Philander Chase Knox Biography

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Biography

The American statesman Philander Chase Knox (1853-1921) served as U.S. attorney general, senator, and secretary of state.

Philander Knox was born on May 6, 1853, at Brownsville, Pa. He graduated from Mount Union College in Ohio in 1872, and in 1878 he formed a successful law practice in Pittsburgh, Pa. In 1901 Knox drew up the papers transferring the Carnegie Steel Company to J. P. Morgan, thus creating America's first billion-dollar corporation, the United States Steel Company.

Knox joined President William McKinley's cabinet as attorney general in 1901, and he continued to serve under President Theodore Roosevelt after McKinley's assassination. Despite his close ties to business interests, Knox vigorously prosecuted trusts under the almost-forgotten Sherman Antitrust Law and took actions against railroads to prevent rate discrimination and rebates. His most notable victory was against the Northern Securities Company, formed by J. P. Morgan and James J. Hill to merge the competing Northern Pacific and Great Northern railroads. Knox personally argued the case before the Supreme Court, which sustained the government's position. Knox also influenced new antitrust legislation, helped draft the laws that created the Department of Commerce and Labor, and gave the Interstate Commerce Commission effective control of railroad rates.

In June 1904 Knox was appointed to the U.S. Senate from Pennsylvania and served with distinction until President William Howard Taft appointed him secretary of state in 1909. As secretary, Knox reorganized and strengthened the State Department and the Foreign Service. He encouraged American overseas investments (his policy of "dollar diplomacy") to promote the objectives of American political diplomacy, although he was not too successful.

In 1913 Knox resumed his law practice in Pittsburgh. In 1916 he was elected to the Senate, where he fought against United States participation in the League of Nations and ratification of the Treaty of Versailles. Instead, Knox favored a congressional resolution repealing the declarations of war against Germany and Austria. President Woodrow Wilson vetoed this, but President Warren Harding signed it in 1921. On Oct. 12, 1921, Knox died.