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Letter From Chandler Hale to Frank Orren Lowden, January 20, 1911

Chandler Hale

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January 20, 1911.

My dear Mr. Lowden:

Supplementing my conversation of this afternoon with your Secretary in reference to the results accomplished through the reorganization of the consular service in 1906, I would make the following comments:

Prior to the passage of the law of April, 1906, our consular service consisted of a large number of independent offices scattered over the world, responsible direct to the Department but with no other relation to one another. Consuls were appointed to those offices, as a rule, without regard to age or knowledge of the language or customs of the country, and without an adequate examination to test their fitness for the performance of consular work. They usually retained their offices so long as their friends in this country retained positions of influence or during the period in which the administration was in control of the political party to which they belonged. They performed the work pertaining to their offices according to their own judgment and such control and direction as the Department was able to exercise through correspondence. Beyond the publication of their commercial reports there was little incentive for them to be efficient or to conduct their offices in a satisfactory and useful manner. The Department itself was without the means to exercise
effective control of the service or to investigate irregularities and misconduct in it.

The act of April, 1906, with which you are familiar, gave to the Department for the first time a force of inspectors through which it could investigate irregularities as well as inefficiency, and bring about proper conduct of the consular business; but it was the Executive Order of June 27, 1906, which applied to the consular service the one effective method of securing the best and greatest results from every officer, namely, - promotion for efficient discharge of duty. This has resulted in encouraging and stimulating every officer to put forth his best efforts in the hope that sooner or later his record for useful work might win him promotion to an office in a higher grade, and to make it understood that men who were not active and not useful could hope for no advancement.

The provision of the Executive Order limiting original appointments to the lower grades after an impartial examination to determine the fitness of candidates for appointment to the consular service has resulted in the appointment of younger, better educated, and more representative men. During the first month after appointment new consuls undergo a course of instruction in the Department of State, coming in contact with and listening to lectures from the men in charge of the various subjects with which later they will be called upon to deal. They learn from a brief service in the Bureau of Manufactures and the Bureau of Trade Relations the interest which our people display in foreign trade and the information which they stand in need of. Through similar detail to the
custom houses they learn the character of the information which they will later on be called upon to furnish, to assist in the proper valuation of merchandise imported to this country from their prospective districts. They obtain similar information and instruction on other subjects from other departments of the Government, and thus go to their posts not only with a personal acquaintance and relation with each officer before whom their future work will come, but also with a comprehensive view of the activities of the various departments and bureaus of the Government with which they may in future have direct or indirect official relations. It may be remarked right here that nowadays every consul goes to his new post equipped with a knowledge of the language of the country, or at least of a language which will serve all practical purposes in that country. This is a matter of obvious importance, since it would be difficult indeed for any consul to be in all respects efficient without the ability to carry on direct intercourse with the officials and merchants of the country.

Since the promulgation of the Executive Order in 1906 regulating appointments and promotions, the commercial reports from consular officers have increased from $4872 to $9400 per year, which is some evidence, at least, of the beneficial effect of the new regulations.

Since 1906 the consular service has been conducted on a purely non-political basis. Candidates for examination have been designated from the North and from the South alike, it being a strict rule never to inquire into the political affiliations of any candidate. Since that rule was issued, there have been examined 360 persons, of which 160 have passed. Of this number 111 have been appointed. Thirty one percent of the classified posts in the consular service (including the positions of consular assistants and student interpreters) are today filled by men who have
entered under the provisions of the Executive Order, the principles of
which you have embodied in the bill now before Congress, and they repre-
sent thirty seven states and territories of the Union. Of the men
appointed to the grade of consul, 32 have been from the Northern States
and 31 from the Southern States.

No effort has been spared by the Department in attempting to interest
all sections of the country in the foreign service, and on this point I
would invite your attention to the enclosed letter addressed last year to
the Honorable Cordell Hull of the House of Representatives, in which are
embodied copies of letters addressed by the Secretary of State to Senators
from the Southern States, and also to heads of educational institutions
in the South.

The Department of State is today doing with success an amount and
variety of work on behalf of our foreign trade that has not been done in
the history of the Government. Some of the results which have been
achieved are outlined in the enclosed extract from the remarks of the
Assistant Secretary of State before the Committee on Appropriations of
the House of Representatives, and as evidence of the good that has resulted
from some of the activities of our consular service I enclose an extract
from some remarks I made a few evenings ago before the National Board of
Trade. The results to which I have referred could not have been brought
about without an efficient diplomatic and consular service under the
intelligent and constant direction of the Secretary of State. Moreover,
these results represent a small part of the work of the Department of
State for the past year, and perhaps the part of least importance. The
larger phases of our international relations, particulars of some of which you will find appended to the letter to Mr. Hull, require delicacy and skill if they are to be dealt with successfully. The greater the skill and experience of our diplomatic officers, the more successful will they be in dealing with these questions, and the greater the benefit which the country will derive from their efforts. The international questions which confront this country today are not to be compared in character and degree of difficulty with the questions with which it was expected to deal a decade ago, when its interests and its influence were more nearly confined to its own boundaries. Today in every question of importance its representatives are confronted with the most experienced and most skilful representatives of other Governments, and it is consequently of great importance now and may be vital to us later on, that our representatives abroad should be men of wide experience and training in their profession.

I am, my dear Mr. Lowden,

Very sincerely yours,

Director of the Consular Service.

The Honorable Frank O. Lowden,

House of Representatives.

Enclosures:

As indicated above.