



## THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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### **Interview of the First Lady by Wendell Goler, Fox News**

Map Room

9:15 A.M. EDT

Q Let's talk about Afghanistan. You've been there three times -- twice by yourself. There's a sense that Afghanistan needs more security, but that it needs more than just security. Tell me what it needs.

MRS. BUSH: Well, of course I'm not an expert, but just from watching from afar and from this last visit, and from going to the Afghanistan support conference in Paris, I think Afghanistan needs a very strong commitment from the international community to help in the ways that we can help them build infrastructure.

Afghanistan was totally destroyed by years of war -- first with the Soviet invasion and then finally with the Taliban, a very, very oppressive regime. And so they need everything. They need roads, they need schools, they need hospitals, they need medical centers. They need all the things that can help them build the infrastructure that will allow them to have an economy that can help pull their people out of poverty.

On the other hand, we have seen them already do a lot. It's been six years, they've written a constitution, they've had two presidential elections and parliamentary elections. They're getting ready next year, in the next year, to have elections again -- presidential elections and parliamentary elections. That they've been able to do so much in six years, after such devastation, is really amazing.

Girls are in school all over Afghanistan. I have a friend, an Afghan American who has built a school there -- 14,000 girls go to these buildings that she's been able to put up. This is in Kabul. It's a girls' school. We still need security at a lot of these schools because women and girls are still targeted. But, on the other hand, lots and lots of girls across Afghanistan are in school. And many women are now members of parliament.

When I went to Afghanistan and visited Bamiyan, their governor, Habiba Sarabi, is a female. I met female police recruits who were studying the Afghan constitution and studying to become police officers. And both of those things are really amazing -- that women would be police officers and that they would have an Afghan constitution to study.

So there are many, many good signs in Afghanistan, but also they're just the signs that we can't drop them, that the international community has to stay involved and that the United States particularly needs to make a long-term commitment and really follow up. NGOs from around the world, there's a place for them to be involved. And I'd like to see -- this is something that I've seen when I've visited Bamiyan -- I'd like to see the American agriculture community, our land grant colleges, a lot of them have

agriculture components -- that was part of the land grant college system -- to do real partnerships with Afghanistan to build their agriculture sector, because it will be -- it's so important for them to feed themselves, but also for them to build their economy.

Q You raise a number of issues. Let's start with the aid commitment. At the donors conference you got \$20 billion worth of commitments -- half of that from the U.S. Do you worry about countries making good on their commitments? Do you worry about future administrations making good on the U.S. commitments?

MRS. BUSH: Absolutely. I mean, you always worry about that at every sort of conference, donors conference. I mean, we know after the tsunami, we know after the earthquake, other big natural disasters that a lot of times the pledges that are made, that huge number of pledges is not always followed up with the total amount. And that's a worry. So that's one more reason to urge the international community to stay involved and to follow up. And I think they will. But people need to speak out about it and urge the international community to continue that.

I know the United States will stay involved. I know that no matter who is elected President in November and is inaugurated next January that the United States will keep its commitment. I've met many Americans, and a very large group of American women, who have made it a personal effort of their own to reach out to women in Afghanistan. I've met a woman who is the wife of a president of an American university who has gotten scholarships for Afghan girls to come study in universities in the United States. And these are full scholarships, including the money to get over here in the first place. And these are girls who were picked because they have a real commitment to their country. They're going to get their degrees here and then go back home and work to build their country. I've met women who are working with micro enterprise and supporting women entrepreneurs all over Afghanistan, so that these women -- many of them widows, widowed by the years of war there -- can support their families and start little businesses. And it's happening. I mean, there are entrepreneurial women and men across Afghanistan.

I saw in Bamiyan -- and I think this is so interesting -- this potato storage. Bamiyan agriculture is mainly potatoes, but they would have to sell everything right at harvest when the prices were lowest because they had no way to store. And Idaho potato farmers looked back into the history of Idaho and knew how early settlers could build a primitive but very effective storage for potatoes, so you can hold your crop, which allows you to have food for yourself over the winter, but also allows you to sell your potatoes later in the season when the prices are higher. These Idaho potato farmers have advised Afghan potato farmers.

And that's what we need is we need people from all over the world -- not just Americans -- to reach out and use their own expertise to help Afghans as they try to build their country.

Q A lot of the part of bringing Afghanistan into the 21st century appears to be women's liberation. By my figures that I've read, of the 6 million students, a million-and-a-half are girls, and that's a big deal. There was so much fewer --

MRS. BUSH: Yes, none. (Laughter.) Women weren't allowed to be educated.

Q How much of Afghanistan's problem is the culture? How much of it is related to Afghan men?

MRS. BUSH: Well, that's a very good question, and of course, that is something that we have to address. But it is a very conservative society, we know that, so that women are still targeted if they step outside

of what some people in Afghanistan think are the roles women should have.

But on the other hand we've seen very, very courageous women. Women are on television now. Women have radio shows now in Afghanistan. All of those things are very public and some of those women are targeted. But on the other hand, they're courageously going ahead with the sort of life they want for themselves. We know that there were those teachers all during the time of the Taliban who had the secret schools in their basement so they could continue to educate girls. But that's a problem and it's something that has to be dealt with in a very sensitive way because it is a cultural issue, as you said.

But one thing that I've noticed -- and I've seen this in Afghanistan anecdotally, because of course I don't have any sort of study of it, but I've also seen it around the world in conservative societies -- and that is fathers want the best for their daughters, just like they do for their sons. And they want their daughters to be able to lead productive and happy lives. And in most cases -- and we certainly know this in the United States and in many, many cases around the world in conservative societies -- that men want their daughters to be educated. And I think that's going to be the real change for Afghanistan and for other countries in the Middle East, and that is when women, mothers, and men, fathers, and the daughters themselves say, this is what I want for my life, and I want to also be able to contribute to the building of my country and there's a role for me, as a woman, to play in that.

Q And yet you said at the donors conference that many women were very afraid that Afghanistan could backslide.

MRS. BUSH: That's right. I met this group of women parliamentarians and women teachers, and they're afraid. They're afraid they'll be targeted. But on the other hand, lots and lots of girls are in school, lots of women are teaching. And obviously there are women members of parliament, there's a woman governor, and they're making strides. And that's who we need to support. We need to try to support all of them.

That's why we can't leave and just drop them, because this is their chance, as that one woman told me who came to visit me last year -- or earlier this year, and said, this is our chance and we can't -- if it doesn't happen now, if we aren't successful now, then when will it happen?

Q What advice would you give for the next President, whoever that might be?

MRS. BUSH: About Afghanistan?

Q About Afghanistan.

MRS. BUSH: Well, I hope that the United States will stay very, very involved in Afghanistan. I hope that we'll look for every way that we can help them build the civil society that will support the infrastructure that they need as well. There isn't just an infrastructure of roads and water treatment and bridges and all the things that we take for granted in the United States. But there is the long infrastructure that we have, that we inherited, of laws -- of business law, of contract law, of civil society, of human rights -- that we can live our great, free life that we get to live because we inherited that.

And that's what's very, very difficult to build. It's expensive to build a physical infrastructure, and it's difficult to build the infrastructure of laws that can support a civil society, to protect the rights of the individual, that protects the rights of women, and that will support the building of education that can build a free society.

Q Will you stay involved?

MRS. BUSH: I'll stay involved. And I hope I'll have a chance to stay involved through the presidential library, George's presidential library and other vehicles. The Afghan American Women's Council that was chartered by President Bush and President Karzai has been moved now to Georgetown University. I think that will be a way that it can stay as an institution and a way for American women, a vehicle for American women to continue to reach out to women in Afghanistan to help them and to mentor women -- for instance, women business people. There's been a great mentorship program where women entrepreneurs in Afghanistan have come and been partnered with women entrepreneurs in the United States, to develop their -- help them develop their business skills.

All of those things will continue, and I hope to be a part of it.

Q Would you go back? I mean, do you anticipate --

MRS. BUSH: Sure, I hope I'll have the chance to go back. And Barbara and Jenna both really want to go; they were very disappointed when I went this year and they couldn't go with me. And so I hope to go back and take my girls there and meet all these people again that I've had the opportunity to meet over the last eight years, and meet a lot of other women and girls in school.

Q What am I missing here -- something I haven't asked you?

MRS. BUSH: Not that I can think of, except that I hope the U.S. will stay involved, and I know we will. And also I hope that the United States and the people of Afghanistan will realize it's just been six years -- they're just a six-year-old country trying to rebuild after being almost literally destroyed. And it takes time. I mean, look at how long it took us in the United States -- and we had the very perfect document, the perfect Constitution, and it took us so long to -- and we still, every day, have to work on making sure our country is what we want it to be.

Q Thank you.

MRS. BUSH: Thanks so much, Wendell.

END 9:30 A.M. EDT

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