

Handout B: Cleveland's Veto Message

UNITED STATES, February 16, 1887

To the House of Representatives of the United States:

I return without my approval House bill number ten thousand two hundred and three, entitled "An Act to enable the Commissioner of Agriculture to make a special distribution of seeds in drought-stricken counties of Texas, and making an appropriation therefor." [1]

[A] long-continued and extensive drought has existed in certain portions of the State of Texas, resulting in a failure of crops and consequent distress and destitution. [2]

Though there has been some difference in statements concerning the extent of the people's needs in the localities thus affected, there seems to be no doubt that there has existed a condition calling for relief; and I am willing to believe that, notwithstanding the aid already furnished, a donation of seed-grain to the farmers located in this region, to enable them to put in new crops, would serve to avert a continuance or return of an unfortunate blight. [3]

And yet I feel obliged to withhold my approval of the plan as proposed by this bill, to indulge a benevolent and charitable sentiment through the appropriation of public funds for that purpose. [4]

I can find no warrant for such an appropriation in the Constitution, and I do not believe that the power and duty of the general government ought to be extended to the relief of individual suffering which is in no manner properly related to the public service or benefit. A prevalent tendency to disregard the limited mission of this power and duty should, I think, be steadfastly resisted, to the end that the lesson should be constantly enforced that, though the people support the government, the government should not support the people. [5]

The friendliness and charity of our countrymen can always be relied upon to relieve their fellow citizens in misfortune. This has been repeatedly and quite lately demonstrated. Federal aid in such cases encourages the expectation of paternal care on the part of the government and weakens the sturdiness of our national character, while it prevents the indulgence among our people of that kindly sentiment and conduct which strengthens the bonds of a common brotherhood. [6]

It is within my personal knowledge that individual aid has, to some extent, already been extended to the sufferers mentioned in this bill. The failure of the proposed appropriation of ten thousand dollars additional, to meet their remaining wants, will not necessarily result in continued distress if the emergency is fully made known to the people of the country. [7]

—Grover Cleveland