

# PROCTOR KNOTT'S SPEECH ON DULUTH, MINN.

---

---

Remarks of  
**HON. NAT PATTON**  
of Texas  
in the  
**House of Representatives**  
Tuesday, October 1, 1940

Speech Delivered January 27, 1871

*(Not printed at Government expense)*



*This is a famous speech for  
Duluth. It is considered an  
unusual example of satire.*

*BBW*

United States  
Government Printing Office  
Washington : 1940

264988--19555

REMARKS  
OF  
HON. NAT PATTON

Mr. PATTON. Mr. Speaker and ladies and gentlemen of the House, one of the greatest speeches ever delivered by a Member of the House of Representatives was made by Proctor Knott, a Representative in Congress from the State of Kentucky. The House of Representatives was considering a resolution extending the time to construct a railroad from the St. Croix River or Lake to the west end of Lake Superior and to Bayfield. Proctor Knott was opposed to the bill, and everything that he said in derision and ridicule about Duluth, Minn., came true in fact. Proctor Knott's speech was delivered on January 27, 1871, in the Forty-first Congress, third session.

My colleague and friend from Duluth, the Honorable WILLIAM A. PITTENGER, on June 12, 1930, extended his remarks in the RECORD and included therein Proctor Knott's address. It is as follows:

MR. KNOTT'S ADDRESS

Mr. Speaker, if I could be actuated by any conceivable inducement to betray the sacred trust reposed in me by those to whose generous confidence I am indebted for the honor of a seat on this floor; if I could be influenced by any possible consideration to become instrumental in giving away, in violation of their known wishes, any portion of their interests in the public domain for the mere promotion of any railroad enterprise whatever, I should certainly feel a strong inclination to give this measure my most earnest and hearty support, for I am assured that its success would materially enhance the pecuniary prosperity of some of the most valued friends I have on earth, friends for whose accommodation I would be willing to make almost any sacrifice not involving my personal honor or fidelity as the trustee of an express trust. And that fact of itself would be sufficient to countervail almost any objection I might entertain to the passage of this bill, not inspired by an imperative and inexorable sense of public duty.

But, independent of the seductive influences of private friendship, to which I admit I am, perhaps, as susceptible as any of the gentlemen I see around me, the intrinsic merits of the measure itself are of such an extraordinary character as to commend it most strongly to the favorable consideration of the House, myself not excepted, notwithstanding my constituents, in whose behalf alone I am acting here, would not be benefited by its passage one particle more than they would be by a project to cultivate an orange grove on the bleakest summit on Greenland's icy mountains. [Laughter.]

Now, sir, as to those great trunk lines of railroads spanning the continent from ocean to ocean, I confess my mind has never been fully made up. It is true they may afford some trifling advantages to local traffic, and they may even, in time, become the channel of a more extended commerce; yet I have never been thoroughly sat-

isfied either of the necessity or expediency of projects promising such meager results to the great body of the people. But with regard to the transcendent merits of the gigantic enterprise contemplated in this bill I never entertained a shadow of doubt. [Laughter.] Years ago, when I first heard that there was, somewhere in the vast terra incognita, somewhere in the bleak region of the Northwest, a stream of water known to the nomadic inhabitants of the neighborhood as the River St. Croix, I became satisfied that the construction of a railroad from that raging torrent to some point in the civilized world was essential to the prosperity and happiness of the American people, if not absolutely indispensable to the perpetuity of the republican institutions on this continent. [Great laughter.] I had an abiding presentiment that some day or other the people of the whole country, irrespective of party affiliations, regardless of sectional prejudices, and "without distinction of race, color, or of previous condition of servitude." would rise in their majesty and demand an outlet for the enormous agricultural products of those vast and fertile pine barrens, drained in the rainy season by the surging waters of the turbid St. Croix. [Great laughter.]

These impressions, derived simply and solely "from the eternal fitness of things," were not only strengthened by the interesting and eloquent debate on this bill, to which I listened with so much pleasure the other day, but intensified, if possible, as I read over this morning the lively colloquy which took place on that occasion. The honorable gentleman from Minnesota, Mr. Wilson, who, I believe is managing this bill, in speaking of the character of the country through which this railroad is to pass, says this: "We want to have the timber brought to us as cheaply as possible. Now, if you tie up the lands in this way, so that no title can be obtained to them—for no settler will go on these lands, for he cannot make a living—you deprive us of the benefit of that timber." Now, sir, I would not have it, by any means, inferred from this that the gentleman from Minnesota would insinuate that the people in that section desire this timber merely for the purpose of fencing up their farms so that their stock may not wander off and die of starvation among the bleak hills of the St. Croix. [Laughter.] I read it for no such purpose, sir, and make no such comments on it myself. In corroboration of this statement from the gentleman from Minnesota, I find this testimony given by the honorable gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Washburn, who, speaking of the same lands, said: "They are generally sandy, barren lands. My friend from Gray Bay district, Mr. Sawyer, is perfectly familiar with this question, and he will bear me out in what I say, that these pine timberlands are not adapted to settlement." Now, sir, who, after listening to this emphatic and unequivocal testimony of these intelligent, competent, and able-bodied witnesses [laughter], who, that is not as incredulous as St. Thomas himself, will doubt for a moment that the Goshen of America is to be found in the sandy valleys and upon the pine-clad hills of the St. Croix? [Laughter.]

Who will have the hardihood to rise in his seat on this floor and assert that, excepting the pine bushes, the entire region would not produce vegetation enough in 10 years to fatten a grasshopper? [Great laughter.] Where is the patriot who is willing that his country shall incur the peril of remaining another day without the amplest railroad communication with such an inexhaustible mine of agricultural wealth? [Laughter.] Who will answer for the consequences of abandoning a great and warlike people in possession of a country like that to brood over the indifference and neglect of their Government? [Laughter.] How long would it be before they would take to studying a declaration of independence and hatching out the damnable heresy of secession? How long before the grim demon of civil discord would rear again his horrid head in our midst, "gnash loud his iron fangs, and shake his crest of bristling bayonets"? [Laughter.] Then, sir, think of the

long and painful process of reconstruction that must follow, with its concomitant amendments to the Constitution; the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth articles. The sixteenth, it is, of course, understood, is to be appropriated to those blushing damsels who are, day after day, beseeching us to let them vote, hold office, drink cocktails, ride astraddle, and do everything else the men do. [Roars of laughter.] But, above all, sir, let me implore you to reflect for a moment on the deplorable condition of our country in case of a foreign war; with all our ports blockaded; all our cities in a state of siege; the gaunt specter of famine brooding like a hungry vulture over our starving land; our commissary stores all exhausted, our famished armies withering away in the field, a helpless prey to the insatiate demon of hunger; our Navy rotting in the docks for want of provisions for our gallant seamen; and we without any railroad communication whatever with the prolific pine thickets of the St. Croix. [Great laughter.]

Ah, sir, I could well understand why my amiable friends from Pennsylvania [Mr. Meyers, Mr. Kelly, and Mr. O'Neill] should be so earnest in their support for this bill the other day, and if their honorable colleague, my friend, Mr. Randall, will pardon the remark, I will say I consider his criticism of their action on that occasion as not only unjust but ungenerous. I knew they were looking forward with far-reaching ken of enlightened statesmanship to the pitiable condition in which Philadelphia will be left unless speedily supplied with railroad connection, in some way, with this garden spot of the universe. [Laughter.] And, besides, sir, this discussion has relieved my mind of a mystery that has weighed upon it like an incubus for years. I could never understand before why there was so much excitement during the last Congress over the acquisition of Alta Vela. I could never understand why it was that some of our ablest statesmen and most distinguished patriots should entertain such dark forebodings of the untold calamities that were to befall our country unless we should take immediate possession of that desirable island. But I see now that they are laboring under the impression that the Government will need guano to manure the public lands of the St. Croix. [Great laughter.] Now, sir, I repeat, I had been satisfied for years that if there was any portion of the habitable globe absolutely in a suffering condition for a railroad, it was the teeming pine barrens of the St. Croix. [Laughter.] At what particular point on that noble stream such a road should be commenced I knew was immaterial, and so it seems to have been considered by the draftsman of this bill. It might be up at the spring or down at the foot log, or the water gate, or the fish dam, or anywhere along the bank, no matter where. [Laughter.] But in what direction it should run, or where it should terminate, were always, in my mind, questions of the most painful perplexity. I could conceive of no place on "God's green earth" in such straitened circumstances for railroad facilities as to be likely to desire or willing to accept such a connection. [Laughter.]

I know that neither Bayfield nor Superior City would have it, for they both indignantly spurned the munificence of the Government when coupled with such ignominious conditions, and let this very same land grant die on their hands years and years ago rather than submit to the degradation of direct communication by railroad with the piney woods of the St. Croix, and I know that what the enterprising inhabitants of those giant young cities refused to take would have few charms for others, whatever their necessities or their cupidity might be. [Laughter.] Hence, as I have said, sir, I was utterly at loss to determine where the terminus of this great and indispensable road should be, until I accidentally overheard some gentlemen the other day mention the name of "Duluth." [Great laughter.] "Duluth!" The word fell upon my ear with peculiar and indescribable charm, like the gentle murmur of a low fountain steal-

ing forth in the midst of roses, or the soft sweet accents of an angel's whisper in the bright, joyous dream of sleeping innocence. Duluth! 'Twas the name for which my soul had panted for years, as a hart panteth for the waterbrooks. [Renewed laughter.] But where was Duluth? Never, in my limited reading, had my vision been gladdened by seeing the celestial word in print. [Laughter.] And I felt a profound humiliation in my ignorance that its dulcet syllables had never before ravished my delighted ear. [Roars of laughter.] I was certain the draftsman of this bill had never heard of it, or it would have been designated as one of the termini of this road. I asked my friends about it, but they knew nothing of it. I rushed to my library and examined all the maps I could find. [Laughter.] I discovered in one of them a delicate hairlike line, diverging from the Mississippi at a place marked Prescott, which I supposed was intended to represent the River St. Croix, but I could nowhere find Duluth! Nevertheless, I was confident that it existed somewhere, and that its discovery would constitute the crowning glory of the present century, if not of all modern times. [Laughter.] I knew it was bound to exist in the very nature of things; that the symmetry and perfection of our planetary system would be incomplete without it. [Renewed laughter.]

That the elements of material nature would have long since resolved themselves back into original chaos if there had been such a hiatus in creation as would have resulted from leaving out Duluth. [Roars of laughter.] In fact, sir, I was overwhelmed with the conviction that Duluth not only existed somewhere but that, wherever it was, it was a great and glorious place. I was convinced that the greatest calamity that ever befell the benighted nations of the ancient world was in their having passed away without a knowledge of the actual existence of Duluth; that their fabled Atlantis, never seen save by the hallowed visions of inspired poesy, was, in fact, but another name for Duluth; that the golden orchard of Hesperides was but a poetical synonym for the beer gardens in the vicinity of Duluth. [Laughter.] I was certain that Herodotus had died a miserable death because, in all his travels and all his geographical researches, he had never heard of Duluth. [Laughter.] I knew that if the immortal spirit of Homer could look down from another heaven than that created by his own celestial genius, upon the long lines of pilgrims from every nation of the earth to the gushing fountain of poesy opened by the touch of his magic wand; if he could be permitted to behold the vast assemblage of grand and glorious productions of the lyric art called into being by his own inspired strain, he would weep tears of bitter anguish that, instead of lavishing all the stores of his mighty genius upon the fall of Ilium, it had not been his more blessed lot to crystallize in deathless song the rising glories of Duluth. Yet, sir, had it not been for this map kindly furnished me by the Legislature of Minnesota, I might have gone down to my obscure and humble grave in an agony of despair, because I could not nowhere find Duluth. [Renewed laughter.] Had such been my melancholy fate I have no doubt but that, with the last feeble pulsation of my breaking heart, with the last faint exhalation of my fleeting breath, I should have whispered, "Where is Duluth?" [Laughter.]

But, thanks to the beneficence of that band of ministering angels who have their bright abode in the far-off capital of Minnesota, just as the agony of my anxiety was about to culminate in the frenzy of despair, this blessed map was placed in my hands, and as I unfolded it a resplendent scene of ineffable glory opened before me, such as I imagined burst upon the enraptured vision of the wandering peri through the opening gates of paradise. [Renewed laughter.] There, for the first time, my enchanted eyes rested upon the ravishing word "Duluth." This map, sir, is intended, as it appears from its title, to illustrate the position of Duluth in the United States, but if the gentlemen will examine it, I think they will concur with me in the opinion that it is far too modest in its pretensions.

It not only illustrates the position of Duluth in the United States but exhibits its relations with all created things. It goes even further than this. It lifts the shadowy veil of futurity and affords us a view of the golden prospects of Duluth far along the dim vista of ages yet to come. If the gentleman will examine it, they will find Duluth not only in the center of the map but represented in a series of concentric circles 100 miles apart, and some of them as much as 4,000 miles in diameter, embracing alike in their tremendous sweep the fragrant savannas of the sunlit South and the eternal solitudes of snow that mantle the ice-bound North. [Laughter.] How the circles were produced is perhaps one of those primordial mysteries that the most skillful paleologists will never be able to explain. But the fact is, sir, Duluth is preeminently a central place, for I have been told by gentlemen who have been so reckless of their personal safety as to venture away in those awful regions where Duluth is supposed to be that it is so exactly in the center of the visible universe that the sky comes down at precisely the same distance all around it. [Roars of laughter.] I find by reference to this map that Duluth is situated somewhere near the western end of Lake Superior, but as there is no dot or other mark indicating its exact location, I am unable to say whether it is actually confined to any particular spot or whether "it is just lying around there loose." [Renewed laughter.]

I really cannot tell whether it is one of those ethereal creations of intellectual frostwork, more intangible than the rose-tinted cloud of a summer sunset; one of those airy exhalations of the speculator's brain, which I am told are ever fitting in the form of towns and cities along the lines of railroads built with Government subsidies, luring the unwary settler as the mirage of the desert lures the famishing traveler on and ever on, until it fades away on the darkening horizon, or whether it is a real, bona fide, substantial city, all staked off, with the lots marked with their owners' names, like that proud commercial metropolis recently discovered on the desirable shore of San Domingo. [Laughter.] But, however that may be, I am satisfied Duluth is there, or thereabouts, for I see it stated here on this map that it is exactly 3,990 miles from Liverpool [laughter], though I have no doubt, for the sake of convenience, it may be moved back 10 miles so as to make the distance an even 4,000. [Renewed laughter.] Then, sir, there is the climate of Duluth, unquestionably the most salubrious and delightful to be found anywhere on the Lord's earth. Now, I have always been under the impression, as I presume other gentlemen have, that, in the region around Lake Superior, it was cold enough for at least 9 months in the year to freeze the smokestack off a locomotive. [Great laughter.] But I see it represented on this map that Duluth is situated just exactly half way between the latitudes of Paris and Venice, so that gentlemen who have inhaled the exhilarating airs of the one or basked in the golden sunshine of the other must see at a glance that Duluth must be a place of untold delights [laughter], a terrestrial paradise fanned by the balmy zephyrs of an eternal spring, clothed with gorgeous sheen of everblooming flowers, and vocal with the silver melody of Nature's choicest songsters. [Laughter.] In fact, sir, since I have seen this map I have no doubt that Byron was vainly endeavoring to convey some faint conceptions of the delicious charms of Duluth when his poetic soul gushed forth in the rippling strains of that beautiful rhapsody—

"Know ye the land of the cedar and pine,  
Where the flowers ever blossom, the beams ever shine;  
Where the light wings of zephyr, oppressed with perfume  
Wax faint o'er the garden of gull in her bloom;  
Where the citron and olive are fairest of fruit—  
And the voice of the nightingale never is mute;  
Where the tints of the earth and the hues of the sky,  
In color though varied, in beauty may die?"

264988—19555

As to the commercial resources of Duluth, sir, they are simply illimitable and inexhaustible, as is shown by this map. I see it stated here that there is a vast scope of territory, embracing an area of over 2,000,000 square miles, rich in every element of material wealth and commercial prosperity, all tributary to Duluth. Look at it, sir [pointing to the map]. Here are inexhaustible mines of gold, immeasurable veins of silver, impenetrable depths of boundless forest, vast coal mines, wide extended plains of richest pasturage—all, all embraced in this vast territory, which must in the very nature of things empty the untold treasures of its commerce into the lap of Duluth. [Laughter.] Look at it, sir [pointing to the map]. Do you not see these broad brown lines drawn around this immense territory, that the enterprising inhabitants of Duluth intend some day to enclose it all in one vast corral, so that its commerce will be bound to go there whether it would or not? [Great laughter.] And here, sir [still pointing to the map], I find, within a convenient distance, the Piegan Indians, which of all the many accessories to the glory of Duluth I consider by far the most inestimable. For, sir, I have been told that when smallpox breaks out among the women and children of that famous tribe, as it sometimes does, they afford the finest subjects in the world for strategical experiments of any enterprising military hero who desires to improve himself in the noble art of war [laughter], especially for any lieutenant general whose—

“Trenchant blade, Toledo trusty,  
For want of fighting has grown rusty,  
And eats into itself for lack  
Of somebody to hew and hack.”

Sir, the great conflict now raging in the Old World has presented a phenomenon in military science unprecedented in the annals of mankind, a phenomenon that has reversed all the tradition of the past as it has disappointed all expectations of the present. A great and warlike people, renowned alike for their skill and valor, have been swept away before the advance of an inferior foe, like the autumn stubble before a hurricane of fire. For aught I know the new flash of the electric fire that shimmers along the ocean cable may tell us that Paris, with every fiber quivering with the agony of impotent despair, writhes beneath the conquering heel of her cursed invader. Ere another moon shall wax and wane the brightest star in the galaxy of nations may fall from the zenith of her glory, never to rise again. Ere the modest violet of early spring shall open her beauteous eyes, the genius of civilization may chant the unavailing requiem of the proudest nationality the world has ever seen, as she scatters her withered and tear-moistened lilies o'er the bloody tomb of butchered France. But sir, I wish to ask you if you candidly believe that the Dutch would overrun the French in that kind of style if General Sheridan had not gone over there and told King William and Von Moltke how he managed to whip the Piegan Indians?

[Here the hammer fell.]

[Many cries, “Go on!” “Go on!”]

The SPEAKER. Is there any objection to the gentleman from Kentucky continuing his remarks? The Chair hears none. The gentleman will proceed.

Mr. KNORR. I was about remarking, sir, upon these vast wheat fields represented on this map in the immediate neighborhood of the buffaloes and the Piegans, and was about to say that the idea of there being these immense wheat fields in the very heart of a wilderness hundreds and hundreds of miles beyond the utmost verge of civilization may appear to some gentlemen rather incongruous—as rather too great a strain on the “blankets” of veracity. But, to my mind, there is no difficulty in the matter whatever. The phe-

nomenon is very easily accounted for. It is evident, sir, that the Piegans sowed that wheat there and plowed it with buffalo bulls. [Great laughter.]

Now, sir, this fortunate combination of buffaloes and Piegans, considering their relative positions to each other and to Duluth, as they are arranged on the map, satisfies me that Duluth is destined to be the beef market of the world. Here you will observe [pointing to the map] are the buffaloes, directly between the Piegans and Duluth; and here, right on the road to Duluth, are the Creeks. Now, sir, when the buffaloes are sufficiently fat from grazing on these immense wheat fields, you see it will be the easiest thing in the world for the Piegans to drive them on down, stay all night with their friends the Creeks, and go into Duluth in the morning. I think I see them now, sir, a vast herd of buffaloes, with their heads down, their eyes glaring, their nostrils dilated, their tongues out, and their tails curled over their backs, tearing along toward Duluth, with about a thousand Piegans on their grass-bellied ponies yelling at their heels. [Great laughter.] On they come! As they sweep past the Creeks they join in the chase, and away they all go, yelling, bellowing, ripping along amid clouds of dust, until the last buffalo is safely penned in the stockyards of Duluth. [Shouts of laughter.] Sir, I might stand here for hours and expatiate upon the gorgeous prospects of Duluth as depicted upon this map. But human life is too short and the time of this House far too valuable to allow me to linger longer upon the delightful theme. [Laughter.] I think every gentleman on this floor is as well satisfied as I am that Duluth is destined to become the commercial metropolis of the universe and that this road should be built at once. I am fully persuaded that no patriotic representative of the American people who has a proper appreciation of the associated glories of Duluth and the St. Croix will hesitate a moment to say that every able-bodied female in the land between the ages of 18 and 45 who is in favor of woman's rights should be drafted and set to work on this great work without delay. [Roars of laughter.]

Nevertheless, sir, it grieves my very soul to be compelled to say that I cannot vote for the grant of lands provided for in this bill. Ah, sir, you can have no conception of the poignancy of my anguish that I am deprived of the blessed privilege. [Laughter.] There are two insuperable obstacles in the way. In the first place, my constituents, for whom I am acting here, have no more interest in this road than they have in the great question of culinary taste, now perhaps agitating the public mind of Dominica, as to whether the illustrious commissioners who recently left the Capital for that free and enlightened republic would be better fricasseed, boiled, or roasted [great laughter]; and in the second place, these lands, which I am asked to give away, alas, are not mine to bestow. My relation to them is simply that of trustee to an express trust. And shall I ever betray that trust? Never, sir. Rather perish Duluth. [Shouts of laughter.] Perish the paragon of cities. Rather let the freezing cyclones of the bleak Northwest bury it forever beneath the eddying sands of the St. Croix. [Great laughter.]