

# Pledge

In Washington, the nation faced significant turmoil as President Buchanan's cabinet experienced turmoil. On December 8, Howell Cobb, the treasury secretary, resigned, aligning with his home state of Georgia. Shortly after, Secretary of State Lewis Cass also resigned due to frustration with Buchanan's inaction regarding South Carolina's secession efforts. Cass urged the president to take decisive action against the uprising, reminiscent of Andrew Jackson's approach during the 1832 nullification crisis. However, Buchanan preferred to maintain peace and leave the White House without conflict, leading to Cass' resignation, who remarked, "The people in the South are mad; the people in the North asleep," and noted Buchanan's fearful demeanor.

On the same day, a group of four South Carolina congressmen approached Buchanan to discuss the critical issue of the federal forts in Charleston Harbor. They reached an informal agreement that was ambiguously defined, influenced by the congressmen's hopes and Buchanan's desire to avoid confrontation. Buchanan suggested they summarize their discussions in writing for "prudential reasons." The next day, December 9, they submitted a short statement indicating South Carolina's intention not to attack the forts before the upcoming secession convention, under the condition that no reinforcements were sent to the sites and that their military status remained unchanged.

Buchanan responded with a memo indicating that should South Carolina forces attack, it would place them "completely in the wrong," holding them responsible for the outbreak of the Civil War. He expressed strong reservations about the term "provided," concerned it could be construed as a commitment he was unwilling to make. The congressmen insisted that it was not their intention to imply an official representation of their state and acknowledged their individual authority in this matter.

Despite Buchanan's interpretation, the delegation left believing he had made a solid commitment to maintain the military status quo at Charleston Harbor, a belief that they conveyed back to authorities in South Carolina. Buchanan, however, considered this as merely "the promise of highly honorable gentlemen" to assist in the matter, calling the supposed pledge an honor-based commitment that would ultimately propel the nation closer to war.