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We Must Preserve Our Forests, Protect Our Watersheds, and
Promote the Utilities of Our Rivers From Source to Sea—
This Is the Plain Duty of the Hour, and if We Fail to
Do It, We Invite the Deluge and Create the Desert.

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SPEECH

OF

HON. WILLIAM SULZER
OF NEW YORK

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

THURSDAY, MAY 21, 1908

WASHINGTON
1908

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OF
HON. WILLIAM SULZER.

The House having under consideration the bill (H. R. 21986) to enable any State to cooperate with any other State or States, or with the United States, for the conservation of the navigability of navigable rivers, and to provide for the appointment of a commission—

Mr. SULZER said:

Mr. SPEAKER: This bill to create a forest commission to investigate something and report next year nothing regarding the protection of the forests within the watersheds of the White Mountains and the Southern Appalachian range is a sad disappointment to the real friends of genuine forest preservation. It means more delay—and procrastination has been the order of the day—in this momentous matter. We had indulged the hope that the Appalachian forest reservation bill would be reported and passed before this session of Congress adjourned; but, alas, our fondest expectations are again destined to be shattered by this little apology for the real legislation so earnestly demanded by the far-seeing people of the country.

Now, I want to say that I am opposed to this delay. I look with suspicion on this makeshift. Instead of the House of Representatives responding to the appeals of the people and meeting this great question in a broad and statesmanlike way, the powers that be in this House direct that the committee bring in this bill to delegate away our legislative rights to a perfunctory commission. It is a great mistake. The people are being humbugged. The pretext will not answer. We are sent here to legislate on this question, and on all other questions, and we should not seek to escape the responsibility. The Congress is the lawmaking body of this Government. The people elected us to legislate, and if we are too indolent or too ignorant or too incompetent to do it, we ought to be manly enough to say so and

resign and go home and let the people elect Members who are capable enough and competent enough and industrious enough to legislate, not only on this matter, but on all other matters.

I am opposed to delegating away the powers of the legislative branch of the Government to irresponsible commissions. I am against legislation by commission. I do not like too much commission-made law. I am opposed to this legislative commission business—to a commission to investigate the tariff schedules, to a commission to report on banking and currency, to a commission to look into this matter of forest preservation, and to commissions to do various other things. It is all wrong. It all means delay—more procrastination. These commissions to do this, and to do that, and to do something or other, are merely excuses for delay and for junketing parties, called into being to have a good time, created to spend the people's money, and nine times out of ten utterly useless and barren of beneficial results. We are sent here to do the people's business. Let us obey their mandates and endeavor to meet their expectations.

I am in favor of preserving our forests by intelligent forestry legislation. I am in favor of protecting our watersheds, and utilizing to the utmost our numerous rivers as they flow from the mountains to the seas; and I believe that now is as good a time to begin as some time in the future. We must preserve our forests; we must protect our watersheds; we must promote the utilities of our rivers from source to sea. This is the plain duty of the hour; and if we fail to do it, we invite the deluge and create the desert. This is a great economical question. I warn the House that delay in this matter is dangerous. Let us do our duty now and not endeavor to escape responsibility by delegating our powers to this commission that will be impotent to accomplish permanent results.

Now, what does this little commission bill do? Briefly, it provides, in the first section, that the consent of the United States is given to any State to enter into any compact or agreement, not in violation of the law of the United States, with any other State or States. The second section makes an appropriation of \$100,000 to enable the Secretary of Agricul-

ture to enter into cooperative arrangements with the States or with owners of private woodlands for the administration and utilization of the same. Just what the result of that will be I know not. The remaining sections of the bill provide for the appointment of a commission of ten members, five to be appointed by the Speaker of the House and five to be appointed by the presiding officer of the Senate; these ten to take into consideration all questions relating to the proposed forest reservations of the White and Appalachian mountains.

[The action of the committee in this matter—from the bill to do something, now pending in the committee, to this commission bill, just sprung on us, to do nothing—is the merest kind of a makeshift—the rankest kind of an apology—intended only for delay and to escape responsibility; and the whole proceeding is most deplorable. I regret it exceedingly, and I appeal to the wisdom and to the sagacity and to the patriotism of the Members of Congress to do something substantial now before it is too late. We are behind the age on this all-important question of the conservation of our natural resources. We have received a mighty heritage and with it a corresponding responsibility. We are the trustees for future generations; and we will be false to ourselves, false to our country, and false to our trust if we do not do our duty and preserve, in so far as we can, what we enjoy for the benefit of those that come after us. Let us be true to our trust and true to the ages yet to come, and always bear in mind that willful waste makes woeful want.

Mr. Speaker, we must preserve our forests; we must protect our watersheds; we must look after our rivers, from their source to the sea. It is one of the most important questions of the day, and further delay is criminal. We must wake up before our forests are denuded and our rivers destroyed. After the forests are gone this is what will happen: The soil dries up, loses its fibrous life, and by erosion is rapidly washed down into the rivers, where it is deposited to the detriment of navigation, necessitating millions of dollars of Government money each year for dredging. The heavier forest debris, which is not removed, dries up and becomes a tangled mass of timber, that takes fire from the hunter's or the woodman's match, or when

the lightning strikes it. The fires, beginning in this débris, spread to the forests that are left and every year do incalculable damage; then the springs and the multitude of tiny brooks that feed the rivers are dried up, and the latter in the dry season get very low, causing enormous loss of the water power which runs the great mills; then the snows melt and the heavy later rains begin. There is no soil now to hold back and distribute equably this downfall on the steep slopes, and so we have the devastating floods, which annually entail enormous losses.

And so, sir, it follows like the night the day that after the devastation of the forests comes the deluge and then a barren waste and then death to all living things and then the rainless desert. It is thus that annihilation has come upon some of the greatest empires and richest domains that the world has ever seen. Once upon a time, before the mountain forests of Lebanon were destroyed, Palestine blossomed like a rose and supported in much affluence a population of 10,000,000. The mountains have long been denuded. Forbidding slopes, barren and ugly, rear their weird forms sharply above dismal and desolate valleys. Scarcely 400,000 people remain in all the region, and most of these are in hopeless and abject poverty.

The valley of Babylon, where once stood the metropolis of the world, is abandoned and forlorn. Nineveh, the magnificent city of the ancients, is buried beneath the shifting sands of time. Desert wastes cover the sites of Carthage and Tyre and Sidon, yet bountiful nature once provided for these places its richest gifts of fertility and abundance. Antioch is gone and all Syria is a scene of irreparable ruin. The destruction of her forests, followed by the disappearance of her soil and the decay of her industries, foreshadowed the inevitable result. Man destroyed the forests, and the lands which once flowed with milk and honey were transformed into desert wastes. One-third of China, it is said, has been rendered uninhabitable, and the ruined hills of southern Italy will no longer support their population, and testify in mute eloquence the consequence of forest slaughter. Is such a mournful record of devastation and destruction, of decay and annihilation, to be repeated in Amer-

ica? I trust not. But I warn my fellow-countrymen that if the carnival of loot of our natural resources is not stopped, and speedily stopped, and the forests administered for perpetual use, history will repeat itself, and the inevitable must follow here as in other lands. We can not escape if we destroy principal and interest. Let us do our duty now or sooner or later this will be a national issue that will sweep all opposition aside.

The intelligent conservation of our wonderful natural resources means much to our glorious country now, and much more in lasting benefits to future generations. The willful waste of these natural resources—the devastation of our forests, the destruction of our watersheds, the elimination of our rivers—means decay and death and desert wastes, means in the centuries yet to come the conditions we now witness in northern Africa, in western Asia, in Italy, and in Spain. The world is learning by experience. We must learn in the same school. We can not have our cake and eat it, too. We can not violate natural laws with impunity; we can not neglect fundamental principles and escape the consequences; we can not decimate our forests and have our rivers, too, and without them our fertile fields will ere long be barren wastes. Shall the history of the ancients repeat itself here? Shall we never take heed? In the story of the past let us realize the duty of the present, and by intelligently responding to the essential demands of the hour we will be true to our trust, true to humanity, true to ourselves, and future generations appreciating our work will rise up and call us blessed. [Applause.]

The SPEAKER. The time of the gentleman from New York has expired.

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