

2023

Subject: Various Chairmen of the Senate and House Committees on Foreign Affairs, etc.

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One of the happiest memories which I have of my service with my government for so many years ^{is} was the relations which, at least during the latter half of that service, I was able to have with members of the Senate and House committees on Foreign Affairs and with leading members of Congress.

When I assumed my duties in 1937, Senator Key Pittman was a Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. He was a charming and capable gentleman. He was of medium height, extremely slender, and with a finely chiseled face. He was courteous and even courtly in his manner, but if he was upset about anything he could be equally abrupt. It was very early in my stay in the Department that Mr. Hull, in line with my duties as the Administrative Officer of the Department and of the Foreign Service and maintaining a good deal of liaison between the Department and the Congress, said to me that there were, I forget how many treaties, but well over a dozen which had been in the Senate Committee of Foreign Relations for years, some of them, without any action being taken on them by the Committee. It was very important that we should ratify these treaties and it was embarrassing to us in our relations with some other countries, whose ratification had been delayed, that we had not taken any action. The Secretary said that we were, that is, the Department and the President were in favor of the ratification of every one of these treaties and had so informed the Committee, and that I was to see Senator Pittman and ask him if anything could be done to facilitate their consideration by the Senate Committee and appropriate action being taken. I'd had a number of very pleasant conversations with Senator Pittman before this on matters of business with the Committee. When I called on him and mentioned to him the purpose of my visit he became cold and distant and formal, in marked contrast to the friendly and

cordial atmosphere during the first part of our conversation. He was extremely noncommittal. I felt that I had to press the matter and I said to the Senator that it was really very inconvenient for us that these treaties should be lying dormant in this way and that if he wished any information with regard to any of the treaties and if the Committee wished any further detailed information, the Department would be very glad to furnish it. Pittman looked at me and he said: "Messersmith, I don't like to say this to you but it isn't your fault. If these treaties are so important and the Department considers them so important, why hasn't Hull come down to see me and talk to the Committee about these treaties. Isn't it important enough for him to do that himself?" I told Senator Pittman that he was quite correct. I thought, however, that it was worthwhile bearing in mind two things and one of them was that the ^{treaties} ~~Committees~~ had reached him as Chairman and the Committee with the express approval of the President and of the Secretary of State. They had been accompanied by substantiating documents. The other point I thought was that he should really bear in mind that the Secretary was a very busy and harassed man these days and that it was certainly no lack of courtesy on the part of the Secretary in not having come to call on him. I knew what high regard the Secretary had for him and certainly Mr. Hull, who was a most courteous gentleman and most understanding, would not willingly and not intentionally give any slight to the Committee. Pittman smiled and said that ~~me~~ I was quite right, but that was really the reason why no action had been taken. The Committee had felt that the Secretary himself should press the matter before the Committee and take the trouble to come down to talk with them. I reiterated that if the Secretary had had the slightest intention that this situation existed and that they wanted him to come down, he would have done so long since. Senator Pittman said that he would be very happy to go into the treaties with me

and with the appropriate people in the Department and then bring them **before** the Committee and our people could appear before the Committee. I do not recall how many months it was before practically every one of these treaties was ratified by the Senate.

The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations has had many distinguished chairmen. Senator Pittman was one of the great chairmen of the Committee. He was frail in health and he passed away much too soon. He had many qualities of the statesman and was a good parliamentarian in Congress. His actuation in the Senate was continually helpful to the executive in carrying through sound foreign policy. When he passed away I felt that one of my best friends had gone and that our country had lost a fine public servant.

For Senator Tom Connolly of Texas I have great affection.. In view of the increasing complexity of our relations and the necessity for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations being continuously and adequately informed, the Department had to have constantly closer contact with the Chairman and the members of that Committee. I frequently appeared before the Committee as did other officers of the Department. I was always treated with courtesy and consideration, but I was always happy when any meeting was over to which I was called at which Senator Johnson and Senator Borah were present. As **senior members** of the Committee they **sat** always very close to the Chairman at the head of the table. Any officer of the Department appearing before the Committee to testify **usually sat** next to the Chairman. Senator Borah and Senator Johnson could be two of the most disagreeable men to ~~x~~ witnesses appearing before the Committee from the Department. Aside from differences of opinion and often lack of agreement with policies sponsored by the Department and the President, they seemed to take a personal pleasure in heckling anyone from the Department. It took me a long time to get

accustomed to it but I had learned many years before to hold my temper. They ended up towards the end of my tour of duty in Washington in being much more courteous. Their attitude was in such marked contrast to that of men like Senator Greene, who no matter how much he might differ with the witness, he was always courteous. His questions were always pertinent and constructive. Senator Vandenberg was apt to be difficult when a Department witness was in the chair but he was always courteous. Senator White from Maine in those days was one of the really helpful members of the Senate Committee. Senator Austin of Vermont was one of the **senators** who had given most attention to our foreign relations. We became very close personal friends. Senator Austin was one of those who could rise above partisanship in matters of foreign policy. He was a great public servant. Senator George has been for many years one of the most useful members of the Senate. A student, a man of ponderation, of great common sense, **broad** knowledge and great understanding, he has become in these days not only the greatest of our elder statesmen but one of the great forces in our country. It was a great privilege for my wife and myself to get to know Senator and Mrs. George a good many years ago. Although in recent years we have had little opportunity ~~for~~ to see each other, my admiration and respect for him have grown as the years have gone by. Whether it be in the field of finance or whether it be in the field of foreign relations, there is no man in the Congress today with broader and deeper experience and with more mature judgment. That he should be taking this statesmanlike attitude in the Senate, during the presidency of President Eisenhower, and as the most important member of the Senate in the opposition party, is no surprise to those of us who have known him during these many years and have appreciated that he is one of those who has always been able to stand above partisanship not only in foreign relations but even in internal problems. When President

Roosevelt endeavored to impose himself too much on the Congress and on certain members of his party in the Senate and in the House, Senator George was one of those who would not go along with things just because they came from the White House or because the majority of the party was behind the measure. It is not easy for an important member of Congress to be non-partisan in matters of foreign policy, but it is much more difficult to be non-partisan in matters of internal policy. Although we have made tremendous progress in independent thinking and action and in bi-partisan collaboration in foreign relations and though most of the outstanding men in the Congress today are working in this spirit, Senator George will be remembered as one of the earliest and greatest leaders in this understanding movement.

The many years in the Foreign Service were rich in experiences of all kinds at home and abroad. One of my very pleasant memories is the pleasant relationships which I was able to have with the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the various Chairmen and a good many of the members thereof. The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations for many years of our history overshadowed the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. This was very natural as it was only to the Senate Committee that any treaties or agreements with foreign nations had to be submitted for approval before they were submitted to the Senate itself. It was in the early 1930's that the House Committee began to become more important. All bills, of course, affecting, the organization of the Foreign Service had to be submitted to that Committee and it was in it that they were given the most serious and detailed consideration, and all the estimates of the Department for its work in Washington and abroad were reviewed by the House Committee. They^{were}%, of course, also reviewed by the Senate Committee but when these estimates reached it they had already had this very thorough consideration in the House Committee and the Senate Com-

mittee had available to it the detailed hearings which it had held on the bill. While the House Committee had, therefore, always been important in certain aspects of our foreign relations, it was not, as I have already said, until the early 1930's that it began to inform itself more fully on developments in our foreign relations. This was due to the nature of the times in which we were living and the increasingly dark clouds which appeared on the horizon in various parts of the world.

It became **the** practice of the House Committee to call before it ambassadors and ministers and high-ranking foreign service officers when they happened to be in the United States on leave or for consultation with the Department. Beginning with the time that I was stationed in Berlin in the early 1930's, I was one of those who was called frequently to appear before the Committee, and these were very pleasant occasions. Whether the members belonged to the minority or to the majority party, I found that they approached, almost without exception, these important problems beginning to face us in an objective and non-partisan way. As a matter of fact, during all of my experience with the House Committee I recall only one member of that Committee who did not have this approach and who did not treat the officers of the Department appearing before it in a courteous and correct way. This was Hamilton Fish of New York. He was, to begin with, a violent isolationist, and by nature he could be extremely objectionable. When I recall the successive **chairmen** of the House Committee and the outstanding members with whom I had most contact during the years beginning with 1930, it is really an extraordinary thing and a very encouraging thing as I look back on these years, that there was only this one really discordant and unhappy element.

One of the earliest Chairmen whom I knew well was Charles Linthicum of Maryland. We became very close friends. He not only fre-

quently called me before the Committee as a whole but it was always a pleasure to call on him at his office at the Capitol to discuss business of the Department and developments abroad in which he was particularly interested. Linthicum was one of those men who appreciated not only the increasing importance of our foreign relations but the necessity for having the proper instruments for the formation and execution of policy. He was particularly helpful in efforts towards getting better treatment for the Foreign Service and for the personnel of the Department, and was one of the first Chairmen of the House Committee to give impetus to the so called Foreign Buildings Program to provide residences for our chiefs of mission abroad, office buildings for our establishments, and particularly in out of the way places where housing problems were exceedingly difficult houses for our Foreign Service officers below the rank of ambassador and minister. Mrs. Linthicum was very much interested in the Foreign Service and in the Foreign Buildings Program and accompanied her husband on a number of visits abroad, which were made for the purpose of determining whether or not a building should be acquired for residential or office purposes in foreign cities.

When I was Consul General in **Buenos** Aires in 1928 and 1929, Mr. and Mrs. Linthicum came to Buenos Aires for the purpose of looking over buildings which might be acquired as a residence for the Ambassador and a site for an office building in which the Embassy, the Consulate General, and all of our attachés and government establishments in Buenos Aires could be housed in one building. My wife and I were both very much attached to Mrs. Linthicum as she was a charming lady, but we knew that she had rather pretentious ideas as to how an ambassador should be housed. Our Ambassador at that time in Buenos Aires was Mr. Robert Woods Bliss, a career officer with many years of useful service behind him. Both he and Mrs. Bliss were well off in this world's goods and

this was very fortunate for us as well as for them in those days as Buenos Aires at that time was the highest living cost city in the world. Mr. Bliss had rented for his residence a very appropriate private house for which I think he must have paid at least his whole salary as rent. Although this was no inconvenience to him and to Mrs. Bliss, he was perfectly willing to make this sacrifice for our country, it was of course a very improper arrangement as it hampered the President and the Department in selecting chiefs of mission for Buenos Aires and most of the posts in the Service. In those days the compensation of a chief of mission was about half of what it is today without any allowances. It was, therefore, impossible for the President to name as ambassadors to certain cities and, in fact, to most capitals, ^{those} who did not have considerable private income.

Before the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Linthicum, the Ambassador and I and other members of the staff looked over the whole field in Buenos Aires to determine what residences could be bought which would be appropriate for our purposes and which would not be too expensive for a chief of mission who did not have outside income or at least only modest income. We had found two or three such residences that were really appropriate and on their arrival we began to show them these places. We had found one magnificent house on the Avenida Alvear which had been built by Mr. Bosch Alvear. He belonged to one of the richest and distinguished families of the Argentine. He had built this house not only as an appropriate setting for himself but also because he had aspirations to the Presidency and thought it would make an admirable residence for the President of the Argentine. He had brought an architect from France to design the building, as well as the formal garden. He had brought workmen from Paris to do the finishing of the principal reception rooms and dining-room of the residence. There is perhaps no city

in the Americas in which there are more large, fine, and I may even say pretentious, **private residences** than there are in Buenos Aires. There was a very restricted but a very rich group of families in the Argentine whose holdings were principally in land and whose revenues therefrom were enormous. These families vied with each other in building these beautiful homes. While the Bosch Alvear house may not have been the finest in Buenos Aires it was certainly among the three or four largest and most beautiful in the city. The Ambassador and Mrs. Bliss and my wife and I had looked at the house and while we realized that it had many advantages, it would be much too expensive. Mr. and Mrs. Bliss did not shrink from the idea of living in the house as they had the personal means in order to maintain it, but they realized, as we did, that unless our government after purchasing the building would make really adequate and **appropriate** allowances **for the** maintenance of it, including a large corps of servants, it would make it impossible for the President to send anyone to Buenos Aires as Ambassador who was not a man of very considerable personal means. While we knew that Mr. Linthicum was a man of sound judgment and would be in agreement with our ideas, we thought it best not to bring this Bosch Alvear house to the attention of neither Mr. or Mrs. Linthicum. After we had shown them the houses which we had found after so much pains in going over available places, Mrs. Linthicum showed her dissatisfaction with all of them, and in some way or other **she** learned about the Bosch Alvear house and went to see it without our knowing anything about it. I remember the way she reproached me for not having brought this house to her attention as she considered that she **had** lost time and her husband had lost time in looking at these others, and she made it very clear that the Bosch Alvear house was the one that she considered the appropriate one as a home for our ambassador in Buenos Aires. Mr. Bliss and I endeavored to dissuade them from any consideration

of the house, pointing out particularly the cost of maintenance even if it were borne by our government, and how impossible it would be for anyone except a very rich man to live in it. It was this residence, however, which was acquired by our government. I remember how unhappy I was about the decision but we felt that we'd done the best that we could and I consoled myself with the idea that, in any event, we would never have to live in it.

I have elsewhere noted that when Secretary Byrnes called me on the telephone on April 1, 1946, and told me that the President and he wished me to go to Buenos Aires as Ambassador that one of the reasons that I gave for not being able to go was that at our time of life we could not possibly undertake the expense of living in so large a house, the maintenance of so large an establishment. I have also noted elsewhere that Mr. Byrnes and the President later both assured me that I would "come out ^{whole} ~~full~~". We lived in the residence for the some fourteen months that I was Ambassador to the Argentine. It is really a beautiful house. My wife had always been accustomed to living in good sized houses and she knew how to manage a house and how to make the best use of a dollar. Even with her experience it took some twenty inside servants in order to maintain the residence. The distances in the house were really magnificent and even with twenty inside servants we were perhaps less well served than we had ever been before. Had it not been for our faithful Belgian couple, Arturo and Mary, who had been with us for so many years and who knew how to take care of such a large establishment and who were completely honest and efficient, it would have been impossible for us, even with the government paying the rent of the house and certain services and some of the servants, to have lived in this house.

This may be an appropriate time to say something concerning the Foreign Buildings Program of our government. I took a great interest

in this program from its inception for two reasons. The principal reason for this interest lay in the fact that I knew that we were the only government of first importance that did not make appropriate provision for its chiefs of mission in other capitals. The British, the French, the German, and even the governments of many smaller countries, including some of the Latin American countries with relatively slender resources, had long since engaged in a program of buying and maintaining residences for the chief of the diplomatic mission in all capitals. I had seen how even men with ample personal means which they were willing to use in the representation of our government were obliged to spend months of the first part of their stay at the post to which they had been appointed in looking around for an appropriate residence which they could rent. More important than this, I knew how much the President's power was limited to appoint the men to important diplomatic posts by this fact that it was almost indispensable that they have not only a fair but in many cases considerable private income. The President could not think of appointing an Ambassador to London or to Paris or to Berlin or to so many capitals, including a number in Latin America, unless he had first assures himself that they had the **adequate** personal income and were prepared to cover such a large part of the cost of the representation of our government out of their private pocket. When one considers these circumstances it is really, in retrospect, a very fortunate thing for our country that there were usually men of capacity and adequate qualifications who were prepared to take these posts. The salary scale in our diplomatic **service** of career had been from the outset so low that no one could think of accepting an appointment as a Secretary in the diplomatic service unless he had a quite ample private income. Such of these men of the career, therefore, who finally found their way into posts as chief of mission were not embarrassed by this problem.

As I was particularly interested in the administration of the Foreign Service and realized the importance of our government establishments abroad being adequately and conveniently housed and being together for their most efficient operation, I also had this interest in the Foreign Buildings Program because it included also the purchase or the erection of buildings in capitals in order to house our establishments and to provide them in this way with adequate and permanent homes. The program also involved the acquisition of or erection of buildings for some of our consular establishments in various parts of the world where there was no possibility of finding adequate rented buildings.

While I was one of the Foreign Service officers who was interested in this program from its inception, it was not until I became Assistant Secretary of State in 1937 and the so called Foreign Buildings Office in the Department of State was one of my administrative responsibilities, that I could really do something to effectively forward this program. A committee had been set up years before known as the Foreign Buildings Committee. It was composed of the Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Relations, of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, and of the Secretaries of State, Treasury, and Commerce. It was this committee which was supposed to determine where buildings should be bought or built for residential and office purposes and the Foreign Buildings Office in the Department of State was the agency directly charged with the execution of the program for acquisition or building and of the maintenance of buildings after acquisition. The program had made very little progress. Everybody was convinced of the necessity for the program for so many reasons but we had made very little progress. The appropriations which it was possible to secure from the Congress for the buildings program were insignificant. This was in line with the general treatment which was being given by the Congress, par-

ticularly through the appropriations committees, to the budgets presented by the Department of State for its services in Washington and abroad and for the Foreign Buildings Program. I had, before I assumed my duties as Assistant Secretary with these administrative responsibilities, reached the conclusion that while a good part of the responsibility lay on the Congress and particularly the appropriations committees in each House, that perhaps a good deal of the responsibility lay also on the Department for not adequately presenting the matter and mobilizing public opinion which was increasingly conscious of these problems and of the importance of our foreign relations. As it was obvious that the Department needed not only more money for this Foreign Buildings Program but also larger appropriations for its work in Washington and abroad and as this was a problem which could no longer be pushed off, I gave it my immediate attention. I found that the President was not only understanding but sympathetic and wished to be helpful. Secretary Hull was understanding and helpful. The small group of men whom I had gathered around me in the Department and of whom I have made mention elsewhere, who aided me in the reorganization of the Department and in the consolidation of the foreign services in such an effective way, were enthusiastic supporters of this program. In those days it was necessary for a good many of us in the Department to make frequent trips to various cities in the United States where we spoke to groups of businessmen and to groups of persons interested in our foreign relations. We began to bring before them this problem of the increased needs of the Service and the shabby way in which it had been treated. I recall that when we explained to responsible people throughout the country during these opportunities which presented themselves, the inadequate manner in which the Department had been treated in the matter of appropriations and how much the

conduct of our foreign relations was hampered by this inadequate treatment, I found almost incredulity. It seemed impossible to these responsible men that this matter should have been treated in so shabby and inadequate a manner. In conversations with the members of Congress in Washington with whom the officers of the Department had contact, we began to emphasize this problem. In a relatively short time adequate opinion was built up so that the appropriations committees in both Houses found it necessary to give more considered attention to the requests of the Department.

I shall not go into the painful experiences which we had in finally getting gradually and almost at a snail's pace increasingly ^{that} adequate appropriations for the Department. It is satisfying to record/ at this writing the Department of State is receiving from the Congress an entirely adequate hearing of its needs, and for the most part the monies made available for the Department and the Foreign Service and for the Foreign Buildings Program are adequate.

The Foreign Buildings Program has made a great progress. As our establishments in so many foreign capitals are increasing in size ^{of} because/ the responsibilities which are country is carrying, it is obviously in the best interest of our government/ ^{not to} ~~to~~ acquire residential or office quarters but to build them. We now own a residence in practically every important capital of the world where our chief of mission on his arrival will find an adequate home. We have office buildings in many capitals for our combined establishments there and the program has so far progressed that it is now possible for the Department to give increased attention to the acquiring of homes for the higher officers of our establishments in capitals as well as for our consuls general and consuls in important commercial centers throughout the world. The in-

creasing scope of this Foreign Buildings program and what is, I believe, the careful and considered execution thereof has meant a great deal not only for the morale of our representation abroad but it has meant even more for the effectiveness of its operation.

During the three years that I spent in the Department from 1937 to 1940, I found that the House Committee on Foreign Affairs was the most effective instrument which we had for getting better understanding of our Foreign Relations as well as better treatment for the Department and the Foreign Service. Mr. Linthicum died while he was Chairman of the Committee. Representative Reynolds who, I believe, succeeded him as Chairman, I had known for years. He had shown through all the years that he was in Congress great interest in our foreign relations. Mrs. Messersmith and I and the Reynolds had become close friends. He made an extraordinarily effective Chairman of the Committee and at a time when the Committee's work was becoming so increasingly important. He unfortunately passed away not too long after he became Chairman of the Committee as a result of a heart attack. The following Chairman, Representative ^{Tom Mac Millan} X of South Carolina, had been one of the effective members of the Committee for years and he and I had as happy a period of collaboration on the Department's problems as anyone could hope to have. He was Chairman only a relatively short time and died of a heart attack. Representative ^q Eton of New ~~York~~, who had been the pastor of one of the important churches in New York City for years, became Chairman for a brief period. When ^{sol} Bloom of New York became Chairman of the Committee there were some who viewed it with concern as they did not think he had the background and the capacity for this important post. Those of us, however, who knew the close interest which Bloom had taken in our problems for so many years realized that he would make an effec-

tive Chairman of the Committee and events so proved. Robert Bacon of New York, who was for many years the ranking minority member of the Committee, was a man of broad vision and understanding. He was one of the most highly respected members of the Committee as well as one of the most useful. Mrs. Edith ^Vourse Rogers took an interest in the Department and in the Foreign Service and the work of the House Committee which her husband had shown so constructively over many years. She was elected to take his place in the House on her husband's death. Mrs. ^{Benton} ~~X~~ from Ohio, who joined the Committee later, proved to be a valuable element. Men like Representative Chipperfield and Representative Johnson from Texas and so many others made a very real contribution to our problems.

During the years from the early 1930's, when I was in Germany, while I was in the Department of State, and later in Mexico and Cuba and Argentina, in fact up to my retirement around the middle of 1947, I was often before the Committee at its invitation to inform it of specific phases of our problems in the place where I was working. I have very happy memories of these meetings. They were, of course, always off the record and I could speak with complete frankness. I have had a good deal of experience in meetings of this kind, not only with committees of Congress but also with groups of businessmen, bankers, and those interested in our foreign relations in its varied aspects, and this over a long period of years. I can only say that the meetings that I had with the House Committee remained one of my most pleasant memories. I knew I was dealing with responsible people who had a real realization of the problems which were confronting our country, whether they were Republicans or Democrats I found the same endeavor to get understanding and to arrive at proper conclusions.

Early in these notes I want to insert in connection with the mention which I make of the **Foreign** Buildings Program and the Foreign Buildings Office in the Department of State, the loyal and efficient service rendered by Frederick Larkin as the head of that Office during the time that I was Assistant Secretary of State. He was a man of indefatigable energy and of very real capacity. He did not hesitate to fly to China, to India, to any part of South America, or Africa, or **wherever** we had a problem in connection with the program. He was a man of indefatigable energy and good judgment and, above all, a practical man. He saw to it that we had good and proper buildings. Few departments of our government have been served over so many years by so many devoted, loyal, and competent servants. Frederick Larkin in his field was outstanding among **these**.