

# A Solemn Council

In the chapter "A Solemn Council," dated February 4, Lincoln's preparations for his journey to Washington coincide with significant political activity regarding secession in Virginia. A recent election showed that the majority of Virginia's delegates favored staying in the Union, bolstered by the guidance of Lincoln's designee, Seward, who believed further concessions would be necessary to maintain this support. This optimistic sentiment was affirmed by the results from Tennessee, where voters declined to hold a secession convention.

Amidst this, a "Peace Convention" gathered in Washington in an attempt to address the secession crisis, met at the Willard Hotel despite the tense atmosphere of the city, reminiscent of impending war. Apprehensions about potential conflict were underlined by Edwin Stanton's fears that the city might soon fall to Southern forces. To demonstrate resilience, authorities had an American flag raised at the partially constructed Washington Monument, a symbol of divided tones reflecting national discord.

As discussions at the Peace Convention progressed, seceded states convened in Montgomery to establish the Confederate States of America, led by president Howell Cobb. Montgomery, though small, became the capital, and was known for its central role in the domestic slave trade. The city featured an array of businesses and services, including peculiar advertisements and entertaining tidbits, reflecting life in Confederate Alabama.

On February 9, delegates chose Jefferson Davis as president of the new Confederacy, a role he initially hesitated to accept, feeling uncertain about leading in such tumultuous times. Varina Davis, his wife, harbored concerns about his political capabilities. Meanwhile, Lincoln was preparing his own journey to Washington, remaining silent but focused on the upcoming challenges.

In the days of his journey, Davis delivered numerous speeches advocating for Southern independence and asserting a break from the Union, declaring an end to the possibility of compromise. His words reflected the urgent call for commitment to the secession movement and foreshadowed the deepening divide leading to war .