Notes on the Appropriation Bill of 1912, May 13, 1912

Francis Mairs Huntington-Wilson
The action of the House of Representatives in abolishing the offices created in the State Department in 1909 for the advancement of commercial and other interests, places the Department in a position of being absolutely incapable of transacting the business connected with foreign relations and foreign commerce except in a purely routine way. During the past few years the diplomatic and consular service has been developed to a high degree of efficiency. The reasons for that development are two-fold: first, the application of the merit system to the diplomatic and consular service, and second, the organization built up by Secretary Knox under the appropriation which the House has just voted to discontinue, there has been intelligent and expert direction of the diplomatic and consular service from the Department. It has been shown conclusively that the full measure of efficiency in those services can be obtained only by having in the Department a sufficient organization to map out the work to be done, devise policies, draft appropriate instructions and secure their execution by efficient administration. A business house which rested its hope of success alone upon a large force of salesmen or agents scattered over the country would soon come to grief. Success could only be assured by having a strong executive force in the home office to direct the agents and keep them up to the highest standard of efficiency, and adequate manufacturing and shipping departments to deal with orders as received. Likewise in the diplomatic and consular service, officers stationed thousands of miles away from Washington, and
from one another, can not alone accomplish the things that are necessary for the national or commercial interests. There must be intelligent cooperation and direction at home, which can only be by having a sufficient number of men of ability in the State Department to study questions and draft the instructions which the diplomatic and consular officers are to execute. Neither branch of the service is much by itself. All three — departmental, diplomatic, and consular — are indispensable to any proper degree of efficiency.

The House of Representatives has now voted to sweep away every man of the force gathered together by Secretary Knox and with whose assistance he has brought about commercial results of an importance unparalleled in our history, and which a conservative estimate values at more than $100,000,000 in the last three years. During the week in which the action of the House was taken the Department obtained by the work of the existing organization the saving of tariff restrictions thousands of dollars such is to our exporters, but the removal of these restrictions but temporary unless there is an adequate force of experts to see that they are continued.

The fundamental principle upon which the existing organization was built up is that of specialization upon the different branches of the work of the department and diplomatic and consular service through experts employed for that purpose. Thus, questions relating to the Far East are studied by men who have served many years in the Far East; questions relating to
Latin America are dealt with by men who have had large experience with Latin-American affairs, and a large acquaintance with the leading public men in Latin America; questions relating to commerce, tariff restrictions, and business opportunities abroad are studied by men who give their entire time to specializing upon those subjects; consular affairs are dealt with by an officer familiar with the subject and able to devote his entire attention to it. The results obtained during the past three years speak for themselves and contrast sharply with the condition theretofore existing in the Department when only a small percentage of the questions arising could be given anything approaching careful consideration.

It is idle to attempt to justify the action of the House in abolishing the Bureau of Trade Relations by alleging duplication of work. The only place where duplication can even be claimed to exist is in the clerical work of editing consular reports. This work does not touch the main functions of the Bureau of Trade Relations, which are to keep constantly abreast of commercial conditions in foreign countries requiring diplomatic treatment, a class of work which neither the Department of Commerce and Labor nor any other department of the government has attempted to do, and which in the nature of things it can not perform. The work for which the Bureau of Trade Relations exists is not domestic but foreign; relates strictly to the class of questions that must be treated through the diplomatic and consular service, and with which other departments can not deal effectively.