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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT URGES REPRESENTATION FOR VIRGIN ISLANDS AND GUAM

Advancing development in the Virgin Islands and Guam, two of America's off-shore areas, justifies giving them elected nonvoting representation in Congress, Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton told Congress in a report today.

The Department recognizes, however, that the question of representation in Congress is peculiarly a matter on which the Congress should make the determination, Secretary Seaton said.

The Virgin Islands, an island group in the Caribbean east of Puerto Rico having an area of 133 square miles and an estimated population of 30,000, was acquired from Denmark by purchase in 1917. In recent years the mild climate and pleasant living conditions of the islands have won for them increasing favor as a tourist resort, and as a home for retired "continentals". This growth in tourism and residential development has given a strong upward impetus to the islands' economy.

Guam, the largest of the Mariana Islands, located in the western Pacific almost due west of Hawaii, became American territory in 1898 as a result of the war with Spain. Its area is 209 square miles, and its permanent population is about 38,000. It was seized early in World War II and held by the Japanese until near the end of the war, but throughout the Japanese occupation the Guamanians gave proof of their loyalty to America. Its strategic location has resulted in its use as a major American defense base in the Pacific since 1945. The large concentration of American forces there in recent years has materially aided the economy.

Both the Virgin Islands and Guam have the status of organized, but unincorporated, territories of the United States. The term "unincorporated" means that they have not been brought within the full purview of every provision of the United States Constitution. However, each is governed under an organic act passed by Congress, with a bill of rights, an elected legislature, and a governor appointed by the President. Residents of both territories are citizens of the United States.



The Interior Department report, in commenting on the various pending bills, recommended against using the title "Delegate" for the proposed Guam and Virgin Islands representatives. That title has heretofore been restricted to representatives from incorporated territories, such as Alaska and Hawaii were recently, which were considered to be candidates for statehood. Persons representing unincorporated areas in Congress have always in the past carried the title of "Resident Commissioner".

The report also questioned the proposal, contained in some of the pending bills, that the new representatives have four-year terms, as contrasted with the two-year terms held by Congressmen.

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