

US Ambassador Bill McCormick

By Bernadette Cooney

With Foreign Minister, Winston Peters lauding the praises of a "new level of political relationship" between New Zealand and the United States, *Auckland Today* speaks with US ambassador to NZ, William McCormick, to see if we have turned a corner in our often times aloof relationship with the super power nation.

New Zealand's relationship with the United States may at times be perceived to be less than rock solid, given our exposure to ever increasing global anti-Americanism and even splits at home between politicians about our level of allied military involvement in such political hotspots as Afghanistan, Iraq, or Timor. But despite the contention, our allegiance is still strong and our support appreciated, says Wellington based United States ambassador 68-year-old William McCormick.

The former US Army military policeman and Harvard School of Business graduate has served as U.S. ambassador to New Zealand since 2005, after a successful business career which still sees him serve as board chairman of the McCormick & Schmick's chain of seafood restaurants, boasting 76 locations in 30 states.

His civic and charitable involvement throughout his time has been extensive, indicative of his patient and philanthropic attitude.

Last year's APEC meeting in Sydney and the US/NZ Partnership Forum held in Auckland in September highlighted common bonds between our two nations and an overwhelming sense of co-operation he says.

"We have an excellent relationship and the opening of dialogue between our two nations can only be beneficial. We have so many common areas of concern whether that be global warming, terrorism, avian flu or the preservation of Pacific fish stocks; together we have a strong history of working together to find solutions."

Although on the face of it the 21 leader Asia-Pacific meeting didn't appear to achieve a lot so far as strengthening trade or military ties between the two countries, McCormick considered it a victory for democracy nonetheless.

"You can't always walk out of these events saying 'these are the tangible results'; it takes time to really reflect and mature because anytime there is greater understanding, greater relationship and greater knowledge of one another and the priorities of each country, you do have a

better arena for future dialogue and understanding," William says.

In his address to the US/NZ Partnership Forum, which saw New Zealand Government Ministers meet with senior US officials, McCormick said sharing core values did not mean we would always agree on everything.

"We can continue to have differences of opinion on those subjects but still remain firm friends."

Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Christopher Hill reiterated his appreciation over our support for efforts to address nuclear concerns with North Korea and build a greater sense of community through ASEAN, APEC and the Pacific Islands Forum.

"There is no question that the United States has a good partner in New Zealand and it is widely recognised and appreciated. New Zealand makes valuable contributions to peace, stability and economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region," says Hill.

Working together on counterterrorism and non-proliferation, despite our anti-nuclear stance is considered a plus, Hill told forum attendees.

"One of the problems with North Korea is that they have turned the nuclear programme into a

kind of identity issue, and New Zealand has taken another path, and so perhaps New Zealand will be a very good partner in convincing the North Koreans to take the New Zealand path."

The issue of a free trade agreement between NZ and the U.S. wasn't ruled out either but no timeframe was given. The Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) would do much to deepen bilateral economic relations he says. "I think as we go further we are going to be able to make progress and to keep an eye on what we all want to see eventually, which is, at some point, a free trade agreement."

A celebration of 50 years co-operation between American and New Zealand scientists on Antarctica was also marked last year, an important milestone signalling an enduring friendship, McCormick says.

McCormick's future in the ambassador post hinges on the outcome of the American general election in November 2008. Depending on who governs, his post may become open for selection, but regardless, his ambassador stint in New Zealand will remain a fond memory for the gentle diplomat. "I drive the official car with the American flag on one fender and the All Blacks flag on the other."

