

## Fright House security men tell the Tartan Day envoys: No can dhu!



CAPITOL STUFF ... George Reid, complete with 'offensive weapon'

**A** SCOT and his skean dhu are hard to part – but it happened when leading political foes went to Washington.

For a few memorable hours, the SNP and the Tories were united.

They were bonded together as politicians George Reid and Struan Stevenson suffered the temporary loss of their precious, bejewelled "black knives".

The two were in the States to mark Tartan Day – set aside by decree of the White House and the US Congress as a time for Americans to celebrate Scotland, Scots and all things Scottish.

But the way they were "honoured" when they arrived on Capitol Hill as guests of honour at a Congressional reception was enough to spark a Thistle-Tagle war.

"Guys with knives down their socks ain't getting in," was the way they – and Scottish-US leaders in full Highland regalia – were greeted.

A spirited bid to talk the Capitol Hill police out of their security decision failed. And there was worse to come...

The cops who guard the Capitol refused to take the sheathed knives into safe-keeping.

"Put 'em in your cars," the Scots were told.

Well, the visitors had no cars. And the reception time was running out.

The malt whisky tasting – with top Congressional aides – was looking like an event that would have to go ahead without its VIP guests.

As they tried to sort out who should stay outside with a fistful of "offensive weapons", the Sunday Mail rushed to the rescue and offered to look after them.

Which is how they made it in time to hear a surprise

proclamation from President Bill Clinton. He put the White House hallmark on last year's Congressional statute designating April 6 as Tartan Day.

Because of the NATO war, Tartan Day organisers were resigned to seeing the special date come and go, without the ultimate recognition.

But Clans of Scotland leader James Morrison raced breathlessly into the reception – clutching the Presidential seal of approval, hot off the fax machine. As he collected his confiscated 'weapon', George Reid, the SNP's May 6 candidate for Clackmannan, recalled how 25 years ago he'd got the same treatment at Westminster.

Dressed for a Caledonian Society dinner, he'd been stopped from entering the House of Commons because of his skean dhu. A point of order was raised and the House voted to lift the ban.

It is an example that Conservative Struan Stevenson, who is leading the polls for a European Parliament seat, hopes the Americans will follow for next year's Tartan Day.

He said: "They need to learn that a Scot stripped of his skean dhu is far more dangerous than one allowed to keep it."

Scottish Labour snubbed invitations to the four-day Tartan revels.

Instead, Whitehall sent kilted faithful party member Stuart Mackintosh, who is working in Washington as an financial analyst and adviser.

The Sunday Mail was denied the pleasure of guarding Mr Mackintosh's skean dhu. He came without one.

And Stuart couldn't hang around long enough to join in the plea for the livelihoods of Borders cashmere workers.

He had to get back to the office.



KNIFE WORK ... Sunday Mail writer Maggie Hall