



15th Annual U.S.-Pakistan Friendship Day

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I am honored that the Pakistan American Congress has invited me to speak today. With Pakistan front and center in the news these days, I thought it was an important time for me to share with you firsthand our views of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. It's one of America's most vital relationships, and I'm very pleased to be a part of it. I just returned from a very productive trip to Pakistan last week, where I met with people across the full political spectrum – from President Musharraf to government and opposition parties to Islamists and the media. I also traveled to Balochistan, where I had a chance to visit with the police, Frontier Corps, Chief Minister and parliamentarians. My visit coincided with visits to Pakistan by both Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte and CENTCOM Commander Admiral Fallon, who also had productive meetings. You can see from the level of our visits that the United States' relationship with Pakistan is one of the most important we have with any country in the world.

The President has also nominated one of our top career diplomats, Anne Patterson, as the next U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan – another indication of the importance we place on this relationship. We hope she'll be confirmed shortly.

We say often that Pakistan is a key ally in the war on terror, and that is true. More than that, however, the United States and Pakistan have developed a strong, multi-dimensional, strategic partnership. Our commitment to the Pakistani people is illustrated by our comprehensive development programs in health, education, and economic development. There are many important examples of the long-term, strategic U.S. commitment to Pakistan:

Development Assistance: The United States is providing more than \$1.5 billion over the next five years to help Pakistan develop in the fields of education, health, governance, and economic growth, including \$750 million for programs in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

Earthquake Reconstruction: Last winter, U.S. assistance helped the Pakistani government ensure that those living in earthquake areas had adequate shelter and clothing. The United States has pledged \$206 million for earthquake reconstruction over the next four years.

Basic Education: Over the past five years (Fiscal Year 2002 – Fiscal Year 2006) the U.S. Government has spent over \$200 million in support of the Government of Pakistan's education reform strategy by working with your government to: a) strengthen education policy and planning at the federal, provincial and district levels; b) improve the skills and performance of teachers and administrators; c) increase youth and adult literacy; d) expand public-private partnerships; and e) provide school improvement grants and involve parents and communities in public schools.

Higher Education: In just four years, funding for our bilateral Fulbright program has grown from \$1 million per year to over \$20 million per year. More than 200 Pakistanis are currently studying for Masters and PhD's in the United States under this program, making it the largest Fulbright program in the world in terms of U.S. government funding.

Security Assistance: The United States has a continuing commitment to Pakistan's defense needs. The sale of F-16s to Pakistan late last year, a regular schedule of bilateral military exercises, and the recent delivery of Cobra helicopters demonstrate the long-term commitment of the United States to its strategic partnership with Pakistan.

New facets in our relationship include discussions of education initiatives and a high-level Joint Committee on Science and Technology. We are also concluding consultations with Congress on Reconstruction Opportunity Zones and hope that legislation will be voted on in the coming months. With U.S. support – we will be providing \$150 million this year in development assistance to Pakistan to support its Sustainable Development Plan for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, where Pakistan is implementing a strategy to strengthen governance, promote economic development and improve security.

Pakistan's strategy has two goals: making Pakistan and the region more stable, open and prosperous; and reducing extremism and thereby eliminating the Taliban and Al Qaeda presence in areas bordering Afghanistan. The United States shares those goals and is working closely with Pakistan to make them a reality, including working to find additional resources to support efforts to strengthen the Frontier Corps.

We applaud President Musharraf's efforts to build a modern, democratic, and prosperous nation. The passage of the Women's Protection Bill in November 2006 was an important indicator of President Musharraf's commitment to that goal. Pakistan's next elections will be a major step in its transition to a strong, stable democratic state with mature institutions. We expect Pakistan to have free, fair, transparent, and credible elections with the participation of all political parties—this will be Pakistan's key to democratic progress and an important step toward ensuring its long-term stability and prosperity. We support a democratic process – not particular candidates or parties—and look forward to seeing the Pakistani people choose their leadership in accordance with the constitution.

I know that the issue of the charges against the Chief Justice is very much on the minds of many people here and in Pakistan. As you've seen, we've expressed our concern and we are encouraging the Government of Pakistan to handle the case in a transparent manner consistent with Pakistan's legal system, while respecting the rights of freedom of the press and assembly.

As I was surrounded my cameras on my recent trip, I couldn't help but note that Pakistan has made significant progress under President Musharraf toward a fully free media. Media organizations have flourished. We believe it is critical for Pakistan's democratic development, its domestic stability, and its international reputation that this progress continues.

Our partnership with Pakistan and commitment to the Pakistani people are long-term. The United States and Pakistan are united in one common purpose: building a better world. Together we are confronting difficult challenges, foremost among them terrorists who oppose freedom and stability, and whose actions are an obstacle to the strong and stable democratic institutions which the Pakistani people desire and deserve.

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