

William Seward's April Fool's Day Memo

Some thoughts for the President's consideration

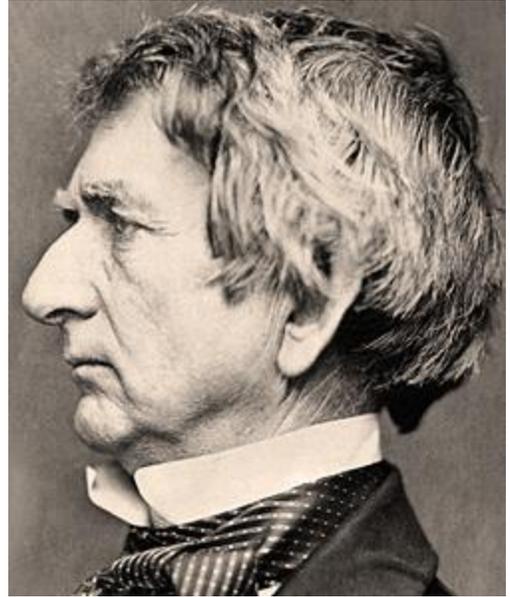
April 1. 1861.

1st. We are at the end of a month's administration and yet without a policy either domestic or foreign.

2d This, however, is not culpable, and it has been unavoidable. The presence of the Senate, with the need to meet applications for patronage have prevented attention to other and more grave matters.

3d. But further delay to adopt and prosecute our policies for both domestic and foreign affairs would not only bring scandal on the Administration, but danger upon the country....

...The policy---at home. I am aware that my views are singular, and perhaps not sufficiently explained. My system is built upon this idea as a ruling one, namely that we must Change the question before the Public from one upon Slavery, or about Slavery for a question upon Union or Disunion. In other words, from what would be regarded as a Party question to one of Patriotism or Union...



For Foreign Nations.

I would demand explanations from Spain and France, categorically, at once [regarding the occupation of Santo Domingo]. I would seek explanations from Great Britain and Russia, and send agents into Canada, Mexico and Central America, to rouse a vigorous continental spirit of independence on this continent against European intervention. And if satisfactory explanations are not received from Spain and France,

--Would convene Congress and declare war against them

But whatever policy we adopt, there must be an energetic prosecution of it. For this purpose it must be somebody's business to pursue and direct it incessantly. Either the President must do it himself, and be all the while active in it; or Devolve it on some member of his Cabinet. Once adopted, debates on it must end, and all agree and abide. It is not in my especial province. But I neither seek to evade nor assume responsibility.

For Lincoln's response and other details, see Letter to William Seward, April 1, 1861, *Lincoln's Writings: The Multi-Media Edition*, <http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/lincoln/letter-to-william-seward-april-1-1861/>