

## **The Crisis Deepens**

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President James Buchanan's State of the Union Message of early December 1860, and his call for a constitutional convention to provide additional protection for the institution of slavery, did nothing to change the viewpoint of extremists on either end of the political spectrum. Over the next several weeks the crisis only deepened as South Carolina moved inevitably towards secession.

In the aftermath of Buchanan's Message, his Secretary of the Treasury, Georgian Howell Cobb, resigned his position. He believed that Lincoln's election alone justified the south's secession, and within a little over two months he would lead the convention in Montgomery, Alabama, that created the Confederate States of America. He later enlisted in the Confederate Army and rose to the rank of major general.

On December 12, Secretary of State Lewis Cass of Michigan joined Cobb in resigning his position, though Cass did so for the opposite reason--believing that Buchanan was not acting forcefully enough against South Carolina. Long a political moderate, the elderly Cass had been active in national politics for decades. He was referred to by some as the "Father of Popular Sovereignty" for his belief that the citizens of a territory had the right to determine whether slavery would or would not exist within its boundaries. On December 8 and 10, a delegation of South Carolina congressmen had met with President Buchanan and urged him, in order to avoid a potential clash, to not send any additional U.S. troops to Charleston until the political situation there had stabilized. Buchanan and his Secretary of War, John B. Floyd, agreed to this request, though they did send an officer to Charleston with instructions for Major Robert Anderson, the

Federal officer-in-charge there, that his command should defend itself if attacked, and authorized him to occupy any of the forts in and around Charleston, including if necessary the still-incomplete Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. Secretary Cass, believing that the administration should have instead reinforced the Charleston garrison, subsequently resigned in protest. Some northerners believed that Cass' resignation indicated that the Buchanan Administration was leaning towards actively supporting secession, though in fact the president still hoped to pursue a moderate policy aimed at preserving the Union. Nonetheless, President-elect Lincoln received warnings that Buchanan "is today as truly a traitor as was Benedict Arnold."

While James Buchanan strove to keep his cabinet and the nation together, Abraham Lincoln kept abreast of national events from his home in Springfield, Illinois, and also corresponded with political supporters. Buchanan's message to congress had displeased Lincoln because the president had laid blame for the crisis solely at the feet of the north. Lincoln assured Republicans that he would not compromise on the issue of preventing slavery from expanding into the territories, telling one senator: "Let there be no compromise on the question of *extending* slavery. If there be, all our labor is lost." He also wrote to a North Carolina congressman, pledging that he had never been "in a mood of harassing the people, either North or South." He added again, though, his conviction that slavery must not expand into the western territories. "You think slavery is right and ought to be extended," he clearly stated, "we think it is wrong and ought to be restricted."

As the week progressed, all eyes in the nation turned to the Palmetto State, where on December 17 a Convention of the People of South Carolina, called for by the state legislature, met in Columbia. The convention's president, D.F. Jamison, called upon the state to "dissolve her connection" with the United States "as speedily as possible."