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fairness in the Pacific

Although long overdue, the U.S. House passage of a bill to seat non-voting Delegates to Congress from Guam and the Virgin Islands is worthy of praise.

It is, first of all, only a basic act of fairness for those living under the American flag to be heard in their own words in Washington.

As Representative Spark Matsunaga said of the Guamanians and Virgin Islanders in the final debate before the 232-104 vote House passage:

"As Americans, they do assert that their cherished American heritage of 'consent of the governed' demands some measure of representation in the National Legislature . . ."

AND IN FOLLOWING remarks, Representative Patsy Mink added:

"The people of Guam and the Virgin Islands, like the people of Hawaii and Alaska before Statehood, are every bit as American as you and I. Their citizens are Americans by birthright. Any one of them could be elected President of the United States."

But all of the benefits will hardly be for the islanders. As Matsunaga pointed out, Congress will gain by having among its official membership "experts fully cognizant of territorial problems and their nuances."

THIS IS, of course, another way-step in extending the democratic

process in remaining U.S. territories:

In 1969, both Guam and the Virgin Islands were granted the right to elect their own governors. Later they may vote for President, and eventually Guam, either alone or with other islands in the Marianas, may make its case for Statehood.

American Samoa, which has its own elected but unofficial representative in Washington, should follow at a pace of its own choosing.

As a U.N. mandate with its own desires for special "free association" status, the Trust Territory in Micronesia is in the process of negotiating with Washington.

We are reminded that any agreement will likely need full congressional approval—and as the Guam debate in the House showed colonialist attitudes still die hard with some old and powerful members.

NOW WITH SENATE passage virtually assured, Representatives Matsunaga and Mink deserve the praise both received from colleagues for their efforts on the Guam-Virgin Island bill. Hawaii has a special role to play in this regard, and our congressional delegation generally has performed it well.

But the job continues as the entire Pacific Island area moves towards new relationships not yet certain but hopefully far from the old colonialist patterns or any form of new paternalism.