

Friday, February 6, 1925.

Remarks by the President to the Newspaper Correspondents.

I have several inquiries here about General Mitchell. I don't think there is any comment that I can make about that. I haven't any explicit and definite information of any action that may be necessary to improve the service. The account of his testimony will be given very careful consideration by the War and Navy Departments. I understand that it is the policy of both the War and Navy Departments to give their officers very wide latitude in testifying before the congressional committees. Amenities are usually observed. One of them, I think, is that one branch of the service should not say anything that might be construed as criticism of another branch.

I thought the Muscle Shoals bill as I understand it - I don't know the details of it fully and accurately - fairly satisfactory. We never get any legislation that is entirely satisfactory to any one person. There naturally has to be a compromise of different ideas. There are one or two things in this bill that I should prefer to have a little different, but I am not enough acquainted with all the circumstances to know whether such a change is warranted. I think there is a provision in it for building another dam. My objection here - one of the objects, if possible, is to get the Government out of the ownership of this property so that we may not be required to make any further investment. May be we can't get out without making a further investment. I wish that we might. Another is the provision that in case the property were leased, at the expiration of the lease, if it couldn't be leased again, the Government should take over the property that might be connected with the Muscle Shoals. I wish we didn't have to put that into the bill. I can see very well that when you are going to lease property of that kind, that they would want some provision that at the end of the lease the improvements that they might have made on it would not be confiscated, that there be some method of either renewing the lease, or if somebody else took it, or the Government took it, making some compensation for their improvements. Of course that might be diminished so as to include merely that property used for the purpose of making nitrates. I don't know whether that is practical or not.

I haven't determined on any Secretary of Agriculture. Mr. Fields of Oklahoma has been under consideration, but no more so than perhaps half

a dozen others.

I haven't determined on any Ambassador to Berlin. I know Ira Nelson Morris, our former Minister or Ambassador to Sweden - that is an Embassy I think. He is a very excellent man, but I had not thought of sending him to Berlin. I should like to place him somewhere.

Not much of anything at today's Cabinet meeting. The Postmaster General told me about the provisions of the Postal Pay bill and the increase in postal rates which seem to make it a fairly satisfactory bill as it stands. He thinks the revenue would amount to over \$60,000,000 - \$61,000,000 or \$62,000,000 - and it is made retroactive only until the first of January. Those, I think, are both improvements over the Senate bill.

I didn't have any information about reported frauds and irregularities in the recent Porto Rican elections. I don't think that either of the Porto Ricans who were in here this morning mentioned it. They were talking more about the economic conditions. I was more interested to see what we could do to improve them. Many of the people of Porto Rico are laborers, a low class of labor, and compensation is small, and if anything could be done to improve the economic condition of the Island is something to interest me more than past frauds in elections. So the matter of elections was not mentioned. I don't think I had heard anything about it.

I suppose the Attorney General will stay until the Court reconvenes, which I understand is the 2nd of March, though he told me this afternoon that he would like to get away for a week if he could.

I did have some talk with General Mitchell and some representative of the Curtis Publishing Company relative to some articles that he was to publish in the Saturday Evening Post. All I could tell him was that I was perfectly willing that he should proceed in any way that had the approval of his superior officers.

I don't know as I can give you any more information about what was expected of the members of the Cabinet that were appointed on the matter of oil conservation, other than what was set out in my letter at that time. It was apparent that there was at that time an overproduction of oil which I expected would result in the - if it is not too strong to say - a waste, which

would result in a shortage and that result in a greatly increased price. It was in order to prevent excesses of that kind on one side or the other that I thought we ought to do what we could in the way of conservation, so that there might be an orderly production for the actual needs of the country in such a way as to keep the market fairly well supplied and not run into a shortage of oil in the future.

There has been no further consideration about the maneuvers of the fleet in the Pacific.

I don't know about the appropriations of the Congress. It says here that they have already exceeded the Budget estimate by \$43,000,000. That is possibly true, though I didn't understand that that was the situation. Unless it has been carefully verified, I should be inclined to doubt it. It has almost always happened in the past that the Congress has been able to diminish budget estimates. But an increase of \$43,000,000 on appropriations which run up to over \$3,500,000,000 is not an excessive amount, and of course the Budget Bureau is unable to tell exactly what the requirements are. Oftentimes circumstances develop after they have made their investigations which warrant an increase in an appropriation. Sometimes circumstances develop which warrant a decrease. The great value of the Budget Bureau is the constant supervision that it has and the constant checking up and holding of the Departments up to high effort for economy and preventing a competition between the different Departments for appropriations. I don't think that is any indication that the budget program is breaking down. That is about 1% - I think my figures are about right - \$43,000,000 would be about 1% of \$4,300,000,000 . We appropriate over \$3,500,000,000.

I don't think I have any comment to make on what Senator Norris may have said in a debate.

I don't know of any specific changes that are in contemplation in our diplomatic representation in South America. I am glad of an opportunity to say that I want to keep our representation there up to a high mark, as a kind of an indication to those countries of the esteem in which they are held, and I know it is pleasing to them to send men that have already achieved something of a reputation at home. That is what I would like to do. I haven't any plans about changing the representation abroad. Changes occur from time to time as a matter of course.

I have already commented about the two members, one of them a member of the legislature of Porto Rico, and the other a lawyer there, who came in this morning.

I don't know as I can give any further information, than that which is in the press relative to the withdrawal of the American representatives from the Geneva Narcotic Conference. We received a telegram from Mr. Porter a few days ago in which he stated that it was his opinion that he wouldn't serve any useful purpose by continuing his efforts there, and he was authorized, if in his judgment it seemed best, to withdraw. There is a distinction; he wasn't directed to withdraw - he was authorized to withdraw if in his judgment it seemed the best thing to do. He was given permission to use his own judgment. I ~~k~~note by the press, and very likely information has reached the State Department in relation to that, that he has already done it.

No mention was made of General Mitchell's testimony at the Cabinet meeting.

I haven't any information about the diphtheria epidemic at Nome, other than what I have received from the Interior Department. That, I presume, is already public; that there had been 28 cases, 10 white people and 18 natives, and there have been 5 deaths, 2 white people and 3 natives. That is a serious situation and the Government is doing what it can to alleviate it.

That seems to cover the inquiries of the day.