On November 19, 1919, the Senate was abuzz with activity from an early hour. A critical debate and vote were expected to take place. Spectators flooded the gallery, jockeying for a good vantage point to view the historic event. Members of the press eagerly awaited news to report for their newspapers and spoke to their contacts about what to expect. The senators gradually entered the chamber and exchanged civil pleasantries before the day’s vigorous debate ensued. Most eyes focused on sixty-eight-year-old Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge.

The Senate was considering the **Treaty of Versailles**. The senators did not disappoint the spectators and debated the treaty through lunch and dinner. After a ten-hour marathon debate in which they heard the arguments of their supporters and opponents, the senators prepared to vote on the treaty. According to the Constitution, President Woodrow Wilson...
needed an affirmative two-thirds vote to win ratification of the treaty he had personally negotiated for six months in France. On the first vote, the senators rejected the treaty with reservations by a vote of 55-39. Another vote was taken on the treaty without reservations as the Wilson administration wanted, and it was also defeated by a nearly identical vote of 53-38.

Lodge had reason to be satisfied with the defeat of the treaty. President Wilson had not consulted with Lodge before heading to Paris, despite the latter's position as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Moreover, Wilson had made blatantly partisan appeals in the congressional elections of 1918, in which Republicans had won control of both houses and Lodge became the Senate Majority Leader. Wilson also did not include any Republicans in the peace delegation.

President Wilson had traveled to France to make peace in December 1918. Lodge disagreed with Wilson's idealistic goals and instead asserted that the treaty should only focus on making it "impossible for Germany to break out again upon the world with a war of conquest." The president briefly returned to the United States in February 1919.

On the evening of February 26, Senator Lodge and other members of the Foreign Relations Committee attended a dinner at the White House. Lodge sat impassively while the president spoke about his objectives of a lenient peace with Germany and, more importantly, a League of Nations to keep the peace. Lodge did not like what he heard. He peppered the president with a series of questions and the answers confirmed many of Lodge's fears that Article X of the Treaty of Versailles would commit the United States to war against any aggressor, thus bypassing the constitutional requirement that Congress be the one to declare war.

Lodge believed in American constitutional principles and not committing U.S. troops to every conflict around the world. He was not opposed to a treaty after the war or even to a League of Nations, but he would not tolerate international commitments that violated the Constitution. He had the integrity to speak courageously and consistently in defense of his beliefs in public.

On the evening of March 2, Lodge invited two other senators to his home to draft a resolution for their fellow senators to sign expressing their opposition to the League of Nations. Thirty-nine Republicans would sign the resolution, and even some Democrats would express support.

On March 3, Lodge gave a critical speech expressing his opposition to the League of Nations. Two weeks later, Lodge spoke in Boston and focused his attention on opposing Article X for violating American sovereignty, Congress's prerogative to declare war, and the danger that Americans would be forced "to send the hope of their families, the hope of the nation, the best of our youth, forth into the world on that errand [to stop aggressor nations]." He continued, "I want to keep America as she has been—not isolated, not prevent her from joining other nations for these great purposes—but I wish her to be master of her fate." In the
Senate, Lodge made sure that any new members of the Foreign Relations Committee were opposed to the League of Nations.

When President Wilson returned to the United States with the signed Treaty of Versailles, he broke with precedent and presented the treaty to the Senate in person with an address. As the president walked into the chamber with the bulky treaty under his arm, Lodge jokingly asked, “Mr. President, can I carry the treaty for you?” Wilson retorted, “Not on your life.” In his speech, President Wilson asked the Senate rhetorically, “Dare we reject it and break the heart of the world?”

In August, Lodge reiterated to the Senate that Article X violated the principles of the Constitution. He stated that no American soldier or sailor could be sent overseas to fight a war “except by the constitutional authorities of the United States.” Also, Lodge thought that the United States could not fight in every war around the globe and only needed to protect American interests. He said, “Our first ideal is our country... We would not have our country’s vigor exhausted, or her moral force abated, by everlasting meddling and muddling in every quarrel, great and small which affects the world.” He refused to back down, defending what he thought was right.

In September, Wilson further angered Lodge and other opponents of the Treaty of Versailles by taking the case for the League of Nations directly to the American people on a speaking tour. That tour was soon cut short when the president suffered a debilitating stroke on October 2, which incapacitated him for months. When the vote on his beloved League of Nations and Treaty of Versailles took place in the Senate, the president could not even get out of bed and walk.

Throughout the debate over the Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations, Senator Lodge stood firmly for the American Constitution and its principles. While he supported world peace and hoped to avert another world war, he would not sacrifice American principles in an attempt to achieve it. He sought to do what was right according to the Constitution, and not merely follow his personal preference or what was politically advantageous.