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SENATE

{ REPORT
No. 1315

AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATION FOR VIRGIN ISLANDS HIGHWAYS

JANUARY 24, 1927.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. BINGHAM, from the Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany S. 4933]

The Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions, to whom was referred the bill (S. 4933) authorizing an appropriation for public highways in the island of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, having carefully considered the same, report favorably thereon, with certain amendments, and recommend that the bill do pass as amended.

This bill, authorizing an appropriation of \$100,000 to enable the Secretary of Agriculture to construct, reconstruct, and maintain public highways as above indicated, is designed to fill several long-felt needs, especially in the island of St. Thomas. Many of the natives complain of their inability to purchase lands suitable for agriculture except upon terms they can not well consider. As a general rule they are permitted to use such land as they wish, paying sometimes as high as \$1 a month for land assessed at \$10 an acre. Only too frequently the owners of the property become dissatisfied with the tenants who are then dispossessed without formality after having grown fruit trees or other crops which they then have to abandon. There is a strong feeling on the part of the poorer natives that this land is held for sale at exorbitant prices to prospective visitors and that this occasions the harsh treatment accorded to them by the owners. There is no disposition on the part of the council of St. Thomas in particular to assist these poor farmers, since most of the council members are landowners. This bill is designed to help cure those ills.

The roads on St. Thomas in particular need improvement and extension. Large stretches of them are almost impassable save for pedestrians. Small agricultural districts, especially on the fertile north side, should be opened, to enable those desiring to develop small farms or orchards to do so and to enable them to bring their crops

to market. The best fruit on the island is grown in that portion so difficult of access.

Furthermore, St. Thomas is very attractive to tourists, though many of its scenic splendors are practically inaccessible. Roadbeds there are in most places, but they are in such shape as to make them impassible for anything less sure footed than donkeys. Possibly economic prosperity for St. Thomas lies largely in an increased tourist trade. The Governor of the Virgin Islands in his last annual report so asserted. He earnestly recommended an appropriation for special road construction.

The building and maintenance of public roads in the Virgin Islands would do much toward relieving the present unemployment in St. Thomas. Now that the water supply system is completed in St. Thomas there is considerable unemployment of which the local government must take, and is taking, notice. Thus the extension of the road system in St. Thomas will furnish employment to many in need of work.

In St. Thomas there are about 16 or 17 miles of roads demanding reconstruction. In most places there is already a roadbed, but torrential rains and consequent washouts during many years have rendered these roads quite beyond the capacity of the local government to rebuild or to repair.

The passage of this bill should encourage the large landholders of St. Thomas to sell their lands at reasonable prices to deserving small farmers; encourage agriculture in the outlying districts; render the islands' beauties and beaches readily accessible to tourists; increase trade and revenues; keep down unemployment and increase the tendency of the natives to be self-respecting and self-supporting. The incentive offered them in the authorization of appropriations for the construction of roads as outlined in S. 4933 should prove beneficial for the Virgin Islands.

