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### Where Your Taxes Go

How Uncle Sam Spends Your Money in Conducting Your Business

By EDWARD G. LOWRY

Author "Washington Close-Ups," "Banks and Financial Systems," etc. Contributor Political and Economic Articles to Leading Periodicals and a Writer of Recognized Authority on the National Government's Business Methods

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### XVI. WHAT OF THESE OLD MEN?

Congress enacted a law in 1890 requiring all heads of departments and independent establishments in the federal service to report each year to the secretary of the treasury the number of employees under them who were below a fair standard of efficiency. Every year this is done and the letters to the secretary of the treasury from the various departments and bureaus are printed in the book of estimates of appropriations compiled for use by congress in making up the annual supply bills. Congress never pays the slightest heed to these reports. They are made up year after year, but the inefficient are never fired.

For example, last year the chief clerk of the treasury reported 170 employees of the Treasury department as below a fair standard of efficiency. But nothing will be done about it. The Interior department reported 139 inefficient, and will probably go on reporting them till they die of old age. There are employees of the government in Washington who are totally blind and who are led from their homes to their offices each day and back home again in the afternoon.

I knew in 1920 one gentleman of ninety-two years who had been in the government service for seventy-two years. He was being paid at that time \$900 a year. His maximum pay during his long service was \$1800 a year. James K. Polk was President when this old gentleman came into the service. He was born on January 10, 1828. His father was a captain of the regular army in the war of 1812. After that service he led an active life in other occupations until 1848, when he died, leaving a dependent family of nine persons, three of them boys. It fell to the lot of one of them to be the chief support of the family.

It came to pass, then, that at the age of twenty he received through the influence of navy friends of his father a small clerkship at the naval observatory, then under the superintendence of that accomplished officer, Matthew Fontaine Maury, whom he served as amanuensis for ten years, accounting it a great privilege and pleasure to have heard Maury's voice dictating the words of sense and wisdom which make up the sailing directions, the wind and current charts and other publications issued from the observatory for the benefit of the world.

From a copyist at first, November 9, 1848, at \$3 a day, the young man was advanced as follows:

July 1, 1853, clerk at \$1,200 a year; July 1, 1854, clerk at \$1,500 a year; July 1, 1870, principal clerk at \$1,800 a year; December 6, 1911, clerk at \$1,400 a year; May 1, 1918, stenographer and typewriter at \$900 a year.

It will be seen that he was demoted in December, 1911, and again in May, 1918, to lower positions, involving less work and responsibility. These demotions were at his own request. In October, 1917, he received from the assistant secretary of the navy, Mr. Roosevelt, the following letter:

"I have to inform you that you have been granted leave without pay for six months beginning October 13, 1917.

"As you have been in the employ of the government now nearly sixty-nine years, and during all that time your record has been excellent, I regret that there is no way in which the department could continue you on the rolls with compensation.

"I desire at this time to express the appreciation of the department for your long and satisfactory service, and the hope that you will be so benefited by this leave that you can return and resume your duties at its expiration."

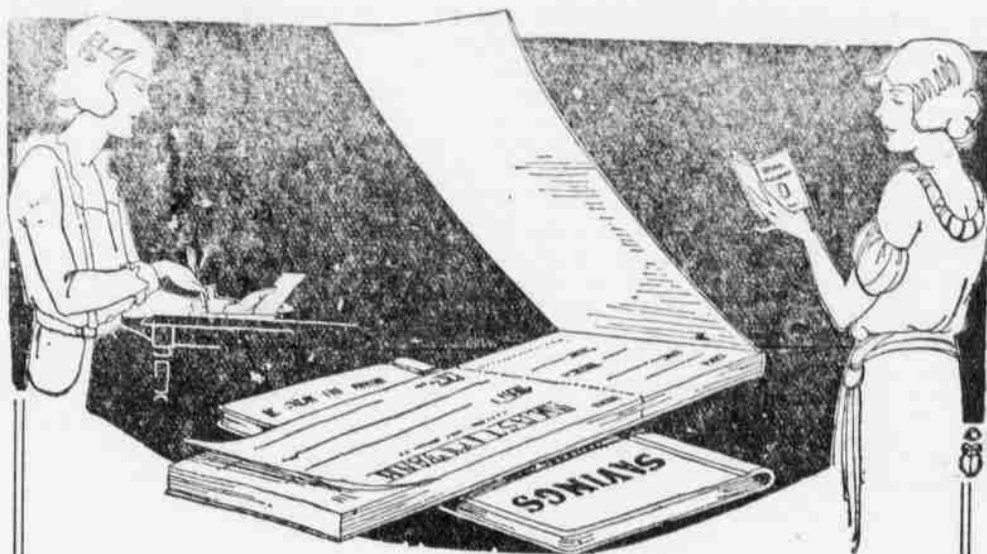
I talked with one of the cabinet officers about the old and feeble employees.

He said: "I don't know what congress intends to do about them, but I know what I intend to do with those in my department. I intend to leave them alone. They can stay here as long as they like, until some provision is made for them. When I was new in the department I dismissed two of these old people and demoted another, on the ground that they were superannuated and inefficient and were a hindrance to the work.

"All three of them wrote me sad letters and promptly committed suicide. That was enough and more than enough for me. Never again will I disturb one of them. I do not choose to have it on my conscience that I pronounced sentence of death on an old man or an old woman in the service of the government. They can all stay on here as long as they like. I found them here and some of them will be here when I leave. If congress chooses to provide for them that is its obligation. But I will never sentence another one of them to self-destruction, no matter what the cost to the taxpayer and the government."

Uncle Eben.

"De troublemaker," said Uncle Eben, "is one kind of manufacturer dat ought to be taxed extra."



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