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LORD: IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH U.S. DEPEND ON NEW ZEALAND

(Transcript: Lord remarks at SFRC hearing 3/31) (520)

Washington -- If New Zealand wishes to improve its relationship with the United States, it will have to rethink its policy on nuclear weapons and nuclear propulsion, according to Ambassador Winston Lord, who has been chosen by President Bill Clinton for the position of assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific affairs.

Lord made his remarks at his March 31 confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in answer to questions posed by Senator Charles Robb (Democrat of Virginia). Robb is the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee for East Asia and Pacific Affairs. He presided over the full committee's March 31 confirmation hearing for Lord.

(begin unofficial transcript)

SENATOR CHARLES ROBB: ...Let me move just a little bit to the east and another more sensitive situation with respect to New Zealand. The new government has talked about reestablishing the relationship with the United States as being a top priority. What do you foresee as the likelihood for some direct discussions about an improved relationship under whatever circumstances might be appropriate?

WINSTON LORD: As you well know, we have good relationships in certain areas, but the main problem there is their nuclear policy, which ran counter to our worldwide and very important posture of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on our ships and aircraft. Certain developments like President Bush's decision in conjunction with Soviet moves to, or Russian moves to, take nuclear weapons off our ships and certain other vehicles is a factor; our testing issue is a factor as we look toward the future. But the New Zealanders have not changed their policy.

There is the further question of the safety of nuclear propulsion -- a separate issue. (A) very good report was issued in New Zealand saying this was safe, but the government has not been able to act on it.

So, we would of course welcome much more cordial relations with New Zealand, including on this issue and try to reestablish what we had many years ago. But frankly, because of the absolute imperative of our global policy of neither confirm nor deny remains important even today, unless there's movement by New Zealand on that question, I don't see how we can do that.

ROBB: I have discussed this neither confirm nor deny at some length with representatives of their government and others. Is there a chance for some sort of policy review given the other areas where we do cooperate effectively and where our interests are so obviously in sync?

LORD: Well, certainly we will review our policy, and I would hope that New Zealand would do likewise. So, they're good people. It's a friendly country in every other respect. It's too bad that their policy -- which we think is unnecessary, of course -- is holding us up. So I would hope we could overcome that in the coming years, but it is going to take some steps on the New Zealand side.

(end unofficial transcript)