

In 1916, as part of an Army appropriation act, Congress established the Council of National Defense, which was given responsibility for the coordination of industries and resources for the national security and welfare. Its membership consisted of the Secretaries of War, Navy, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, and Labor, with the Secretary of War serving as chairman. The act further provided for an advisory commission to assist the Council.

With the entry of the United States into World War I in 1917 the duties of the Council to direct and coordinate transportation, industrial and agricultural production, finance, and other war-related civilian activities expanded considerably. That year the Council asked the governors of the states to create state councils of defense, to serve, in Governor Emmet Boyle's words, "as necessary adjuncts of the National Council."

Since the Nevada legislative session of 1917 ended before the declaration of war, it was not then possible to establish a state council by law. Therefore, it was up to the governor to form such a body. Boyle responded by appointing and chairing a Committee on Public Safety, made up mostly of local committees who reported alleged "un-American" activities to the Governor. Later in the year it was redesignated the Nevada State Council of Defense and its membership consisted of most of the state's elected officials. By the end of 1917 it had been reorganized, and its members were the Governor, Secretary of State, State Controller, Attorney General, and seven citizens. Completing the system was the establishment of county and community councils throughout the state.

On the last day of the 1917 legislative session the lawmakers appropriated \$25,000 from the general fund, which was to be expended, subject to the direction of the Governor, for meeting any military demands which might be made upon the State of Nevada by the President or government of the United States. The Council of Defense received most of the money. Members of the Council served without compensation.

Although Governor Boyle was the official head of the council, Vice-Chairman Henry A. Lemmon, a Reno utilities executive, was the actual chief administrator, with the title of Director. The Council conducted its business in Reno's Nixon Building.

The Nevada State Council of Defense was, in Boyle's words, "a civilian board appointed by the Governor . . . to coordinate and have charge of all war activities of the United States Government and the Council of National Defense." It had little actual power, but it was a significant agency for transmitting requests, recommendations, publications, and regulations of various federal agencies to the county and community councils and to the people of Nevada. Its responsibilities were mainly to advise, coordinate, and cooperate. The dissemination of propaganda was also one of its duties. The Council's main goal was to support the war effort by mobilizing citizens, resources, and public opinion. It provided assistance for the Liberty Loan (war bond) and War Savings Stamp drives, food and fuel conservation efforts, financing the Red Cross, organizing speakers' bureaus, recruitment of farm labor, and the promotion of "Americanization" among Nevada's foreign-born. The Council cooperated with the state Adjutant General in the administration of Selective Service and with federal, state, and local law enforcement in the suppression of "disloyal" activity. An observer sent by the Council of National Defense in 1918 to report on the effectiveness of the state councils found that the Nevada Council was "splendidly organized." He credited Boyle's energetic leadership and his appointment of a vigorous, bipartisan Council.

In addition to the Council of National Defense, the federal agencies with which the council worked included the Food Administration, Fuel Administration, Secret Service, Bureau of Investigation, U. S. Employment Service, Committee on Public Information, War Industries Board, and the Bureau of Education. Non-governmental or quasi-governmental organizations with which the Council was associated were the Red Cross, League to Enforce Peace, American Defense Society, and the Salvation Army.

Some of the more important committees of the Council were those on the Red Cross, public speaking, Americanization, non-war construction, child welfare, finance, food conservation and production. There was also a women's board and a medical section.

The war effectively ended with the armistice in November 1918, and the Council assumed that it would cease operations early in 1919. At the urging of the Council of National Defense, however, the council not only continued its existence after the war, but also received statutory legitimacy. The Legislature passed an act creating the "State Council of Defense of Nevada," which became law on March 28, 1919. This legislation gave the Council "power to issue permits to all persons and organizations soliciting or asking contributions . . . for war relief organizations." The Council's postwar work was mostly concerned with the problems of demobilization, such as helping veterans find employment.

The operations of the Council of National Defense were suspended in 1921; the work of Nevada's Council had ended by 1920. An act of the Legislature in 1943 created a new Council and abolished the old one.

Records of the Nevada State Council of Defense, World War I

General Files 1917-1920, 4 cu. ft. Arranged by subject

The records consist largely of correspondence and printed matter. The correspondence is mostly between the Nevada State Council of Defense and the State Councils Section of the Council of National Defense, as well as other federal agencies, county and community defense councils in Nevada, the councils of defense in other states, and private citizens. Among the federal agencies represented in these records are the Bureau of Investigation, War Industries Board, Food Administration, Fuel Administration, U. S. Employment Service, Bureau of Education, and the Committee on Public Information.

Non-governmental organizations with which there is correspondence include the Red Cross and the League to Enforce Peace. Much of the correspondence with private citizens involves accusations of the "disloyalty" of persons such as pacifists, radicals, and "pro-German" elements.

Other manuscript materials include minutes of meetings, financial records, and court records. The latter concern the suit brought by Hearst publications against the members of the Nevada State Council of Defense. The federal district court issued an injunction against the Council-promoted boycott of Hearst newspapers and magazines (for not showing the "American spirit").

Much of the printed matter is propaganda in the form of posters, pamphlets, and songs issued by federal agencies and patriotic organizations. Other publications are bulletins, press releases, and circulars from federal agencies. There are also newspaper clippings.

The records document the Council's coordination and support of several war-related programs and campaigns, such as the Liberty Loan and War Savings Stamp drives, Armenian and Syrian relief, and the Boys' Working Reserve.

Other matters addressed are War Risk Insurance, reemployment of veterans, "Americanization" of the foreign-born (with emphasis on the use and teaching of the English language), non-war construction, involvement of women in the war effort, the illegal sale of liquor to servicemen, explosives, and detection of deserters.

Nevada State Council of Defense, World War I - Bibliography

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Records in the National Archives: www.nara.gov

Record Group 62. Records of the Council of National Defense. Specifically series 62.6. Records of the State Councils Section and its predecessor, the Section on Cooperation with the States; and series 62.7. Records of the Field Division.

National Archives Microfilm Publications:

M187. *Numbered Document Files of the Advisory Commission to the Council of National Defense, 1904-1941*. 2 rolls.

M1069. *Minutes of the Meetings of the Council of National Defense, 1916-1921; the Advisory Commission of the Council of National Defense, 1916-1918; the Interdepartmental Advisory Committee, 1917; the Joint Weekly Conference, 1917-1918; and the Interdepartmental Defense Board, 1919-1920*. 1 roll.

M1074. *Minutes of Meetings of the Committee on Women's Defense Work, May 12, 1917-Oct. 15, 1918*. 1 roll.