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Report : Mr. Weller

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IN SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

FEBRUARY 8, 1853.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. WELLER made the following

REPORT.

[To accompany bill S. No. 614.]

The Committee on Territories, to whom was referred the memorial of Hiram O. Alden and James Eddy, asking for the right of way for a telegraph to the Pacific, and a grant of land in aid of the construction of such telegraph, having considered the same, beg leave to report:

The memorialists are practically acquainted with the construction and working of telegraphs, having built one of the most permanent and efficient lines in the country—one of them being president, and the other superintendent, of the line. Inquiries satisfactorily answered have established the competency of these persons to build and manage a line to the Pacific, should Congress deem it expedient that such a line should be constructed under national auspices.

The telegraph which the memorialists propose to build is to be subterranean, made of imperishable materials, and perfectly insulated. A line on poles, in the ordinary manner, is, for the tract of country over which it is proposed to build, simply useless. Atmospheric electricity, fires on the prairie, the thunderstorms among the mountains, herds of buffalo, the necessities of the emigrant, are considerations sufficient to establish that the working of a line in the air would be impracticable. Subterranean telegraphs, tried with indifferent success in this country, have been found to work well abroad. Long lines in the kingdom of Prussia, especially, attest the practicability and superior working capacity of the subterranean telegraph.

As to a grant of land along the line of the telegraph, your committee are decidedly disposed to recommend it. The land is worth nothing now to the government, but doubtless will be of value in the hands of these memorialists and their associates when the line shall have been built. Your committee are advised, in regard to telegraph enterprises in this country, that they are by no means certain paying investments. They understand that on the stock of some of the most important lines in the country no dividend is paid. On the other hand, other lines pay a handsome dividend. Some lines are valueless. Many of them have been dead failures, and the lines have been taken down. Such being the character of telegraph stock, it will be seen that the request of these memorialists for a grant of land by which they may call capital to their

aid, considering the national character of the work, is by no means unreasonable; and your committee do not hesitate to recommend such an appropriation, with the best conditions which are wont to be annexed to such grants.

The cost of the line cannot, of course, at this time be accurately fixed. The memorialists seem to have paid close attention to the details of the matter, and present a well-digested plan. Five hundred dollars per mile, making the whole cost, in round numbers, one and a quarter millions of dollars, has been named—an estimate which your committee are disposed to consider well founded, save, however, that they believe it does not give a sufficient margin for contingencies. They deem it, however, to approximate what will be found to be the actual cost, and sufficient for the purposes of this report and the accompanying bill.

The advantages of this telegraph to the government, the convenience and facility it will give them in communicating with their officers on the Pacific coast and in the intervening territories, cannot well be over-estimated. The memorialists propose to transmit the messages of the government free of expense to the extent of seven thousand words per month, and over that amount on terms named in the accompanying bill. Orders from the War, Navy, Treasury, Interior, and Post Office Departments would be found going over this line, to the great advantage of the several services. Accidents in California—demonstrations which, before we hear from them, have hardened into history—could be arrested or prevented by the aid of the telegraph. The movements of hostile Indian tribes and of our troops could be daily known at the War Department. Should a national vessel cast anchor in the harbor of San Francisco, her arrival would be known at the department here almost as soon as a boat from her could reach the shore. By the facilities this line furnishes for giving orders from the departments, the great delays now experienced, and the necessity of special messengers, would be avoided.

In the coast survey, which is already begun on the Pacific side, the telegraph is invaluable. The speed and accuracy by which the longitude can be determined has made it, for the uses of the survey, almost indispensable. We state, on information furnished by intelligent officers connected with the survey, that the observations of one night with the telegraph are worth more than a month's work without its aid.

Such being the return given to the government for that which is now of no value to them, it will be seen that the rights to land which the accompanying bill proposes to confer scarce wear the character of a grant.

But it is to the people of the republic, from one end of it to the other, that a telegraph to the Pacific is eminently desirable and advantageous. The amount of American shipping, engaged in the whale-fishery and in general commerce, now in the Pacific, is vast, and would largely exceed the estimate which any person, without consulting authentic data, would be inclined to form. Few, however, but know that San Francisco has already become one of the most important commercial places on this continent; and few but have looked forward to the time when a large Asiatic traffic shall find its depot there. None except commercial men who have used the telegraph know its value in com-

mercial business. But its advantages between the great cities of the Atlantic border are dwarfed by the facilities of travel: the locomotive runs by its side, and in eighteen hours the passenger from Washington who has telegraphed his starting for Boston overtakes his message. But in the line proposed, the telegraph spans a continent in an instant of time, and leaves the traveller, in the present facilities of conveyance, a month behind. The merchant at San Francisco might order his goods an hour before the sailing of the steamer from New York. In fact, if he consulted only the dial in his own counting-room, he could send his order two hours after the New York time fixed for her sailing. The telegraph, too, would equalize the markets of the Pacific with those of the Atlantic, and the excessive fluctuations now experienced in the prices of the necessities of life in California would disappear.

But it is in its social bearing that the advantages of a telegraph to the Pacific will be most strikingly seen. Every hamlet, it might almost be said every home, in thirty States of the Union, has its representative on the Pacific shore. By the aid of a telegraph they would be in immediate communication with each other. Every message, whether of joy or sorrow, could be instantly transmitted either way; and sons and fathers, wives and mothers, whose relations are now a thousand miles asunder, would be, for the purposes of the interchange of intelligence, as it were, under the same roof. It is found in telegraphs on this side of the Mississippi that the affairs of social life make up the contents of the larger part of the communications. The same feature will be at least as largely developed in the case of a telegraph to the Pacific.

The memorialists propose to complete the line within eighteen months. Your committee would favor its immediate commencement. Much time must necessarily elapse before any railway communication can reach the Pacific, and in all probability this telegraph will be completed before the road is fairly commenced.

Your committee, in view of the foregoing, beg leave to report the accompanying bill.