rather than interventionism or isolation, had emerged as a potent force. It was at the ballot box that this profound shift would receive its most important verdict, as we shall see in the elections in New York and Delaware.

\textsuperscript{50} Jack Horner, “Letter to the Editor,” \textit{Sunday Star}, Oct. 6, 1940.
Chapter 2
Against “A Psychology of Fear”: James Mead, Bruce Barton, and the New York Campaign

In 1940, New York Senator James M. Mead’s bid for reelection became a referendum on President Roosevelt — himself a New York native — and specifically his decision to run for a third term. It was largely because of the war in Europe that F.D.R. sought an unprecedented return to the White House. Consequently, the political battle was waged around the war in Europe and how the United States should react. Mead’s opponent, Rep. Bruce Barton, developed a critique of the President which suggested that Roosevelt’s eventual goal was dictatorship, with entrance to the European conflict just the first step in the process. From there, Senator Mead was described as a rubber-stamp for Roosevelt who would not defend the interests of New Yorkers. Mead, on the other hand, focused on preparedness — a commitment to national defense — and his strong history of supporting labor interests.

James Mead actively cultivated the persona of a working man in his political image. In the year 1898, at age 12, Mead — the son, brother, and nephew of railroad workmen — “quit school to go to work as a water boy” on the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad Company.51 From that simple act began a career that brought Mead to the presidency of the AFL switchmen’s union, the New York State Legislature, the U.S. House of Representatives, and finally in 1938 to the Senate. Mead was, first and foremost, a Senator concerned with labor — a fierce defender of President Roosevelt’s New Deal and of the interests of the working class.

Mead did not make many floor statements on the war in Europe during his two years in the Senate. However, the appendices of the Congressional Record are useful, as Senators were

able to add the text of remarks previously made by themselves or others for posterity. These texts offer a useful window into the thinking of individual Senators, as what a Senator chose to add to the Record reflected their passions or opinions, though not in their own words. For Mead, the appendices demonstrate that he was primarily concerned about American defense. Most revealingly, in April of 1940 Mead introduced an article by Walter Winchell into the appendix, which argued for a liberal approach to American defense: “If so much as one foot of land from Alaska to the Argentine is occupied by any foreign invader, these United States will fight for that foot of land until that Invader is expelled or destroyed.” Winchell continues to state that “we are not prepared [—] we must stop kidding ourselves that Americans can lick anybody.” Mead’s approval of Winchell’s assessment is notable; it depicts an expansive notion of where the United States has a commitment to defend. This also indicates Mead’s early adoption of the “preparedness” framework to national defense, as his introduction of this article well preceded any floor debate over the draft.

Legislatively, Mead’s activities in foreign policy were minor. In the debate over the Selective Service, Mead commended an amendment offered by Senator Guffey of Pennsylvania which would exempt divinity students from the draft. Mead also offered an amendment to the defense appropriations bill which would construct a “maximum-size drydock” in New York Harbor to deal with the largest ships; the amendment was agreed to and taken to the conference committee with the Senate. His voting record, however, was consistently internationalist, as Porter classifies him. Mead voted in favor of the three major pieces of legislation — the

52 86 Cong. Rec. 1794 1940
53 86 Cong. Rec. 10500 1940.
54 Porter, 76th Congress, 204.
neutrality bill, aid to Finland, and the selective service bill — which pushed American foreign policy much more towards a war footing.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{The Rumblings of Fascism}

Mead’s Republican opponent in the 1940 election was Representative Bruce Barton. Some party members considered Barton, a former advertising man concluding his second term in the House of Representatives, as a possible Presidential candidate in 1940.\textsuperscript{56} Barton initially declined to run for the office near the end of August, and the New York Republicans were more than happy to let him do so. But Wendell Willkie wanted Barton, an early supporter of Willkie’s presidential campaign, and Willkie strongly communicated this wish to the state party.\textsuperscript{57} Despite attempts to recruit several other candidates to accept the nomination, including Col. Theodore Roosevelt — son of the former President — and District Attorney Thomas E. Dewey, Willkie’s wishes pushed candidate and party to the same conclusion.\textsuperscript{58} Despite some lingering tension, the Republicans selected Barton to oppose Mead’s reelection at their convention in September.\textsuperscript{59}

Bruce Barton, like Willkie, was far from a hard-core isolationist, and instead focused his campaign against Roosevelt’s excesses and Mead’s reflexive support for the administration. In the House, Barton’s record indicated a moderate approach to foreign policy. Barton voted against

\textsuperscript{55} Porter, \textit{76th Congress}, 208-210.
\textsuperscript{57} “Barton Chosen to Run for Senate,” \textit{New York Herald Tribune}, Sept. 27, 1940, 1A.
\textsuperscript{58} “Simpson Opens Barton Boom For U.S. Senate,” \textit{New York Herald Tribune}, Sep. 25, 1940, 1A.
\textsuperscript{59} Evidence for the tension over the Barton nomination can be found in the \textit{Times} article covering the convention: “a floor fight at the State convention […] was averted, and the State machine bowed once more to forces that it had opposed. "Barton Is Selected to Run for Senate." \textit{New York Times}, Sept. 27 1940, 1.
the revisions to the Neutrality Acts, but did support legislation creating the Selective Service. Yet Barton’s campaign rhetoric and strategy centered around President Roosevelt, and attempted to play on fears that Roosevelt would move to become a dictator. He hammered the decision to run for a third term in near-apocalyptic terms. Barton then sought to tie Senator Mead to the President by accusing him of being a rubber-stamp for the President in the Senate. Barton’s allies also promoted his personal integrity and character as a good reason to vote for him. The war in Europe was an integral part of this strategy, as Barton stated that the decision to go to war would lead gradually to the establishment of a personal dictatorship. ?? ??

Barton’s sharpest attacks on Roosevelt came during the last week of September, when the state convention was deliberating over whom to choose as the party’s nominee. At an address on September 25 — before he was officially nominated — Barton told a Republican crowd that Roosevelt’s Washington allies “are saying that if President Roosevelt is elected the Seventy-seventh Congress [the next] will be the last American Congress to assemble in our lifetime.”

This statement implies that Roosevelt’s intention was to do away with the legislative branch entirely. In an attempt to further develop this critique of Roosevelt as a dictator, Barton emphasized Roosevelt’s “contempt for Congress” and told Republicans that the coming election “is no tea party [—] this is a life and death fight.”

In his speech accepting the nomination two days later, Barton delivered a fiery and hyperbolic description of the coming election, declaring that “the American people must decide […] whether they will gamble with their liberties by electing a president for the third term” and

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60 Porter, 76th Congress, 206, 213.
61 “Barton Asserts War Is Sure if Roosevelt Wins,” New York Herald Tribune, Sept. 26, 1940, 1A.
62 Ibid.
that “so far as I am concerned [the third term] is the only issue” in the coming election. He reiterated that a third term for Roosevelt might mean the end of Congressional elections for the foreseeable future. Most ominously, Barton declared, “I am unqualifiedly persuaded that the third term means war; that American boys will be sent east and west to police the world and risk their lives, or lay down their lives, not by hundreds or thousands, but by hundreds of thousands.” In this Barton worldview, the war in Europe was not a moral issue or even an international political issue, but a domestic question of one man’s quest for power. To this end, Barton occasionally indulged some extremely broad allegations. He claimed, in one speech, that the Roosevelt administration had engaged in a “wave of secret diplomacy” and would, in the third term, seek to establish work camps across the country for America’s youth.

Despite Barton’s grim warnings about impending dictatorship, he also described himself in favor of national defense generally, framing himself as not an isolationist but as a non-interventionist. Barton claimed that, in the House, he had “voted for every single measure of national defense.” Further, he attacked Mead as “ignoring the shockingly defenseless position of our country” during his time in the Senate.

Aside from foreign policy, Barton attempted to paint the incumbent Mead as a rubber-stamp for White House policies — a White House that was not to be trusted. Barton did not directly attack specific votes made by Mead in his two years in the Senate. Instead he cast Mead as a robot or an automaton, declaring at times that “the White House presses the button and the

64 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
Senator answers ‘Aye’ or ‘No.’”68 One variant of this attack was to paint Mead as a servant of the administration over the people of New York — in one speech Barton declared that Mead was “a good senator for Florida, Alabama and Georgia.”69 Barton would also parry Mead’s promise to not send soldiers to war by simply stating “he must vote as he always has voted, the way the President tells him to vote.”70 Barton’s argument, summarized best in the Times the day before the election, was that Mead was little more than a lacky, incapable of reaching his own judgments. “If the third term [for FDR] prevails,” Barton declared, “[Mead] does not know whether he will be in a position to keep his promise[s]. He must vote as he always has voted, the way the President tells him to vote.”71 Barton, on the other hand, claimed that he was beholden to no man and could keep his promises.72

The Messenger of Preparedness

To James Mead, Barton’s strategy must have seemed quite strange. In F.D.R.’s home state, Mead made the opposite bet — that tying himself to the President would prove politically successful in the election. Mead’s campaign on foreign policy was entirely based around the concept of preparedness, making a very simple argument — the Democratic administration was merely concerned about preserving a strong national defense, and that any assertions that the third term would lead to dictatorship were dangerous. In various public appearances, Mead described his opponent as creating a “partisan war scare” and a “psychology of fear” surrounding

71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
the campaign. Rather than advocating for war, Mead argued for preparation towards the eventuality that war would begin.

The preparedness framework was evident from the very beginning of the campaign, when Mead accepted the Democratic nomination at their convention on September 30. On the topic of national defense, he stated that Republicans “would, in their political efforts, undermine the national-defense program, not the program of the President nor the program of the Democratic Party, but the precautionary national-defense program of our country.” He quoted Roosevelt’s statement that “we will not participate in foreign wars, and we will not send our Army, naval, or air forces to fight in foreign lands, outside of the Americas, except in case of attack.” The emphasis was on precautionary measures and only entering any war if already attacked.

This rhetorical framework allowed Mead to go on the offense criticizing the Republican approach to defense. In a speech on October 22, Mead argued that Republican concerns about the state of the national defenses were hypocritical, as the G.O.P. had been the ones opposing increases in military spending. In a talk on Long Island the following week, Mead made this more explicit: “In one breath, the Republicans claim they are for more and better military activity, but every time the President attempts to better our defenses he is declared a ‘war monger.’” By drawing out this contradiction, Mead was able to advocate his own approach for

74 86 Cong. Rec. 6005 (1940).
75 86 Cong. Rec. 6006 (1940).
national defense, such as the building of “defense highways” in the northern part of the U.S.—
highways that could also be used during peacetime.\textsuperscript{78}

For Mead, a Senator who maintained strong ties to labor throughout his political career, 
preparedness was complementary to an aggressive stance defending the New Deal and workers’ 
rights. The week after Barton secured the nomination, Mead declared in a congratulatory 
message that he would make the campaign “New Deal and the merits of the two Presidential 
candidates” — though the New Deal sometimes a back seat to the third term and national 
defense.\textsuperscript{79} In his address accepting the nomination, Mead described the Republican approach as 
“general attacks are made on the New Deal, and yet almost every specific measure is either 
extolled by the opposition, or else we are led to believe that its future remains secure.”\textsuperscript{80} Mead 
stayed on comfortable turf in his condemnation of the Republican ticket for a declared “anti-
labor” stance. In the last week of the campaign, for example, Mead gave a speech tracing a 
“grim, brutal story” of Wendell Willkie’s past record on labor issues, citing Willkie’s companies 
being called before the National Labor Relations Board amid accusations of refusing to bargain 
with workers.\textsuperscript{81} The next day, at a Madison Square Garden rally headlined by vice presidential 
candidate Henry Wallace, Mead again went after Willkie and Barton. The \textit{New York Times} described the content of his remarks as calling the two Republicans no friend of labor.\textsuperscript{82} 

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{78} Dennis Tilden Lynch, “Mead Defends 3d Term Drive As Against War,” \textit{New York Herald Tribune}, Oct. 23, 2940, 17.
\bibitem{80} 86 Cong. Rec. 6005 (1940).
\end{thebibliography}
Republicans had been doing “when this administration was hammering out new economic and spiritual horizons for the common man.”

The two candidates rarely shared the same stage. When they did, though, the war in Europe came straight to the forefront, sharply demonstrating the rhetorical cleavages at play in the race. At an October 27 event at the Young Men’s Hebrew Association in Manhattan, Barton and Mead spoke back to back. Barton, who spoke first, argued that the election of Willkie would ensure “our boys will never have to fight on foreign soil” while “if the third term prevails, they certainly will be fighting for a good share of their lives.” Mead, by contrast, pivoted toward the question of national defense — under Roosevelt “the defenses of America are being prepared at an accelerated rate” — while simultaneously pointing to a statement in the Democratic platform that the war would not happen. This was the central fissure of the campaign on foreign policy — whether the buildup of the national defense was a necessity in a dangerous world or a pretense for a ruthless power grab.

Three major newspaper endorsements were handed out in the week before the election, none of which engaged deeply with foreign policy questions. Barton earned the endorsement of the New York Herald Tribune. The Herald Tribune pointed to Barton’s “sincerity and with his openness of mind and his eagerness to exchange views with his constituents” while not criticizing Mead. Mead picked up the endorsement of the New York Amsterdam News, a black

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83 “Ovation in Kings: President Is Scornful As He Accuses His Foes of Fostering Class Hate,” New York Times, Nov. 2, 1940, 6.


85 Ibid.

86 “Bruce Barton For Senator,” New York Herald Tribune, Nov 3 1940, 8. On the same page, though, the paper declared that “It is necessary to return as many Republicans as possible to both houses of Congress.” (“Those Voting Machines,” New York Herald Tribune, Nov 3 1940, 8.)
newspaper based in Harlem. The endorsement, though, made no mention of the national election, merely lauding Mead for being “consistent in his efforts to advance the Negro’s cause.” The *Times* did not explicitly endorse either man, but its column was critical of both. Mead is described as “an uncritical supporter of the policies — good, bad and indifferent — of the present administration,” while Barton drew praise for his positions, independence, and ability. Interestingly, though, the *Times* criticized Barton for voting against repealing the Neutrality Act’s arms embargo, arguing that the repeal was necessary to support Great Britain. On the same page, the *Times* reiterated its endorsement of Willkie over F.D.R., citing the third term tradition, Willkie’s ability to restart the economy and restore the defense, and Willkie’s non-ideological approach to governing.

In the end, though, Mead emerged victorious, earning 53.26% of the vote to Barton’s 46.66%. Interestingly, Mead’s margin ran well ahead of Roosevelt’s; while Mead won by over 430,000 votes, Roosevelt’s margin was only about 233,000 in an election described by the *Times* as “marked by strange cross-currents.” The vote totals suggest that voters were swayed by claims against the third term, while still accepting the preparedness framework put forward by Mead. For all of Barton’s dramatic and fiery rhetoric about the dangers of reelecting Roosevelt and Mead, the voters rejected his alternative at the polls. These results indicate that Barton should be remembered not as any sort of great statesman or influential figure, but as a candidate

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87 “Our Final Word,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Nov. 2, 1940, 16. Specifically, the endorsement refers to an anti-lynching bill and a bill to prevent the use of photographs in civil service examination.


who was unable to muster a compelling argument for why he should be in office. An incumbent running on a platform of preparedness, such as Mead, had the upper hand, as the voters of New York State returned him to Washington D.C. It wasn’t a dictatorship at home that the voters were worried about; it was a dictatorship abroad.
Chapter 3

The “Busiest Senator” Falls: John Townsend and the Delaware Campaign 92

An unnamed cartoonist describes John G. Townsend, Jr. as “an experienced legislator and recognized as an authority on financial problems.” Wilmington Sunday Star, October 27, 1940.

There are many ways to attempt to define Delaware, but it is difficult to avoid using the word small. The second-smallest state in the nation by land area, Delaware has a unique political

92 “Busiest Senator Still Able to Know More Delawareans Than Any Other Man,” Sunday Star, October 27, 1940.
climate that is a function of its size. The old adage is that “all politics is personal;” it might be more accurate to say that “politics in Delaware is familial.”

Certainly no contemporary would accuse John G. Townsend, Jr., Delaware’s sitting two-term Republican Senator, of being distant and lost to Washington politics. According to the Wilmington Sunday Morning Star — a major weekly paper in Delaware’s largest city — he earned the honor of being known as “the Delawarean who knows more of his fellow citizens than any other man in the state.” Yet in 1940 this icon of Delawarean politics was unceremoniously removed from office, defeated along with Wendell Willkie in a state that had happily sent him to Congress for two prior terms.

Townsend’s defeat was due to a number of reasons, not least of which was the overwhelming popularity of Franklin Roosevelt in Delaware, and Wendell Willkie’s presidential campaign did the incumbent no favors with its emphasis on “no third term” rhetoric. The challenger, James Tunnell, hammered Townsend within the preparedness framework, charging that Townsend was leaving the United States defenseless. This race demonstrates the potency of the rhetoric of preparedness, as the incumbent senator was unable to mount an effective defense of his isolationist impulses in the face of Tunnell’s critique.

For this section, my analysis will rest primarily on two major sources — the two largest newspapers in Delaware at the time, the Journal-Every Evening and the Wilmington Sunday Morning Star. The Journal-Every Evening was a daily evening newspaper, though it did not publish on Sundays, with a strong editorial slant in favor of Republican candidates. The Sunday Morning Star, a weekly paper that published on Sunday, was much more even-handed in its

93 “Busiest Senator Still Able to Know More Delawareans Than Any Other Man.” Sunday Star, October 27, 1940.
coverage of politics. The Star published many letters to the editors as well as a pair of columns analyzing politics from the perspective of the two parties, written by anonymous observers: “In G.O.P. Ranks” by “Onlooker” and “Democratic Musings” by “Thomas Jefferson.” From these, we can construct a detailed picture of the campaign that was waged in public.

A Man of Integrity

Entering the election in 1940, John G. Townsend, Jr. was wrapping up the last year of his second six-year term in the U.S. Senate — the capstone to a career that had seen him hold a bevy of offices in Delaware. Townsend was first sent to the state legislature in 1900, and was elevated to the governor’s office in 1916. After one term in the governor’s office, Townsend returned to political office with his election to the Senate in 1928 and 1934. Townsend, a Republican from Selbyville in southern Delaware, also tended to some of the largest orchards in the country — he is described approvingly in the Sunday Morning Star as “an outstanding fruit grower.”

In the 76th Congress, Townsend had two priorities — national fiscal stability and helping local concerns in Delaware. Townsend’s outlook on politics was primarily that of a fiscal conservative, as he opposed many New Deal programs and was consistently worried about the money supply. Townsend’s opinions on these matters can be seen in the editorials he introduced in the Congressional Record. One, published in the Wilmington Journal-Every Evening, argued that President Roosevelt’s spending plans have failed to invigorate the economy. Since 1933, the

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94 “Busiest Senator Still Able to Know More Delawareans Than Any Other Man.” Sunday Star, October 27, 1940.
editorial claimed, the New Dealers “have distributed more money than all of the rest of the world put together, and they have secured the poorest results.”

Townsend’s pet political project was a bill that would repeal the government’s silver-purchasing program, established in 1934. The government would buy domestic and foreign and silver at set prices in an attempt to raise the price of silver and create silver reserves. Townsend, along with many in the eastern part of the country, were opposed to the program. During the first session of the 76th Congress, Townsend introduced into the Congressional Record editorials that were printed in newspapers around the country, such as the New York Times, Washington Evening Star, and Minneapolis Tribune, in advocacy of his silver bill. The editorial in the Evening Star is typical of these comments, arguing that “this policy has failed” to achieve its goals and describes it as “a billion-dollar smoke screen to hide a $180,000,000 direct subsidy to the mine owners in seven Western states.” Townsend’s passion about this policy impacted his views on foreign policy; as mentioned in chapter 1, he mostly viewed the situation regarding aid to Finland as an opportunity to expound upon the misguided nature of the government’s bullion policies.

More than these national concerns, though, Townsend was committed to the representation of his constituents, working at the margins to help specific communities within Delaware. For example, the Civilian Conservation Corps had established camps to work on mosquito control in Kent and Sussex Counties during the 1930s. These parts of the state, with their extensive coastlines, represented a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Townsend spent much

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95 Journal-Every Evening, July 26, 1939. Published 84 Cong. Rec. 3598 (1939).
96 84 Cong. Rec. 569 (1939).
of the 76th Congress advocating for the continuation of these CCC camps in Kent & Sussex Counties. Townsend also played a valuable role as a well-respected leader in local politics, helping, for example, to end a ferry strike in New Castle.

Viewed as a hard-working senator who was committed to his constituents, in the Senate Townsend confined himself to domestic affairs whenever possible. When he did make public comments, Townsend expressed his worries about the U.S. possibly joining the burgeoning European conflict. A newspaper in Portland, Oregon quoted Townsend as “fearful that sale of 50 destroyers to England means ‘We’re in.’” Though sympathetic to the Allied cause, Townsend believed that England could be supported without the U.S. actually joining the conflict. This suggests that Townsend’s isolationism was pragmatic, rather than reflecting a deep ideological belief about the United States staying out of wars. Rather than supporting Willkie initially, Townsend’s preferred choice was his fellow Senator, Robert Taft of Ohio — much more active within floor debates in Congress than Willkie, and much more of a strict isolationist. Townsend did not, however, speak publicly on this matter, preferring to stay out of any visible conflicts within his own party. Townsend’s major legislative push on foreign policy related to the military pay scale, as following the passage of conscription he introduced legislation

100 Carter, Clearing New Ground, 505.
101 Ibid.
102 For information on the Republican presidential campaign of that year, and on schisms within the party, see Donald Bruce Johnson, The Republican Party and Wendell Willkie (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960).
103 Carter, Clearing New Ground, 511.
designed to increase the salary for enlisted men who served previously in the National Guard.\footnote{104}{“Townsend Seeks To Increase Pay For Guardsmen,” Sunday Star, Oct. 27, 1940.}

Introduced after the draft bill, which Townsend voted against, the Journal-Every Evening noted that Townsend “believes that if soldiers were given adequate pay, there would be no need for conscription. He intends to continue the fight for an increase of pay for the National Guardsmen.”\footnote{105}{“Townsend Hits False Attacks,” Journal-Every Evening, Nov. 4, 1940.}

Townsend’s challenger in 1940 was a long-time Delaware politico, James M. Tunnell, Sr., who grabbed the Democratic Party’s nomination. As Carter notes, this was not entirely a surprising result, as Tunnell had close ties to the Democratic establishment; he “had been Delaware’s Democratic National Committeeman for several years and had a well-established network of friends among the national Democratic leadership.”\footnote{106}{Carter, Clearing New Ground, 514.} A long-time politico who had been active in statewide campaigns for over 40 years, Tunnell was a natural choice to make a bid for the Senate. Though Tunnell was certainly well-connected, as a candidate he also offered the Democratic party certain political advantages. Like Townsend, Tunnell came from the southernmost county of Delaware — Sussex County — and as such could cut into the incumbent’s traditional power base.\footnote{107}{Ibid.} Tunnell’s experience further made him a formidable opponent for Townsend. Few men could match Townsend’s political experience in Delaware, but Tunnell was one of the few who could.

\footnote{104}{“Townsend Seeks To Increase Pay For Guardsmen,” Sunday Star, Oct. 27, 1940.}
\footnote{105}{“Townsend Hits False Attacks,” Journal-Every Evening, Nov. 4, 1940.}
\footnote{106}{Carter, Clearing New Ground, 514.}
\footnote{107}{Ibid.}
The Paradox of the Townsend Campaign

Townsend based his campaign rhetoric on his great experience and influence within Congress, arguing that he was a man of integrity committed to public service. However, the campaign of Presidential candidate Wendell Willkie complicated Townsend’s campaign with its critique of President Roosevelt’s decision to run for a third term. Townsend — also running for a third term in the Senate — found himself in the difficult position of arguing that his experience in the Senate deserved a third term, but the Democratic presidential candidate’s experience in the Presidency disqualified him from one.

The fundamentals of the campaign did not seem to favor Townsend at the outset. President Roosevelt and his programs enjoyed great popularity in Delaware, and Townsend had never been placed on the same ballot as F.D.R. (Townsend’s last election, in 1934, was a midterm year). In Carter’s analysis, “most Delawareans liked Townsend personally and were proud of his obvious national prominence, but they were buying the Democratic view that the country needed Roosevelt to pilot the ship of state through dangerous waters.”108 Townsend’s attention was also somewhat divided — he remained committed to his Senate duties, as well as his reappointment as chairman of the Republican Senate Congressional Committee. This position, which he had held in the past, made him invaluable to the national cause for the Republicans but also added to the burdens on his time.109 On Townsend’s side, though, was his expertise; given his time with the NRSC, Carter argues that “in 1940, no one in the United States

109 Ibid., 503.
knew more about the mechanics of a successful senatorial campaign than John Townsend did.”

The rhetorical thrust of Townsend’s campaign relied heavily on his history of public service. A typical ad, placed in the *Journal-Every Evening* three days before the election, argued that Townsend’s “experience as a war-time Governor and U.S. Senator makes him a valuable asset to the Nation in these critical times.” Rather than looking back at past policy decisions made by Townsend, the implicit argument is that voters should trust his judgment moving forward. The next line of the ad — “[Townsend] is against war but is for an adequate defense against all possible perils” — suggests a willingness to make tough decisions for the sake of the country. A separate ad referenced Townsend’s “USEFULNESS TO THE NATION” for his service on many committees — more than any other Senator. The October 6 edition of “In G.O.P. Ranks” hammered on this point of principle. Along with Representative George Williams, Townsend is said to “deserve the respect of all Delawareans because they fought the New Deal when they believed it needed opposition.”

Yet the rhetoric of the Presidential campaign made Townsend’s argument about experience difficult to justify. President Roosevelt was, in choosing to run again in 1940, breaking the unwritten tradition — first established by George Washington — for the President to limit himself to two terms in office. Republicans, already skeptical of the President’s conduct during his first two terms, seized upon the issue and sought to paint the “third term”

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111 “Vote the ‘Straight’ Republican Ticket,” *Journal-Every Evening*, Nov. 2, 1940.


113 “In G.O.P. Ranks,” *Sunday Morning Star*, Oct. 6, 1940.
decision as anti-American and contrary to the spirit of democracy. These included the formation of a “no third term” society, nominally independent and directed at defending the two-term principle. Of course, this situation presented a problem for supporters of Townsend, who was himself seeking a third term in the Senate. While no such tradition of limiting oneself to two terms existed in the upper house, it still created a certain amount of irony. Carter, in particular, believes that this issue cost Townsend dearly, as the irony of Willkie attacking Roosevelt for seeking a third term but endorsing Townsend for a third term could not be easily explained away.115

There is contemporary evidence that Townsend’s supporters were keenly aware of this irony, and they took to the papers to expound upon the differences between Roosevelt and Townsend. In a September letter to the editor, signed “F.A.C.,” the writer delineates a distinction between a senator and a president running for a third term. “A member of the U.S. Senate becomes more valuable to his constituency and to the country through experience and that there is no way in which extension of service may result in abuse of office. On the other hand, discussion of a third term for a President of the United States has always resulted in the conclusion that such an extension of service would be fraught with danger.”116 When you vote for Townsend, F.A.C. argued, “you confer upon him no extension of great authority, and you vote for him and not a regime” — implying that a vote for Roosevelt would be exactly that.117 A letter published the subsequent week echoes this distinction regarding the role of experience between Congress and the Presidency, using an evocative metaphor: “When a baseball team

115 Carter, Clearing New Ground, 517.
117 Ibid.
begins to falter because of bad management, the owner does not proceed to dismiss the best players, but instead eliminates the manager.”\textsuperscript{118} Regardless of the validity of these arguments, for Republican incumbents running on a platform of experience and integrity, the portrayal of Roosevelt’s campaign as anti-Democratic was a major roadblock to success.

Townsend also borrowed elements of the preparedness framework which fit his political philosophies. Townsend surprisingly voted in favor of aid to Finland and could, if necessary, make a more nuanced argument about foreign policy. At a speech in Wilmington in October 11, Townsend described America’s condition as “miserably unprepared” for war — a war that he believed Roosevelt was trying to start.\textsuperscript{119} Townsend also criticized the profligate spending of the Roosevelt administration — “waste which in seven years has increased the national debt by more than the debt of the preceding 144 years” — though he notably exempted “expenditures in the national defense.”\textsuperscript{120} By taking the preparedness framework and combining it with Townsend’s fiscal conservatism, Townsend made a relatively unique argument about foreign policy.

\textbf{Attacking the Record}

The Democratic campaign, in contrast, focused on attacking Townsend’s history in the Senate and arguing that he did not represent the interests of Delawareans. Democrats advertised Townsend’s record of “solid opposition” to New Deal measures, labor legislation, defense bills. Labor interests came after Townsend for several votes from his time in the Senate. The day before the election, an advertisement was placed in the \textit{Journal Every-Evening} with the sub-

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{119} “Text of Townsend’s Address,” \textit{Sunday Star}, Oct. 13, 1940.
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
headline “SENATOR TOWNSEND VOTES “NO” TO LABOR.” (The broader purpose of the advertisement was to oppose Wendell Willkie as “a matter of LIFE and DEATH” for labor.) The ad provides synopses of eight bills which Townsend voted against from 1933-1939; topics include instituting the five day week, creating a housing authority, and establishing Social Security. The factual assertions were technically true, even if they might not reflect Townsend’s exact position. A vote against a broad appropriations bill, which Townsend might have cast for whatever reason, was presented as a direct attack on a specific issue. Carter characterizes these as “do you still beat your wife?” ads — even in the course of fighting them off, Townsend was forced into combating an uncomfortable premise. In the Sunday Star, the “Democratic Musings” opinion column reinforced this situation with a flat assertion: “There can be no denial that labor is not friendly to Senator Townsend.”

Tunnell himself was comfortable throwing a sharp jab or a flying elbow in the direction of the incumbent. In a radio address on WDEL, Tunnell described Townsend as one of the “most hard-shelled, die-hard conservatives in the U.S. Senate.” Tunnell strategically went after votes on an array of bills, primarily omnibus appropriations bills, to paint Townsend as an opponent of national defense and social security; “There were only five other senators in the entire United States Senate who took the same position [against Social Security].” Tunnell sought to make Townsend appear as the anti-Roosevelt; more importantly, the preparedness approach allowed Tunnell to characterize Townsend’s votes as irresponsible.

122 Carter, Clearing New Ground, 518.
125 Ibid.
Tunnell and the Democratic Party were unafraid to pick at every part of Townsend’s copious record in the Senate to put him on the defensive. On WDEL, the attacks were on local appropriations; at a rally, the assault was on Townsend’s votes on defense. In front of 1,200 people at the Playhouse in Wilmington — a rally headlined by Social Security Administrator Paul V. McNutt — Tunnell “charged that the Senator’s accomplishments in the Senate could be told in one minute but that it would take a long time to tell of all the measure which he has voted into defeat.” In the litany of measures that Townsend had opposed or defeated, the challenger specifically cited votes against bills for naval appropriations and to acquire more army planes — bills, in other words, related to the national defense.126

Townsend’s responses were aimed mainly at correcting the record. The Senator described these sorts of attacks on his record as “falsehoods and half-truths.”127 Though the Democrats were more than happy to sign their name to many of these criticisms, Townsend further argued that “unsigned pamphlets” were deliberately falsifying his record in the Senate.128 These attacks distressed the campaign so much that it took out a full-page ad in the Sunday Star. Entitled “True or False… An Appeal For Fair Play,” the ad set out to contradict nine of the charges Tunnell leveled against the senator, including claims that he voted against materials for the national defense.129 The “In G.O.P. Ranks” column in the same paper blasts Tunnell for these same

126 “McNutt Defends New Deal As Never Opposed to Trade,” Journal Every-Evening, Oct. 23, 1940, 11.
127 “Townsend Hits False Attacks,” Journal-Every Evening, Nov. 4, 1940.
128 Ibid.
129 “True or False… An Appeal For Fair Play,” Sunday Star, Oct. 27, 1940, 8.
comments — describing Tunnell as the “Georgetown mudslinger” and declaring “it was not difficult for Senator Townsend to slap politician Jim slaphappy.”

Victors and Vanquished Alike

Delaware’s connection to the presidential race was not limited to the issue of the third term. Though Delaware’s three electoral votes were not seen as a major prize, Wilmington’s central location between Baltimore and Philadelphia made it a natural stop for the locomotive campaigning that characterized national campaigns in this era, and Roosevelt and Willkie each made a campaign stop in Delaware within the last two weeks of the campaign.

Roosevelt stopped at the train station in Wilmington on October 23 to deliver a very brief speech from the back of his campaign trail, an intermediate stop on the way to a later appearance in Philadelphia. Appearing with Tunnell, the President endorsed him in one sentence: “I hope [Sen. James H. Hughes] will be joined in Washington with another Democratic senator from Delaware.” Roosevelt’s brief remarks — he stopped for a mere 13 minutes — consisted of a paraphrased speech by Abraham Lincoln about the meaning of the word “liberty,” encouraging the crowd to choose a positive vision of liberty. The speech, with its connections to Lincoln, put forward a vision of liberty that would need to be actively defended.

Wendell Willkie had a much longer appearance in Delaware, appearing on October 31 and making a much more extensive appearance. Rather than speaking from his train, Willkie

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131 “Roosevelt Tells Wilmington New Deal Stands for Liberty; Mid-City Rally Hits 3rd Term,” *Journal-Every Evening*, Oct. 23, 1940, 10.
132 Ibid. Specifically, Lincoln spoke of a sheep and a wolf who had different definitions of liberty. The sheep praises the shepherd for liberating him from the wolf, though the wolf sees the shepherd as a “destroyer of liberty.” Lincoln (and Roosevelt) praised people for repudiating the wolf’s definition.
planned a full rally in Rodney Square in downtown Wilmington, an event which drew as many as 30,000 people. Sources are split on whether this appearance was successful, as the *Journal Every-Evening* praised Willkie’s remarks and dedicated several pages of newsprint to the appearance. Carter, though, suggests that Willkie had worn out his vocal cords at this point in the campaign and was therefore not a very powerful speaker. Willkie offered a brief endorsement for Townsend, stating that his presence would be necessary “to help straighten out the mess” in Washington. Willkie’s most notable comment was to suggest that he would increase American production to the point where sending 12,000 planes to Britain would be “insignificant.” Though Townsend actually introduced the candidate, his remarks were deemed so insignificant that they did not receive mention in the paper.

The campaign came down to the final days, but in the end the strength of the Democratic ticket was too much for John Townsend as the voters of Delaware decided to change their representation in the Senate. The *Journal-Every Evening*’s coverage of the Senate contest the morning after the election was limited to a one-sentence blurb: “U.S. Senator John G. Townsend, Jr., a ranking Republican member of the Senate, was defeated for re-election by Democratic National Committeeman James M. Tunnell, Sr., by a vote of 66,471 to 62,908, or a plurality of 3,563, according to the official count.” The same section noted that Republican Rep. George

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133 “Wilmington Throngs Cheer Willkie,” *Journal Every-Evening*, October 31, 1940. This paper was, as I have mentioned before, exceptionally pro-Republican in content, and given the photo printed in the paper I think it is exceedingly likely that the crowd was much smaller than listed.

134 Carter, 516.


137 “Roosevelt Wins in 39-State Sweep; Bacon Next Governor, Tunnell Elected to Senate; President Carries State by 10,169; Townsend Defeated,” *Journal-Every Evening*, Nov. 6, 1940, 1.
S. Williams was also defeated, losing by 5,229 votes.\textsuperscript{138} Though the paper had been hyper-partisan in favor of Willkie and the Republicans during the entire election season, the paper’s editorial on Wednesday morning struck a conciliatory tone: “Delaware voters yesterday spoke their verdict at the polls. […] Upon victors and vanquished alike rests the responsibility for working together without petty partisanship for the welfare of all the people of Delaware.”

The reasons for this were severalfold and are apparent from the pattern of the campaign. The personal popularity of Roosevelt and the New Deal was very strong in Delaware, seen by the ways in which Townsend emphasized his personal integrity rather than his opposition to the president. Roosevelt won Delaware by 11,328 votes but Tunnell won by only 4,208, Tunnell running well behind Roosevelt.\textsuperscript{139} This number suggests that Townsend enjoyed great personal popularity that persuaded many Roosevelt voters to vote for him. Tunnell and the Democrats also ran a ruthless campaign that used Townsend’s record in the Senate against him, using the rhetorical framework of preparedness in order to take a Senator largely focused on local concerns and fiscal discipline and paint him as a hard-line conservative. It also seems likely that the weak campaign of Willkie did the Republican senator no favors. The “no third term” rhetoric, in particular, made it challenging for Townsend to argue that his experience was valuable while at the same time attacking the President for the same thing. After four decades of public service, John Townsend’s career ended in a political trap he could not escape, the victim of forces beyond his control.

\textsuperscript{138} Delaware has only one representative in the House, so the same electorate voted in the Senate and House elections.

Conclusion

In the epigraph to this thesis, I juxtaposed two excerpts from Delaware newspapers. The first, written right after the outbreak of war in 1939, was from the editorial staff of the Journal-Every Evening. It argued that America should have no interest in intervening in the war in the Europe; “America has no purpose to reform other nations or alter their pattern.” Barely more than a year later, a father wrote a letter to the editor of the Sunday Star, discussing his son who had been drafted. Despite the risk of losing his life, the father approved of what his boy was to do. “Events of the past year,” Jack Horner wrote, “show us what to expect from dictator controlled countries.” These two fragments, put in conversation, represent the rhetorical, political, and legislative shifts undergone by the United States in just one short year of war in Europe. Though the initial reaction may have been one of isolationism — that this war was Europe’s problem — the next fourteen months saw the contours of public debate shift dramatically. By the time of the federal election, the United States became a nation girding itself for a war, even if it was a war it hoped would never come.

Understanding the role of the preparedness framework is essential to understanding this transformation, though it is certainly not complete. Preparedness helped reconcile a nation struggling with its competing impulses: to stop tyranny abroad but to avoid the loss of fathers and sons, to defend democracy but to keep its home soil safe. It offered interventionists a

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framework with which to justify actions that might otherwise be characterized by a wary public as dangerous aggression. Further, it offered isolationists a new target to attempt to analyze, arguing (partially correctly) that it was little more than an interventionist cloak.

The elections in New York and Delaware reflect the increasing dominance of the preparedness framework in discussing the war in Europe. Both interventionist candidates cast preparing for war, though not engaging in it, as a responsible, smart response to global developments. Mead and Townsend painted their opponents as dangerous ideologues for their stances on foreign policy, and were rewarded for it by the electorate. Preparedness became a rhetorical code for a serious, responsible public servant. Isolationists were forced to argue against a very difficult position, at times accepting the necessity of preparedness while attacking other components of their opponents’ record. Isolationists seized on Roosevelt’s run for a third term to stoke images of fascism and the end of democracy, but the proposals of the preparedness advocates, couched in moderate terms, did not justify these fears to the public. Though it is important to remember that the two elections analyzed were case studies and do not represent the full scope of the political landscape at the time, they do provide us with solid evidence of the rhetorical shifts which characterized the first year of the war in Europe in America.

The rhetorical shifts in question must be understood as a part of three broad political processes. The changing situation in Europe made Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia seem like even greater threats. American public opinion, grappling with new information about the war, also evolved in new and unexpected ways. Finally, rhetoric plays an important role as a loose gauge of popular opinion by politicians, both reflecting and being shaped by the events around it. Changes in rhetoric reflect judgments made about the American political character by
contemporary actors, with almost no way of knowing their accuracy except for the harsh, imperfect metric of the ballot box.

Continuing to investigate these rhetorical processes may yield valuable information about the Second World War, the foreign policy attitudes of the American public, or how representatives attempt to justify their decisions and persuade more citizens to support them. In particular, there are two natural extensions to the research which I have conducted here. One is to extend the analysis of the preparedness framework through to the first year of the 77th Congress, which struggled with similar issues before the United States ultimately joined the war in December. Another would be to broaden the scope of this investigation by examining different Senate elections in 1940, introducing different regions and different characters to possibly complicate the analysis.

Whatever the way forward might be, investigating the development and influence of the preparedness framework is valuable in understanding the processes by which the United States came to enter the Second World War. Examining how politicians create, debate, and communicate ideas, and how other institutions and citizens respond to and engage with them is a valuable way of tracing historical developments and understanding the workings of the democratic process. The history of millions of lives turns sometimes on little more than the selection of a single word, chosen out of millions.
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