

**STATEMENT  
OF  
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DIRECTOR  
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**BEFORE THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

**REGARDING  
H.R. 3940 ASSISTANCE FOR POLITICAL STATUS EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

**May 19, 2010**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, thank you for the opportunity today to discuss H.R. 3940, which would authorize technical assistance funding for political status education programs.

Subsection (a) of section 601 of Public Law 96-597 created a technical assistance program that authorizes the Secretary of the Interior –

to extend to the governments of American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, the Virgin Islands, and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands technical assistance on subjects within the responsibility of the respective territorial governments.

This technical assistance program, administered by the Office of Insular Affairs in the Department of the Interior, has provided technical assistance funds to the territories for a wide range of purposes.

Section 2 of H.R. 3940 would add a new section before the language above that would authorize, not require, the Secretary of the Interior to extend assistance to American Samoa, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands for grants, research, planning assistance, studies, and agreements with Federal agencies to facilitate public education programs regarding political status options.

The Department of the Interior has no objection to the enactment of H.R. 3940. However, we note that any assistance provided under this authorization would have to compete with other priority needs. We also note that everything section 2 would authorize can be accomplished under the language already contained in subsection (a) of section 601 of Public Law 96- 597 without the enactment of additional legislation.

When the political status of a territory is under consideration, education of the public regarding the options available to the people is of utmost importance. Only an educated

populace can make informed decisions about its future. The Department of the Interior would not object to funding political status education on two conditions:

- the education on options is factual, and
- all points of view receive equal opportunity for hearing.

The Department would not award funding to extol one point of view that unfairly excludes other points of view. The hallmark considerations for a public education program on political status are facts and fairness.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on H.R. 3940. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.