

MESSAGE OF PRESIDENT RELATIVE TO CENSUS OF 1910.

M E S S A G E

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

URGING

UPON CONGRESS THAT IN THE ENACTMENT OF A LAW FOR THE TAKING OF THE CENSUS PROVISION BE MADE THAT THE ADDITIONAL EMPLOYEES BE SELECTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CIVIL-SERVICE RULES.

JANUARY 6, 1908.—Referred to the Committee on Reform in the Civil Service and ordered to be printed.

To the Senate and House of Representatives:

In the taking of the census of 1910 it will probably be necessary to employ about 4,000 additional persons in the temporary force at Washington. I urge upon the Congress that in the enactment of a law for the taking of the census provision be made that these persons be selected in accordance with the civil-service rules. The Civil Service Commission is amply able, through its regular examinations, to promptly supply all needed eligibles having the requisite qualifications.

The noncompetitive examinations used in selecting the force at Washington of the last two censuses served only as a cloak to hide the nakedness of the spoils system. Such examinations are useless as checks upon patronage appointments. They prevent the most incompetent from being appointed, but they do not secure the appointment of the most competent, and they afford no check upon political appointments. It is idle to say that such examinations are fair, for the unfairness and favoritism come in in the choosing of the men who shall be allowed to try them. The great majority of the clerical employees of the last two censuses were far below the average of the persons appointed through competitive examinations in like grades. Statistics prepared on this point show that only about 50 per cent of the applicants who were employed in the last census were able to pass the competitive examinations under the civil-service rules, while

of all other applicants for the same examinations throughout the country about 67 per cent passed. As appointments are made under the competitive system from those highest in grade there is even a much wider margin of difference in intelligence and clerical capacity between the two classes than these figures indicate. Much of the value of a census depends upon the faith of the public in it. The taint of the spoils system will not merely hamper and delay the economical and efficient taking of the census, but will impair the belief of the public in its honesty.

These additional employees are certain to seek to be retained in the permanent service at the close of taking the census. If they are selected for the temporary force upon a patronage basis, it will be unjust and improper to give them preference over those of superior merit having claims under the civil-service law; and yet the very men who now most strongly object to having these employees put under the civil-service law will then endeavor in every way to secure their transfer to the service protected by that law. This has been the unfailing experience of the past. When a branch of the public service is by law exempted from the operations of the civil-service law, so as to admit persons without regard thereto, the strongest pressure is certain to come later from the very individuals who secured the passage of the exemption law to have those they exempted transferred to the classified service. This effort is being made every day. It is proof positive that all these branches of the public service like the Census should be put without qualification under the civil-service law.

I invite attention to the following letter from the Civil Service Commission and to the quotations contained in it from former Commissioners of the Census:

“ DECEMBER 21, 1907.

“ The PRESIDENT:

“ The bill to provide for the new census (H. R. 7597) provides that the additional employees shall be appointed upon ‘such noncompetitive examination as the Director of the Census, in cooperation with the United States Civil Service Commission, may prescribe, the examinations to be held under the direction of said Commission.’ * * * Persons having previous experience in census work are excepted from examinations and the permanent force may be recruited from the temporary force. This proposed legislation is only slightly less vicious than previous census laws. By its noncompetitive feature it permits of the places being apportioned as patronage, and although the persons recommended must be examined, the examinations are not open to public competition. Persons thus appointed for patronage reasons, including persons appointed for the same reasons in previous census work, may be continued in the permanent force. This suspension of the competitive system and the substitution of the patronage system not merely in the temporary force but in the permanent force, which is now subject to competition, opens the door for the removal of persons appointed under the rules to make places for persons appointed by strong political influence. This provision is not merely a backward step, but will inflict a grave blow upon the merit system and discredit competitive examinations. It was only with great difficulty and with your very

earnest support that the House provision to allow the temporary employees of the last census to be made eligible to appointment in the classified service without examination was modified.

“Hon. Carroll D. Wright, when Commissioner of the Census, stated that the absence of civil-service rules made an extra cost of \$2,000,000, and afterwards said:

The above statements more than justify the opinion which I expressed in the report on a plan for a permanent census service, for instead of an extra cost of \$2,000,000, to which I guardedly limited myself, it is apparent that under the first comparison there was an extra cost of \$6,421,246, and under the second comparison of \$3,372,025. The magnitude of the census work, the lack of time for preparation, the temporary nature of the force, etc., may properly, and perhaps sufficiently, account for the extraordinary expense above the \$2,000,000 which I have attributed to the absence of civil-service rules.

The figures which I have given thoroughly justify the opinion Mr. Porter expressed to me several years ago, that it would have been much better had the Eleventh Census been taken in accordance with civil-service rules, an opinion he has now given to the public in an interesting article in the *North American Review* for the current month (December, 1897), in which he gives as one of the faults of the system under which censuses have been taken “the placing upon the shoulders of the superintendent, whose mind should be fully occupied with his experts in planning the work, the responsibility of the appointment of an office force of several thousand clerks.”

“I have the honor to be, very respectfully,

“JOHN C. BLACK, *Commissioner.*”

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

THE WHITE HOUSE, *January 6, 1908.*