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Letter From Francis Mairs Huntington-Wilson to Oscar Wilder Underwood, June 28, 1912

Francis Mairs Huntington-Wilson

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June 28, 1912.

My dear Mr. Underwood:

That the conferees on the Legislative, Executive and Judicial Appropriation bill accept the views of the Senate, so far as the Department of State is concerned, is absolutely necessary unless the whole reorganization of 1909, which for the first time has given us an up-to-date foreign office, is to be wrecked, something which I sincerely believe would be a real tragedy to the foreign interests of the United States, both purely diplomatic and commercial. I am, therefore, venturing to send you these few lines, for which I hope you will excuse me at such a busy time, because I have heard some things which persuade me that the real situation has not been clearly put before you.

The report of the President's Economy and Efficiency Commission is, frankly speaking, an absurd ex parte affair. They have completely ignored the exigencies of this Department as a foreign office and have taken no account of what has been proved by the long experience of officials here and what is supported also by the universal experience of the Governments of all first class countries. As you probably know
know, the President has written to Senator Warren, the
Chairman of the Senate Sub-Committee concerned, a letter
wherein he emphatically dissent from and repudiates the
findings of the Commission in so far as they disturb the
organization of this Department. It is to be borne in
mind, however, that the report of the Commission dealt only
with the Bureau of Trade Relations and did not purport to
consider the necessity of the other offices and divisions
which the House voted to abolish.

There are two phases to the situation. In the first
place, it is absolutely necessary that the Department of
State have a Bureau of Trade Relations. There is a clear
line of demarcation between the work of the Department of
Commerce and Labor and that of the Department of State.
We are the missionaries in the foreign field; they are
the missionaries in the domestic field. Foreign trade can-
not be promoted in foreign countries except through the
diplomatic and consular services. These must be under the
control of the diplomatic department. Commerce and politics
and tariff questions are all intertwined. There must,
therefore, be a Bureau of Trade Relations here if our foreign
service is to do good work for the commerce of the United
States. There is no duplication really of any consequence,
and none that cannot be obviated easily by administrative
measures if one admits that the successful conduct
The amount of money at stake is insignificant in any case.

The second and still more striking phase of the subject is this. Apparently seeking only to attack our Bureau of Trade Relations, the bill as passed by the House has incidentally abolished the offices of Director of the Consular Service, Counsellor, Resident Diplomatic officer, two commercial experts, the Division of Latin-American Affairs, the Division of Far Eastern Affairs, the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, the Division of Western European Affairs, the Division of Information and some other offices. This matter is of such vital importance that it really ought to be thoroughly understood before the conferees meet and settle the fate of the foreign service establishment. Therefore, I am enclosing privately a copy of the confidential memorandum which was submitted to the President and which sets forth the arguments of the Economy Commission, the answers thereto, and the general exigencies of this Department as affected by the vital questions to be settled by the form in which the bill shall be finally passed.

If any oral explanations should be desired, either by yourself or by anyone whom you might indicate, I should be most grateful to hold myself at your disposition and to embrace any opportunity to make clear considerations which are, in my judgment, of very real importance to the United States if one admits that the successful conduct of foreign relations
relations and the successful promotion of foreign commerce are desirable.

Again apologizing for troubling you at so busy a time and with kindest regards, I remain always,

Yours very sincerely,

The Honorable O. W. Underwood,
House of Representatives,
Washington, D. C.