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Report : Petition of J. Snow and A. Bangs

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IN SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

JANUARY 31, 1851.

Submitted, and ordered to be printed.

Mr. RUSK made the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill S. No. 443.]

The Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, to whom was referred the "petition of Josiah Snow and A. Bangs and their associates, praying the right of way and subscription to the stock of the Atlantic and Pacific Telegraph Company," have had the same under consideration, and respectfully report:

The petitioners propose to connect the valley of the Mississippi with San Francisco, in California, by telegraphic wires, and ask the aid of the government in behalf of the undertaking, offering in return the use of the wires for all government purposes for the term of ten years from the time of the completion of the work. Of the advantages to be derived from the connexion in question, no doubt can be entertained. Whether the project be regarded in a military, commercial, or social point of view, the importance of such a line of communication must at once strike the mind, and command the approval of every intelligent person. When viewed in a military light, the advantages to accrue from the proposed connexion must be evident to every one. Situated at an immense distance from those portions of the Union which border on the Atlantic ocean, California is entitled to more than an ordinary share of the care of the nation.

Beyond the reach of ordinary means of intercourse with the seat of the federal government, the transmission of military stores and means of defence must always be a work of much time and labor, whilst her vast extent of unprotected seaboard and incalculable mineral wealth render her peculiarly liable to the attacks of foreign ambition or cupidity. To be enabled to give timely aid in case of need, the government should have at its command the speediest means of being made acquainted with impending danger. Situated as she is, this youngest State of the confederacy might fall a prey to predatory violence from without before intelligence of the presence of a foe could reach those from whom protection is to be expected, and, consequently, although the evil might be remedied in the course of time, a lodgment once having been made, it might require the expenditure of much blood and treasure to effect the object. To meet the danger at the onset, the federal government must be advised of its approach; and the sooner the existence of peril is known,

the more readily can it be checked or avoided. With the proposed line of wires, the presence of danger might be known in a few minutes—whilst at present it would require weeks, if not months, to communicate the information—and succor could be furnished in the time now necessary to convey the tidings of its being wanted. It is true, local defences must be relied on to a great extent in resisting the first impression of a foreign assault; but the sooner the means necessary to maintain this resistance for any considerable length of time are furnished, the sooner will the difficulty be met and overcome.

In a commercial point of view, the line in question assumes a gigantic importance, and presents itself, not only in the attitude of a means of communication between the opposite extremes of a single country, however great, but as a channel for imparting knowledge between distant parts of the earth. With the existing facilities, it requires months to convey information from the sunny climes of the East to the less favored, in point of climate, but not less important, regions of the West, teeming, as they do, with the products of art and enterprise. Let this line of wires be established, and the Pacific and Atlantic oceans become as one, and intelligence will be conveyed from London to India in a shorter time than was required ten years since to transmit a letter from New York to Liverpool. Nor is this all. The trade which, until now, has been carried on over thousands of miles of trackless ocean, infested by storms and innumerable dangers, will follow the path of the lightning, and, passing along the entire length of our North American continent, will scatter wealth and civilization in its course. The territory of the American Union will become the highway of commerce, and the connecting link between the remotest ends of the earth. The happy consequences of such a state of things is too obvious to require further remark.

Nor does the importance of the undertaking of the memorialists claim less interest when regarded in a social point of view. California is being peopled, daily and hourly, by our friends, our kindred, and our political brethren. The little bands that a few centuries since landed on the western shores of the Atlantic have now become a mighty nation. The tide of population has been rolling onward, increasing as it approached the setting sun, until at length our people look abroad upon the Pacific, and have their homes almost within sight of the spice groves of Japan. Although separated from us by thousands of miles of distance, they will again be restored to us in feeling, and still present to our affections, through the help of this noiseless tenant of the wilderness. It will enable parents and children, and brothers and sisters, and husbands and wives, to hold converse together as in other times, and bring hope to the hopeless, and peace to hearts that have been tortured by anxiety and care.

By commencing at Natchez and terminating at San Francisco, one-half of the line would pass through a well-populated country, to which the facilities it affords will be of vast advantage. In addition to this, in the portion which will be constructed in regions not yet peopled, except by scattered tribes of Indians and adventurers, these wires will furnish the government with the most rapid means of communication with the military posts which must be established along the Mexican frontier, with a view to the redemption of the pledges of our national good faith under the provisions of the treaty with that country.

This route will, moreover, in a great measure, escape the difficulties

that may be anticipated from Indian violence, as these people only make occasional visits so far south, their permanent haunts being much further to the north. On the score of climate, as your committee are induced to believe, this route presents decided advantages over any line that could be selected to the northward of it, where the deep snows among the mountains would necessarily form great obstacles to a regular communication, more especially in winter. Added to this is the fact that timber is much more abundant in the lower than upon what may be properly called the upper route—a circumstance of very great importance.

In considering this subject, your committee could not avoid being forcibly struck with the propriety of selecting a route which harmonizes so admirably with other interests connected with the service of the government. The stipulations of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo render it necessary to establish a *cordon* of military posts along the frontier, to protect Mexico from Indian incursions. The government must necessarily place a strong force upon the entire extent of the frontier; and, while this force will protect the wires and stations, those connected with the telegraphic service will be able to add to the comfort and safety of the soldiers. They will be mutual safeguards, and, acting in concert, will be enabled the more easily to restrain Indian depredations and outrages, the horrors and extent of which far exceed any idea which the imagination can suggest. At the same time, these joint forces will contribute to the proper execution of our revenue laws along the boundary line, upon which custom-houses must be erected, at convenient intervals, to prevent the smuggling that will otherwise take place. Thus, as your committee think, an admirable system of preventive police will be established through the co-operation of the custom-house officers, the soldiers, and the agents connected with the telegraphic wires.

In conclusion, it may be stated, in general terms, that no adequate estimate can be formed of the advantages to accrue from the undertaking of the memorialists, directly and indirectly. The full fruits of this enterprise can only be displayed by the lapse of time, attended, as it must be, by increase of population and national prosperity and wealth; nor should it be forgotten that, as a bond of union among the people of this great republic, the proposed connexion will be beyond all price.

It may be proper here to notice a work lately published in London, which shows that the attention of the British people and government has already been drawn to the important subject of an immediate and direct communication between Canada and the Pacific ocean. The proposition, as set forth in the work alluded to above, is to construct a line of communication from Halifax, in Nova Scotia, to the Pacific, passing through Canada, and keeping close to the American boundary line until it strikes that ocean. The writer takes an intelligent view of the vast bearing which the proposed improvement will have upon the course of trade and the commerce of the world, which would thus be made to pass through the British North American possessions. If once thrown into that channel, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the United States to repossess themselves of the advantages now within their grasp. When the prodigious money resources of Great Britain are taken into view, the necessity of priority of action on the part of this country becomes the more evident, as that nation can afford to form the connexion with China, by

steamers, at a rate of return for the investment entirely inadequate when the smallness of our means is considered.

The amount of money for which the memorialists ask is believed to be small, when compared with the good to be effected and the consideration for which the aid is to be furnished is well secured. The bill herewith reported provides for the payment of one-eighth of the entire sum asked on the successive completion of each succeeding eighth of the structure, with a proviso that, in the event of the work being completed within eighteen months, the additional sum of \$50,000 is to be paid. In return for the support thus extended to the memorialists, they bind themselves to transmit all communications that may be required between the government and its agents, civil and military, free of charge, for the term of ten years. If the cost of transmitting this information by ordinary channels be computed, it will be seen that the sum demanded is small, very small, compared with the service to be rendered.

Under these impressions, your committee do not hesitate to recommend the passage of the accompanying bill.