

DESTRUCTION OF INVOICES IN CONSULAR OFFICES.

FEBRUARY 19, 1903.—Referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

Mr. HITT, from the Committee on Foreign Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT.

[To accompany H. R. 17446.]

The Committee on Foreign Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 17446) to authorize the Secretary of State to cause the destruction of invoices filed in consular offices for more than five years, having duly considered the same, report it back with the recommendation that it do pass.

The purpose of the measure is to relieve consular officers from the necessity of storing old and worthless invoices which have accumulated for many years and are not only a menace to the health of the occupants of many consulates, but of considerable expense to the Government, requiring the renting of storage room apart from the consular office for the protection of old and valueless papers no longer of any use. The Secretary of the Treasury states that the records of the custom-houses are complete without them. In section 5403 of the Revised Statutes there is absolute prohibition of the removal or destruction of any paper or document or record filed or deposited in any public office without reference to the value of the document so taken or destroyed; and without authority of Congress the Department has no power to dispose of or destroy this mass of worthless papers. The Secretary's letter recommending the adoption of the bill is hereto attached.

The committee recommend the adoption of the bill.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, February 16, 1903.

SIR: I inclose herewith a draft of an act to permit the Secretary of State to cause the destruction of invoices of merchandise exported to the United States which have been on file in the consular offices for more than five years. The object of this measure is to relieve consular offices from the necessity of storing old and valueless invoices which have accumulated for many years and are not only a menace to the health of the occupants of many consulates, but a considerable expense to the Government. At London, England, for example, it is necessary to rent storage room apart

from the consular office for the protection of old invoices. The documents are no longer of any use, as the Secretary of the Treasury states that the records of the custom-houses are complete without them, but in view of the provisions of section 5403 of the Revised Statutes the Department is without authority to cause their destruction. I therefore strongly recommend that the inclosed provision be enacted into law.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,

JOHN HAY.

HON. ROBERT R. HITT,

Chairman Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives.

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