

Chapter 126 - Congress Finally Approves A Funding Bill Without A Ban On Slavery

Time: March 1, 1847

The Senate Opposes The House Bill Again And Passes Its Own Option

With the final session of the 29th Congress set to adjourn on March 3, 1847, both chambers feel a sense of urgency about funding the Mexican War.

The House has already passed a bill, but with the amendment from Preston King prohibiting any future expansion of slavery, in the west or in other lands acquired by the United States. This prohibition, even more drastic than that from Wilmot, is considered too divisive in the Senate, and it goes down to defeat on March 1 with 21 ayes and 32 nays.

Senator Thomas Hart Benton then proposes a \$3 Million Appropriations Bill, without the King amendment. It passes 29-23 on March 1, 1847, with the only Democrat voting “no” being Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania, a strong opponent of slavery. The only Whig “yes” belongs to Henry Johnson of Louisiana, who cast the decisive vote earlier to annex Texas.

Senate Vote On Appropriation Bill -- Without Wilmot (March 1, 1847)

Region	Democrats Yes - No	Whigs Yes - No	Other Yes - No	Total Yes - No
Northeast	6 - 1	0 - 8	0 - 3	6 - 11
Northwest	5 - 0	0 - 2		5 - 2
Border	2 - 0	0 - 5		2 - 5
Southeast	3 - 0	0 - 4	1 - 0	4 - 4
Southwest	10 - 0	1 - 1	1 - 0	12 - 1
Total	26 - 0	1 - 20	2 - 3	29 - 23
Not Voting	(2)	(1)		(3)

Vote View/Library of Congress Record

Time: March 3, 1847

The House Passes The Appropriation Bill Without The Wilmot Proviso



Stephen Douglas (1813-1861)

With time running out, the Senate bill is back in the House for reconciliation, where those opposing the spread of slavery make one final attempt to add back the King Amendment. But this time it goes down to defeat by a narrow spread of 97 ayes to 102 nays.

This funding battle has lasted since August 8, 1846, a full nine months, and many House members now seem to conclude they have been operating in a dark and dangerous place far too long.

American soldiers are in the field in Mexico; they deserve to be properly funded and supported; the time has come to push on and win the war. Also one war seems enough for the moment -- without adding the visible threats of disunion that have surfaced over the Wilmot and King injunctions. Better to step back from this cliff for now, and possibly return to it later.

This is the theme promoted by the indefatigable Illinois congressman, Stephen Douglas, who lobbies hard to convince Northern Democrats to delay the battle over the spread of slavery until the various territories have been established, settlers have arrived and debated their state constitutions, and requests for admission are filed with congress.

This line of reasoning mirrors the plea from Calhoun that the people in each new state should determine their own form of government. As a principle it will soon become known as “popular sovereignty,” a new option to Wilmot/King and the 34’30” compromise line and one that postpones North-South violence until Kansas applies for statehood in 1856.

The efforts by Douglas and other party leaders pay off when the final bill passes by a comfortable 115-82 margin in the House on March 3, 1847.

House Vote On Appropriation Bill -- Without A Slavery Ban

Region	Democrats Yes - No	Whigs Yes - No	American Yes - No	Total Yes - No
Northeast	31 - 7	0 - 40	1 - 3	32 - 50
Northwest	22 - 3	0 - 10		22 - 13
Border	10 - 0	0 - 8		10 - 8
Southeast	28 - 0	0 - 5		28 - 5
Southwest	22 - 0	1 - 6		23 - 6
Total	113 - 10	1 - 69	1 - 3	115 - 82
Not Voting	(20)	(9)	(1)	(30)

Vote View/Library of Congress Records

Analysis of the final outcome on the \$3 Million Bill shows a remarkable shift among the Democrats in the seven months since the Wilmot Proviso passed the House on August 8, 1846. At that time, 52 Democrats voted in favor of the bill limiting the spread of slavery; by March 1847, only 10 of them are left! This is an early testament to Stephen Douglas' powers of persuasion

Shift In Democrat Votes For The War Appropriations Bill

Bill Limiting Spread Of Slavery	Aug 8, 1846	Mar 3, 1847	Change
# Democrats Voting Aye	52	10	(42)
# Democrats Voting Nay	55	113	+58

The ten hold-outs are all Northern Democrats, led by David Wilmot, and joined by others including Preston King, Jacob Brinkerhoff and Hannibal Hamlin.

The Ten Hold-Out Northern Democrats

Name	State
Jacob Brinkerhoff	Ohio
John Campbell	Pa
Martin Grover	New York
Hannibal Hamlin	Maine
Joseph Hoge	Illinois
Preston King	New York
Mace Moulton	New Hampshire
John Wentworth	Illinois
Horace Wheaton	New York
David Wilmot	Pennsylvania
Bradford Wood	New York

Meanwhile, the House Whigs remain solidly against the appropriation bill and the war itself.

Sidebar: Recap Of The Key Votes On The Wilmot Proviso						
Chamber	Date	Form Of Bill	Yes	No	(NV)	Resolution
House	August 8, 1846	\$2MM + Wilmot	85	80	(56)	Senate Tables
House	February 15, 1847	\$3MM + King	115	106	(6)	House Passes
Senate	March 1, 1847	\$3MM + King	21	32	(3)	Senate Opposes
Senate	March 1, 1847	\$3MM w/o Proviso	29	23	(3)	Senate Passes
House	March 3, 1847	\$3MM + Wilmot	97	102	(28)	House Opposes
House	March 3, 1847	\$3MM w/o Proviso	115	82	(30)	House Passes