

October 5, 1974

Office of the White House Press Secretary

NOTICE TO THE PRESS

The President has signed H. R. 11559 -- submerged lands: Guam, Virgin Islands, and American Samoa -- which transfers title to certain submerged lands and uplands from the Federal Government to the jurisdiction of the territorial governments of Guam, the Virgin Islands, and American Samoa.

Under provisions of a 1963 Act, the Secretary of the Interior was given limited authority to convey title to certain submerged lands to the governments of Guam, the Virgin Islands, and American Samoa. However, this authority has seen scant use and for the most part the submerged lands of these territories are presently owned by the Federal Government and administered by Interior.

H. R. 11559 will convey to the governments of Guam, the Virgin Islands and American Samoa title to the submerged lands beneath the three-mile territorial sea adjacent to their respective coastlines. The conveyance will be subject (a) to valid existing rights and (b) to eleven specific exemptions which taken together mean that little more than bare title to the submerged lands plus coral, sand, and gravel will initially pass to the territories. However, most of the conveyance exemptions will be overridden by the Secretary with the concurrence of the Federal agency having jurisdiction over the area after providing the Congressional Interior Committees with 60-days notice of the proposed conveyance action.

H. R. 11559 also will transfer income and trespass action rights associated with the conveyed submerged lands to the local government under whose jurisdiction the land will be placed. The estimated annual income to all three territories from sales of resources in the submerged lands will be only about \$300,000 according to Interior staff.

The enrolled bill will fully protect the United States' interests in national defense, commerce navigation, flood control, production of power, and international affairs in each of the three territories. Section 2 of the bill specifically preserves the right of the President to establish naval defensive sea areas and naval airspace reservations around and over the islands of Guam, the Virgin Islands, and American Samoa when deemed necessary for national defense.

Finally, the enrolled bill will convey full title to the Virgin Islands government of Federal properties which were placed under its control by the 1937 Virgin Islands Organic Act, if such properties are not otherwise reserved by the Secretary of the Interior within 120-days after enactment; however, this will not be applicable to National Park Service properties.

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