

To the United States House of Representatives  
United States March 30th 1796.  
Gentlemen of the House of Representatives.

With the utmost attention, I have considered your resolution of the twenty fourth instant, requesting me to lay before your House, a copy of the instructions to the Minister of the United States, who negotiated the treaty with the king of Great Britain, together with the correspondence and other documents relative to that treaty, excepting such of the said papers, as any existing negotiation may render improper to be disclosed.

... I trust, that no part of my conduct has ever indicated a disposition to withhold any information, which the constitution has enjoined upon the President, as a duty, to give, or which could be required of him by either House of Congress, as a right; ... so far as the trust, delegated to me by the people of the United States, and my sense of the obligation it imposes "to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution," will permit.

The nature of foreign negotiations requires caution; and their success must often depend on secrecy: and even when brought to a conclusion, a full disclosure of all the measures, demands, or eventual concessions, which may have been proposed or contemplated, would be deemed impolitic; for this might have a pernicious influence on future negotiations, or produce immediate inconveniences, perhaps danger and mischief, in relation to the other powers. The necessity of such caution and secrecy was one cogent reason for vesting the power of making treaties, in the President, with the advice and consent of the Senate; the principle, on which that body was formed, confining it to a small number of members. To admit, then, a right in the House of Representatives, to demand, and to have, as a matter of course, all the papers respecting a negotiation with a foreign power, would be, to establish a dangerous precedent.

... I repeat, that I have no disposition to withhold any information, which the duty of my station will permit, or the public good will require to be disclosed; and, in fact, all the papers affecting the negotiation with Great Britain were laid before the Senate, when the treaty itself was communicated for their consideration and advice.

... the papers called for can throw no light; and as it is essential to the due administration of the government, that the boundaries, fixed by the constitution

between the different departments, should be preserved: a just regard to the constitution, and to the duty of my office, under all the circumstances of this case, forbid a compliance with your request.

Go. Washington.

-Excerpt from a letter written by George Washington in response to a Congressional request for documents, March 30, 1796