

TO PROVIDE A CIVIL GOVERNMENT FOR THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 17, 1936.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. DEMPSEY, from the Committee on Insular Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany H. R. 12298]

The Committee on Insular Affairs, having had under consideration H. R. 12298, a bill to provide a civil government for the Virgin Islands of the United States, favorably report the same and recommend that it do pass.

The Governor of the Virgin Islands, witnesses from the Interior Department, and official delegates from the Colonial Council of the Virgin Islands were given the opportunity of presenting such testimony as they desired on the question of a civil government for the Virgin Islands. Their testimony was recorded and appears in the hearings. The committee also met in executive session several times for the purpose of discussing the provisions of the bill. Every phase of the proposed legislation was covered thoroughly.

An intense study was made of two bills, H. R. 11751 and H. R. 12171, prepared by the Interior Department and by an official committee in the Virgin Islands, respectively. Open hearings were held in the Virgin Islands during the preparation of the draft that was presented by their official delegates to the committee. The committee also considered the suggestions for changes made both by the Interior Department and by the Virgin Islands delegation. An agreement was reached in executive session of the Insular Affairs Committee and the above numbered bill favorably reported.

The following letter from the Secretary of the Interior accompanied the original draft of H. R. 11751 and explains the necessity for permanent legislation to replace the temporary act of March 3, 1917, under which the Virgin Islands are now being administered.

INTERIOR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, March 9, 1936.

Hon. LEO KOCIALKOWSKI,
Chairman, Committee on Insular Affairs,
House of Representatives.

MY DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: There are transmitted herewith copies of a draft of bill to provide a civil government for the Virgin Islands of the United States.

As you are aware, the Virgin Islands have been governed since their purchase by the United States of America in 1917 under the act of Congress of March 3, 1917, "An act to provide a temporary government for the West Indian Islands acquired by the United States from Denmark * * *". Many efforts have been made to secure the enactment of a permanent government act, but so far without success.

There is an obvious need for clarification of the powers and duties of the various branches of the government of the Virgin Islands. The attached bill, it is believed, will effect that clarification. Also, its provisions would rectify many of the illiberal provisions of existing law by granting universal suffrage, eliminating appointment by the Executive of members of the local legislative bodies, equalizing representation, limiting the veto power of the Governor to a suspensive veto, granting the local legislatures power over the appointment of officers of the local governments, removing existing restrictions on the power of the local governments to alter existing taxation laws, and, in general, by establishing a democratic form of government on familiar, American lines and by granting wide local autonomy.

The local legislatures of the Virgin Islands have appointed committees to study and make recommendation concerning the provisions of a permanent government act for the Virgin Islands. These committees have prepared a draft of bill which is similar in many respects to the attached bill. The local legislatures intend to appoint representatives to appear before your committee if hearings are held on it. The Department of the Interior will be glad to send its representatives to present its views at such hearings.

This bill has been transmitted to the Acting Director of the Bureau of the Budget, and he has advised that it is not in conflict with the policy of the President.

Sincerely yours,

HAROLD L. ICKES,
Secretary of the Interior.