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Petition of inhabitants of Wisconsin, to separate the offices of Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Wisconsin; and that the people have leave to elect the Governor, and that the Superintendent reside among the Indians

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WISCONSIN.

PETITION

OF

INHABITANTS OF WISCONSIN,

TO

Separate the offices of Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Wisconsin; and that the people have leave to elect the Governor, and that the Superintendent reside among the Indians.

FEBRUARY 6, 1840.

Referred to the Committee on the Territories.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled :

The undersigned, citizens of the Territory of Wisconsin,

RESPECTFULLY REPRESENT :

That they occupy a portion of the territory northwest of the river Ohio, which was ceded to the United States by Virginia and other States, and being within the limits defined in the treaty of peace of 1784, its freedom and independence were acknowledged equally with other portions of the United States. A government was provided for it by the ordinance of Congress of 1787. The officers of that government were *to be appointed by the Congress*, which at that period governed the United States; and although that instrument secured many of the principles of civil liberty to the inhabitants, by uniting the executive and judicial branches to form the legislative, it established a despotism instead of a free government.

After the Government of the United States was changed, in 1787, the appointing power was also changed, by the act of 1789, from the whole Congress to the President and Senate, by whom the Governor is now appointed, without the concurrence of the citizens of this Territory, or the concurrence of the representatives of the citizens of the United States. He is the executive of an Executive, alike independent of the governed and of the appointing power. The President is the sole judge whether he performs his duties correctly and satisfactorily to the people; *the people themselves* may not be consulted either upon his appointment or removal. Is the Territorial government to be administered for their benefit or that of the President?

At the period when there were but few citizens of the States inhabitants of the territory northwest of the Ohio, when the country was filled with savages and with the subjects of a power which held undisputed dominion over the greatest part of it, it was doubtless wise to reserve to the United States the perfect control over the Territorial government. But its situation is now widely different. There is no interest or power here which is opposed to that of the United States; its inhabitants are chiefly American citizens; and, being American citizens, they possess the irrepressible desire *to live under a free government.*

We appeal to those who are themselves in the high enjoyment of liberty—to the members of the Congress of the United States—to look at us in our state of colonial servitude, and contrast it with their own. May not the thirty thousand “free inhabitants” of Wisconsin be trusted by a republican government with the choice of their own Governor—an officer who is to serve them as their fellow-citizen, and not to rule them as a King?

When the office of Governor was first created for the Northwestern Territory, it was distinct from that of superintendent of Indian affairs, and his salary was fixed at one thousand dollars. They were in the year 1800 united by law, for the purpose, it is supposed, of increasing the salary of the Governor. In consequence of this union, persons have generally been selected for this office on account of their reputation for military talents, rather than their civil qualifications; and it is not improbable that the desire to increase that reputation, or a love of war rather than peace, may have occasioned difficulties on the frontier which would not otherwise have occurred.

We do, therefore, respectfully pray that these offices may be separated by law, and that the office of superintendent of Indian affairs for Wisconsin may be established at some place convenient to the Indians and to the Indian traders.

And we do also respectfully pray that the qualified electors of Wisconsin may be authorized to elect the Governor of the Territory annually; and that he be required to reside or keep his executive office at the seat of government of the Territory.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.