HELEN CLARK GOES TO WASHINGTON

Spring sees US warming to New Zealand

AUDREY YOUNG
in Washington

PM's lunch with President marks thaw as both nations agree to concentrate on what they agree on, not their differences

It has just turned spring in Washington DC and President George W. Bush has agreed to a big thaw towards New Zealand.

While domestic relations between the President and Congress are deteriorating chillingly, Helen Clark's scheduled visit to the White House early this morning marks a warming in a small, but noticed, international relationship.

The two-hour meeting and lunch with President Bush and senior Administration figures was due to begin at 3am (NZT).

The United States has concluded that New Zealand's anti-nuclear legislation is for keeps and that even though New Zealand opposed the invasion of Iraq, it is in US interests to move on and be warmer to the reliable friends it has.

The case for a free-trade agreement remains a top priority for New Zealand, one that Helen Clark has continued to press in Washington on this visit — her second in five years but the ninth time she has met President Bush.

New areas of co-operation will be emphasised from today in what is being described as "a fresh approach" to the relationship.

Helping to get North Korea off the nuclear habit and adopting alternative forms of energy is an issue New Zealand will purse with a big endorsement from the United States.

And ending World Trade Organisation members' subsidised fisheries, in the interests of sustainability, could be another area for joint action, Helen Clark hinted yesterday in a speech in Washington.

The Prime Minister preceded her audience with President Bush with a meeting yesterday with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to rehearse the themes for this morning's summit.

Dr Rice raised Iraq in the context of Middle East security. She is also said to have thanked New Zealand specifically for its role in the Pacific, its support over North Korea and for its contribution to Afghanistan.

Helen Clark later acknowledged a resolve by the second-term Bush Administration to work with New Zealand.

"We have been talking more to each other than past each other, looking closely at where our interests coincide, and seeking to expand co-operation."

She said the nuclear-free policy was referred to as "a rock in a road" which you find a way around.

"It doesn't mean the rock has gone away but you find a way to work around it."

Helen Clark paid a visit yesterday to the House of Representatives Speaker, Democrat Nancy Pelosi, to put New Zealand's case for a free-trade agreement and to register our record on labour and environmental concerns, which are key issues to the Democrats.

The Democrats will control President Bush's ability past June to negotiate any complete free-trade deals and no one knows yet what they will do.

Mrs Pelosi is leading a move to have the Democrat-dominated Congress put a deadline of August 2008 on the withdrawal from Iraq in return for allowing a bill to continue financing the war to pass. She acknowledged New Zealand's position on the war, Helen Clark said later.

Mrs Pelosi is also battling President Bush over Congress' right to inquire into a recent purge of federal prosecutors.

Helen Clark's blunt speech to the Asia Society yesterday set out New Zealand's case for a closer relationship with the United States.

She touched on the growing importance of New Zealand's relationship with Asia as well as its role in the South Pacific, which she said "was not quite how Rodgers and Hammerstein portrayed it in the 1958 film".

She invoked New Zealand and the United States' history of fighting side-by-side, but also talked about the exception, Iraq.

She referred to the "invasion" of Iraq, where others might use euphemisms, and said that while New Zealand had taken a different position, "we share the hope that peace and a better life will eventually prevail in that troubled land where so many Iraqis, Americans and others have died".

Referring to the breakdown of the 1951 Anzus security pact, she said that afterwards "unfortunately our relationship then came to be defined by what we disagreed on — primarily the nuclear policy — rather than our strong commonality of purpose in most endeavours".

Helen Clark will meet Defence Secretary Richard Gates and United States Trade Representative Susan Schwab today before leaving Washington for Chicago and Seattle.

ROCKY RELATIONSHIP

- 1985: Labour Government adopts an anti-nuclear policy and the Anzus treaty is suspended.
- 1991: National elected to Government on same anti-nuclear policy.
- 1995: Bill Clinton meets National PM Jim Bolger on the understanding the law may be changed.
- 2002: George W. Bush meets Labour PM Helen Clark three months after SAS is deployed to UN-mandated action in Afghanistan.
- 2003: New Zealand opposes the war in Iraq.
- 2007: President Bush welcomes Helen Clark again.

ON THE WEB

For the latest on this morning's meeting between Helen Clark and the President, go to: nzherald.co.nz

IN STEP: Helen Clark and Condoleezza Rice taking a stroll yesterday before their meeting in Washington. PICTURE / REUTERS

CLOSE IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH

If you say something often enough, people will believe it.

And there's proof at the highest level.

Even Prime Minister Helen Clark thinks former Secretary of State Colin Powell said New Zealand and the United States were "very, very, very good friends".

She should know. She was standing right next to him in 2002 in Washington when he supposedly said it.

He didn't. He actually characterised the relationship in much more intimate terms when he said the two countries were "very, very, very close friends".

In the five years during which the remark has has been corrupted to just "good" friends, it has lost some of its impact.

In interviews before her Washington trip, Helen Clark not only repeatedly used the wrong phrase, which she caught off reporters and commentators (she used the correct one once), but said she was happy with that status.

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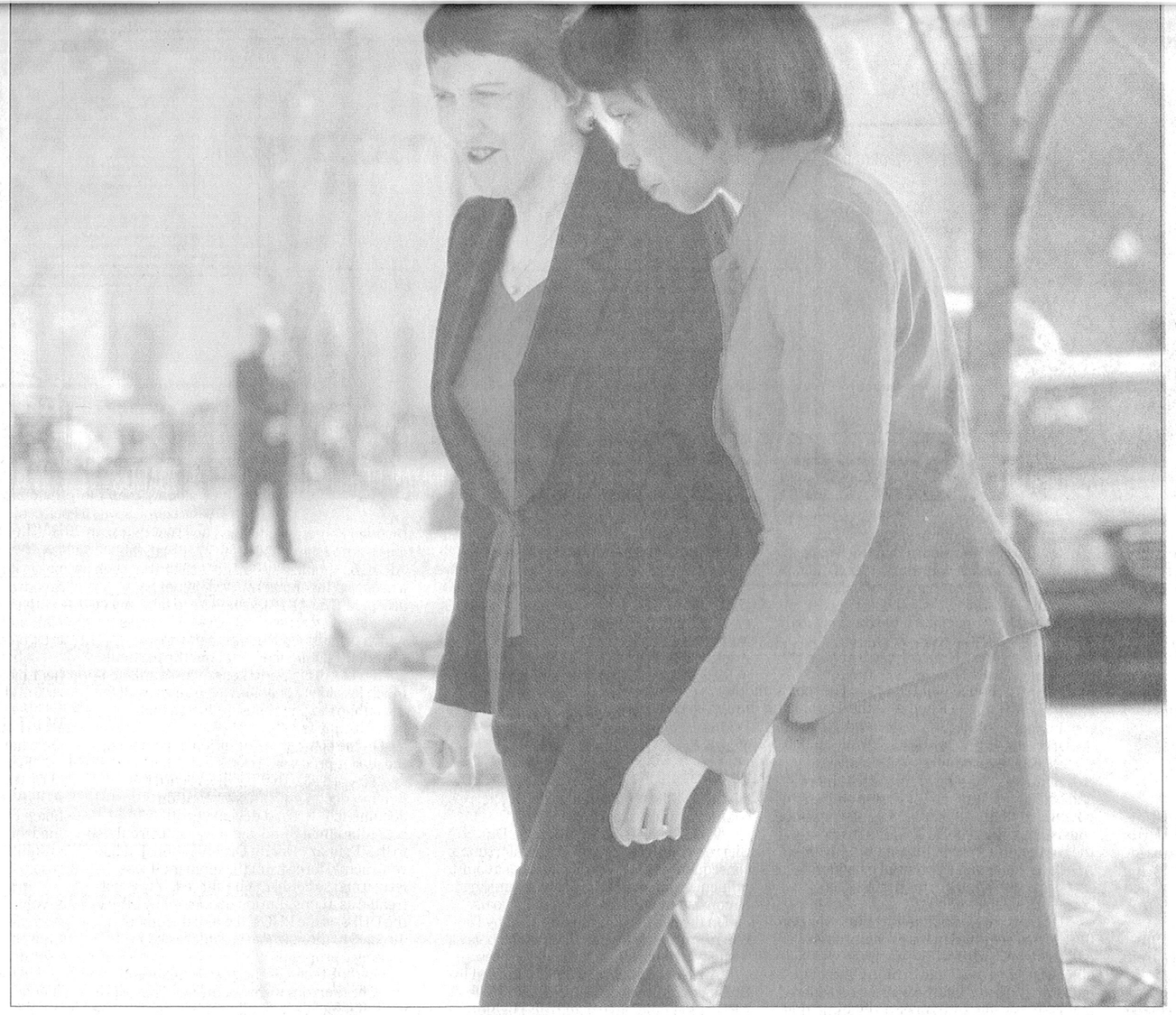

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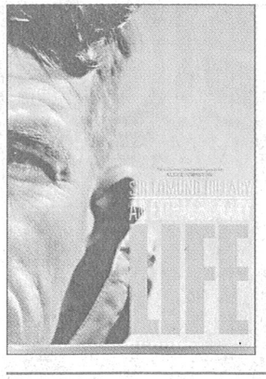

Jacket, gloves and book — gifts for Bush

The gifts chosen for President George W. Bush from New Zealand to mark today's White House visit by Prime Minister Helen Clark are a jacket, some gloves and a book — which are not as innocuous as they sound.

Like New Zealand's Sports Minister, Trevor Mallard, and Education Minister Steve Maharey, President Bush indulges in mountain bike riding, so Helen Clark would not have been short of expert advice.

The black jacket is apparently for the express purpose of mountain bike riding and the gloves are possum-skin ones and are also for riding.

The book — *Sir Edmund Hillary: An Extraordinary Life* by Alexa Johnston — is autographed by Sir Edmund. It is also signed by Helen Clark.

New Zealand's gifts to leaders have deliberately become more personal over the years, selected for their potential to be actually used or valued by their recipients rather than sent to archives or museums to be catalogued and forgotten.

The psychology behind the riding-related gifts could be that President Bush may perhaps think favourably of New Zealand when he takes time off to do one of the things he enjoys most.

He is likely to get more use from this year's gift than the 2002 one when Helen Clark last visited.

Then it was an All Black jersey.

Secretary of State and accomplished pianist Condoleezza Rice was given a CD featuring the work of Wellington composer John Psathas, titled *A View From Olympus*.

He is of Greek descent and penned the theme song to the Athens Olympics. The works are performed by Michael Houston and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

ROGERS

- PYGMY PALM $6
- ORANGE CLIVIAS $5
- GRASSES GALORE $2, $3, $4
- GRISELINIAS $2, $3, $4, $5, $6, $10, $20, $36
- 6' BANGALOW PALMS $20
- 6' OLIVES $26
- EUGENIAS $9, $14, $29, $59
- 12' NZ TITOKIS $79
- 8' PURIRI $59
- CITRUS TREES $17
- HIBISCUS $6, $10
- STAR JASMINE $5
- BROMELLIADS $9
- HEBES $3, $4
- CYCADS $14, $16
- KENTIAS $10, $69, $99
- ALDERS $12
- 7' JACARANDA $20
- COROKIAS $3, $4, $6
- PUNNETS $1

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