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CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

MONDAY, Nov. 21, 1803.

DEBATE on the paſsage of the bill fixing the SALARIES of certain officers therein mentioned.

(Continued.)

MR. ELLIOT. I feel no diſpoſition to detain the Houſe many minutes upon this queſtion. I ſhall be brief in my remarks with the leſs reluctance, from the reflection that it is almoſt impoſſible, that at the commencement of the debate it was almoſt impoſſible to ſay any thing new upon the ſubject. But, as I repreſent a portion of the American people, than whom none are more attached to the principles of political economy, or more ſparing in the compenſation they afford their public officers, and as the views I take are ſomewhat different from thoſe of any gentleman who has ſpoken, I muſt be indulged in a very few obſervations.

I candidly confeſs, Sir, that I have not examined this ſubject with that minute exactneſs with which I wiſh generally to inveſtigate ſubjects of conſequence that come before this Houſe. To diſpoſe my mind for a deciſion, I do not wiſh to calculate the exact differences between the prices of houſe rent, beef, flour, or butter, at Philadelphia or Waſhington, in 1799, or 1803: I do not wiſh to aſcertain the preciſe ſum neceſſary for the ſupport of a family in genteel life: I do not aſk what were the political ſentiments of the men who raiſed the ſalaries to their preſent ſtate: I do not aſk for the information that the governor of Maſſachuſetts receives 2,666 dollars and 66 cents, nor do I wiſh to inform other gentlemen that the governor of Vermont receives but 750 dollars, as an annual ſalary. I am ſatisfied with general views of the ſtate of ſociety, of the importance of the offices in queſtion, and the talents requiſite for the diſcharge of their duties. Theſe general views ſatisfy me that the blanks in the bill on the table, have not been filled with ſums too large. I think it unneceſſary to attempt to form a ſcale of the relative uſefulneſs of thoſe perſons who may fill theſe offices at different times. But is it poſſible to arreſt the progreſs of ſociety and manners? I wiſh we could be as ſimple and economical as the ancient Romans. But I think it in vain to ſtrive to ſtop the progreſs of ſociety to refinement, or even to luxury and extravagance. The preſent queſtion is not, ſhall we augment ſalaries? But, ſhall we continue them as they are? Fears ſeem to be entertained by ſome gentlemen, that we muſt raiſe them hereafter, and ſome think the preſent law will be unpopular. We ought undoubtedly to raiſe them hereafter, if it ſhould be neceſſary, but it is a ſtrong argument with me in favor of the bill, that the quantum of ſalary which it contemplates has been eſtabliſhed for ſome years; if we now reduce it, we ſhall have frequent complaints, and probably juſt ones, of its inſufficiency, and we ſhall annually be employed in augmenting or reducing. I wiſh to make theſe ſalaries permanent, and to eſtabliſh them on ſuch a liberal baſis, that there will be no probability of our being called upon again very ſoon for a further augmentation. My conſtituents are attached to the principles of economy. I am attached to them myſelf. But I believe that the [illegible] people, were this ſubject properly explained to them, would be ſatisfied, although the round ſums with which the blanks are filled ſeem large to the farmer and day laborer.

While I do my duty, I am regardleſs of the conſequences to my own popularity, which may reſult from the vote which I ſhall now give. I wiſh for no popularity which is not founded on independence of ſentiment, and conduct dictated by a liberal policy.

Mr. HOLLAND ſaid, that, though it was probable he ſhould ultimately vote for the bill, he conſidered it exceptionable on account of its permanency. He did not conſider this a proper time to fix the permanent ſalaries of their officers. He looked forward to the time when thoſe officers might execute their duties for a lower ſum than that at preſent neceſſary—The preſent ſituation of this city rendered their diſcharge extremely inconvenient. But the time was faſt approaching when the city itſelf would afford talents for filling theſe offices which were at preſent drawn from a diſtance. For theſe and other reaſons he was in favor of limiting the period of the bill—For this purpoſe, he moved a re-commitment of the bill to a ſelect committee, to fix a limitation to it.

Mr. J. RANDOLPH.—I know of no object for which this bill can be recommitted, but to delay the proceedings of the Houſe. I am ſatisfied the worthy member from North-Carolina has no ſuch intention; but ſuch, notwithſtanding, will be its effect. What has been the courſe purſued in this buſineſs? A gentleman from Virginia, in the firſt inſtance, made a motion for continuing for a further and limited time the law of March 1799. It was objected that this ſimple propoſition did not give the individual members of the Houſe an opportunity of canvaſſing the amount of ſalary allowed by that bill to each officer; and that a diſpoſition might exiſt to increaſe ſome and to diminiſh other ſalaries. It was alſo objected that a temporary proviſion ought not to exiſt for permanent offices; and alledged that the proviſion ſhould be permanent; that the Houſe ought to be liberated from the unpleaſant neceſſity of diſcuſſing the ſubject every two years. On this ground the reſolution was diſagreed to; and a ſubſtituted reſolution referred to the committee of ways and means. That reſolution was, not that it was expedient to continue the act of 1799 for a particular time, but that it was expedient to *fix* by law the ſalaries, or in other words to make them permanent. Not make them permanent, by putting it out of the power of the legiſlature at any time, when they ſhall ſee fit, to alter them;—for at any future time they will have a right to repeal this act, but make them ſo far permanent, as to relieve Congreſs from diſcuſſing the ſubject every ſeſſion of a new Congreſs.—Thus inſtructed the committee reported a bill in blank. In filling up theſe blanks every gentleman poſſeſſed the right of objecting to every item. The ſenſe of the Houſe was fairly taken, and the reſult was a determination to eſtabliſh the ſalaries preciſely on the ſame baſis fixed by the law of 1799. Now it appears to me, that if there really are any electioneering views within or without theſe walls, which I am ſorry to ſee diſplayed on the floor of this Houſe, gentlemen will be willing to fix the reſponſibility of raiſing the ſalaries upon certain members, and other gentlemen, if actuated by ſuch motives, will not fix the reſponſibility on themſelves, but place it, where it ought to reſt, by re-enacting the law of 1799. But for myſelf, I entertain no fear of the public ſentiment reſpecting any meaſure, dictated, as this is, by a regard to the public good. I believe that to legiſlate on other principles, is tacitly to ſay the people are incompetent to their own government.

So much as to the recommitment of the bill. When I came into the Houſe, I found the reverend gentleman from Maſſachuſetts delivering his ſentiments, on which I beg leave to offer a few remarks. I underſtood the reverend gentleman as maintaining that, in the diſcuſſion of this bill on a previous day, the ſalaries as now eſtabliſhed by law, were advocated from perſonal friendſhip to the gentlemen now in office. I can only reply for myſelf that I did not advocate them on that principle, and for others, that if they advocated them on that principle, it altogether eſcaped my notice. Another objection of the reverend gentleman is, that an amendment, made by a gentleman from the ſame ſtate with himſelf (Dr. Euſtis) repreſents theſe ſalaries as the ſame with thoſe eſtabliſhed by the act of 1799. This is either a matter of fact, or it is not. Let gentlemen examine the laws, let them compare every ſalary fixed in this bill, with every ſalary eſtabliſhed by the act of 1799, and ſay whether they are not the ſame. If this is the fact, can the inſertion of the amendment, which is at moſt an act of ſupererogation, vitiate the whole bill? Is it ſufficient that it contains a declaration of a fact which no one can deny, and which does not affect its details, to vitiate it? When the gentleman began his obſervations I had not taken my ſeat. There may have, therefore, been ſome obſervations of weight which I did not hear. But if the reſt were of the ſame nature with thoſe I did hear, I would wiſh it were conſiſtent with the rules of our proceeding to have diſpenſed with the reading and to have printed the ſpeech for the uſe of the members, or of thoſe for whom it was intended. In ſome of the remarks which I did hear, the reverend gentleman violated all the rules of the drama. I have always underſtood that the ſcape goat had gone into the wilderneſs, and was never afterwards heard of. But a few days ſince he had been packed off by a gentleman from Connecticut loaded with our political ſins.—Is it poſſible then that ſince laſt Friday, when we firſt heard of this ſcape goat, that ſo many ſins have accumulated upon us as to require the ſending another ſcape goat, in expiation of them, into the wilderneſs? The reverend gentleman may, however ſay, that he is not acquainted with the rules of the drama, and that they have nothing to do with his profeſſional concerns; but ſtill I ſhould have ſuppoſed him better acquainted with his profeſſion, than to have introduced this ſcape goat a ſecond time.

The gentleman from North-Carolina (Mr. Holland) has taken a ground that will defeat his own motion. He obſerves that there is not at preſent ſufficient talents in the city of Waſhington for the filling of theſe offices; though there may be, in a ſhort time. I ſhould be happy if the citizens of Waſhington contained perſons capable of executing all the great offices of the government; but I ſhould look with regret to that time, if I ſuppoſed when it arrived, there could be a neceſſity to fill theſe offices from ſuch perſons: as I never wiſh to ſee the time when all the great officers of the government ſhall be taken from a disfranchiſed territory. Independent of the conſideration ariſing from the propriety of obtaining that information which can only ariſe from a ſelection of men from the different parts of the union, I never wiſh to ſee the time when theſe great officers ſhall be taken from men not endowed with the bleſſings of ſelf-government.

For theſe reaſons I hope the bill will paſs, and that this diſcuſſion will be laid aſide, until, at ſome future day, it may be conſidered proper to enter into an enquiry into the expediency of reducing or increaſing the ſalaries. I believe, however, from the progreſs of ſociety and the depreciation of money, the time will never come, when it will be expedient to reduce them.

I will now ſay a word in reply to the gentleman from Maſſachuſetts (Mr. Haſtings) who advocates a reduction of ſalaries, not becauſe they are too high for men of eminent profeſſional talents, but becauſe they are enough for the men now in office. I underſtood him as ſaying the preſent ſalary was not too much for a gentleman once ſecretary of the treaſury (Mr. Hamilton) reſpecting whom the only wonder was that he had accepted that office, or having accepted it, had ſo long continued to hold it.

Mr. *Haſtings* deſired to explain. He had ſtated that the firſt ſecretary of ſtate (Mr. Jefferſon) had not reſigned his office becauſe his compenſation was too ſmall. He had ſtated that the ſecretary of war had not, he believed, reſigned ſolely on that account. He had ſtated that it was a matter of ſurpriſe that a gentleman of ſuch great profeſſional talents as the firſt ſecretary of the treaſury had ever accepted, or having accepted, had ſo long continued to hold the office.

While up he would reply to his colleague (Mr Varnum) who had aſked if beef and other articles were not higher at preſent than they ever had been in the part of the country in which he lived. He would anſwer that they were not ſo high in that part of the country for two or three years paſt, as they were in the year 1799.

Mr. *Randolph.*—I aſſure the gentleman from Maſſachuſetts that it is no part of my intention to enter into a comparitive view of the merits of the officers of the preſent adminiſtration and thoſe of the laſt.

I regret that the gentleman from Maſſachuſetts (Mr. Varnum) who poſſeſſes ſo ſtrong a claim to the conſideration of the Houſe, ſhould have made an expoſition calculated to repel newſpaper animadverſion. I believe that it is a taſk beyond the power of that gentleman, or any other, to check its miſrepreſentations. I believe likewiſe that it is enough for a member of this Houſe to repel arguments adduced on this floor, without deſcending to a warfare with the editors of newſpapers.

Mr. HOLLAND ſaid he was very far from intending to ſay that the time was near at hand when all the offices might be filled by perſons reſiding in this city. He only meant to ſay that ſome choices might be made from among them; and that the inducements would hereafter be greater to gentlemen to come forward than they were now. The only inducement that could now operate was a ſenſe of public duty. By coming here, gentlemen are placed in a ſtate of exile, and cut off from all ſociety.

Mr. SMILIE. I hope before this bill ſhall be recommitted, we ſhall hear better reaſons for it than have been yet adduced. I am ſure if the gentleman from North Carolina will candidly examine the reaſoning he has uſed, he will be convinced there is no force in it. Does he really ſuppoſe that we ſhall ever ſee a ſtate of ſociety in which we ſhall be ſubjected to leſs expences than at preſent. As ſociety progreſſes, ſo will expences. But I am againſt the recommitment for another reaſon. This is a diſagreeable ſubject to come before this Houſe; and I would wiſh gentlemen, in favor of making a temporary proviſion, to reflect that we are not now about giving theſe ſalaries a conſtitutional eſtabliſhment; that is not in our power; we are no more making them permanent, than we have already made permanent the ſalaries of the Preſident and Vice Preſident, and our own compenſations. If this bill paſſes, it will put the ſalaries of the officers provided for in it on the ſame footing with them. It will remain with the legiſlature, at any future time, to raiſe or diminiſh them according to the circumſtances of the country. As to a future diminution of them, I have no idea of it; on the contrary, I believe that men younger than myſelf, will live to ſee the time when they will be raiſed.

An oppoſition to this bill may be conſidered by ſome gentlemen as the road to popularity. But this conſideration ſhall never influence me. I believe the only road to popularity is to do what we think right, and what our conſciences approve. It has always been a principle with me to have as few officers as poſſible, and to pay them well for their ſervices.

My colleague (Mr. Clay) has dropped an idea that it is the wiſh of the people that theſe ſalaries ſhould be reduced. If it is the wiſh of the people of his diſtrict, I cannot ſay that it is the wiſh of the people of mine. I voted laſt year for continuing theſe ſalaries; and yet my conſtituents have never blamed me, indeed I have not heard the ſubject mentioned by them. I have confidence in the good ſenſe of the people, and I believe that this diſcontent is not with the people. Have we not good reaſon to expect that they will be ſatiſfied? Are not the great reductions we have made in the expences of the government known to them? Will they not be ſatiſfied with theſe, and not regard the trifling differences between the amount of the preſent ſalaries, and the propoſed reductions? Mr. Smilie concluded by ſaying he differed with gentlemen, on the expences of living between this place and Philadelphia, conſidering the expences here greater than they were there.

Mr. SKINNER, in reply to the remarks of his colleague Mr. Haſtings, ſtated that he was incorrect in his facts. He had ſtated the price of flour in 1799 at 16 dollars a barrel—It was not ſo. It was only 9 dollars. From his converſance with the ſhipping buſineſs, he was alſo juſtified in ſtating that beef and pork were now higher than they had been at any time heretofore.

DR. EUSTIS. It is well known in the ſtate of Maſſachuſetts that the ſalaries of the governor and judges are not competent; and for the many years I have had the honor of a ſeat in the legiſlature of that ſtate, I have not known one in which there has not been a temporary grant in addition to the permanent compenſations; and during the laſt year an act paſſed one branch of the legiſlature for their increaſe. Hitherto, I have been ſatisfied with a ſilent vote on this ſubject, as I have been of opinion that the deciſion of the queſtion depended upon circumſtances on which the judgment of every member was made up, and which, I am ſorry to ſay, have received no light from the long diſcuſſion which we have heard. Some gentlemen have gone into a detailed view of the expences of living. If they had actually gone to market, and judged for themſelves, they would have been convinced that theſe officers receive a bare competence. Let gentlemen look at the ſtate of the country, what it is, and what it is to be. It is ſaid that the preſent ſalaries are predicated on war prices. What war? Between France and England. Does not a war between the ſame nations now exiſt, and is it not probable that articles of life will riſe as high as they were before?

Theſe, however, are ſmall conſiderations. The true queſtion is whether men of talents equal to a diſcharge of the moſt important duties under the government will devote them to the ſervice of their country, and how long, without remuneration. For my part, I acknowledge my ſurpriſe that any gentleman ſhould conſider 5,000 dollars too much for talents fitted to preſide over the deſtiny of a nation. I am aſtoniſhed at ſuch an opinion. My own conviction is that the preſent ſalaries are inadequate, and I know that in ſome inſtances the officers are trenching upon their private fortunes. I am ſtill willing to continue the ſalaries, without augmentation, as they were fixed in 1799. Let gentlemen look at the ſituation of our officers; and how long they are likely to be employed. In other governments there is other proviſion beſides ſalaries. After receiving a liberal compenſation, an officer, under other governments, retires with a penſion or a peerage. But what is the fact with regard to the beſt of our officers if their ſervices are required till they have reached the age of three ſcore and ten. If they die we wear a piece of black crape on our arm in commemoration of their ſervices. If they ſurvive their office, and are able to provide for themſelves, it is well; but if they are not able, we make no proviſion for them. Theſe, ſir, are the cheapeſt ſervices in the world; the ſalary is all; and they die with it, or by it. Gentlemen will perceive, from its amount, that it is impoſſible to lay by a farthing for the day of adverſity.

As to the motion to limit the exiſtence of the act, it is improper, becauſe, if the war continues, the price of conſumable articles will riſe, beſides that the depreciation of money will operate a regular augmentation. And though the act be unlimited by itſelf, yet it will be in the power of the preſent, or the next, or any other congreſs to take it into conſideration, and act upon it according to their diſcretion. The limitation is therefore unneceſſary, and may be vexatious; for no ſubject can be touched, ſo troubleſome within doors, and more calculated to excite feeling out of doors.

I was unfortunately abſent when my revered colleague made his obſervations on the amendment I had the honor to introduce. I underſtand him as being in favor of the principle of the bill, but as meaning to vote againſt it on account of that amendment. Not having the diſcriminating judgement of the gentleman, it may be my misfortune not to perceive how this furniſhes him with an argument againſt the whole bill. I was, in the firſt inſtance, for re-enacting the act of 1799 in its very words; but gentlemen not liking that courſe, the propoſition to that effect was negatived, and another propoſition agreed to. On this propoſition, as its baſis, a bill was brought in ſpecifying the ſalaries given to the ſeveral officers. To this bill I offered the amendment now objected to. The gentleman from North Carolina objected to it as unneceſſary. But the Houſe overruled the objection, and determined that it ſhould be incorporated in the bill. The Houſe determined that it was proper. Whether it is proper will reſult from a ſingle conſideration. We paſs a bill fixing certain ſalaries. The bill appears by itſelf to be a new act, fixing new ſalaries, whereas the principle, on which it is founded, has been practiſed upon ever ſince the year 1799. It appears then proper to trace this principle to its firſt origination. Not that it is my intention to derive a ſanction to the preſent meaſure from the act of 1799; but ſimply to record a fact, undiſputed and indiſputable, that the ſalaries are now eſtabliſhed as they were in 1799, that every man who reads this law, may know it. It is no part of my intention to caſt reproaches upon a former adminiſtration. I know this is impoſſible; for by agreeing to this act I approbate that meaſure by giving to theſe officers the ſame ſalaries then given. I mean it ſimply as a matter of record.

One gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. Goddard) with great facetiouſneſs propoſed the other day, that I ſhould make proclamation of this fact. Why the honorable gentleman, with his uſual ſagacity, has preciſely hit my intention. It is, Sir, my intention to make proclamation, of this fact, or publication of it, that we may make it appear that this is a continuation of the ſame act paſſed by the gentleman and his friends, when they were in power, in the year 1799; and that the honorable gentleman may take it home and ſhew his conſtituents, by an undiſputed declaration on the face of it, that this is the ſame act with that paſſed in 1799, and that it may appear that we have done neither more nor leſs than continue without augmentation or diminution, the ſalaries as eſtabliſhed by the act of 1799.

Mr. J. CLAY. I do not intend to trouble the Houſe with any further obſervations on the general merits of the bill. The gentleman from Maſſachuſetts is the only one, who, in my opinion, has adduced any arguments why theſe ſalaries ſhould be raiſed. Under the idea that no anſwer is required, I intend