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BUSH SAYS CONGRESS SHOULD ACT ON IMMIGRATION

By Peter Baker
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Former President George W. Bush, who normally stays out of current political issues, waded briefly into the immigration debate in an interview broadcast on Sunday, urging Congress to pass legislation to overhaul the system.

"It's very important to fix a broken system, to treat people with respect and have confidence in our capacity to assimilate people," Mr. Bush said on the ABC News program "This Week." "It's a very difficult bill to pass because there's a lot of moving parts. And the legislative process can be ugly. But it looks like they're making some progress."

Mr. Bush was a champion of immigration changes during his presidency, and his failure to pass such legislation was one of his biggest disappointments. President Obama has effectively picked up the baton in pressing for a similar plan to create a path to citizenship for millions of immigrants in the country illegally, aided by newfound support among Republicans worried about the electoral implications of alienating a growing Latino vote.

Mr. Bush said politics should not be the primary motivation for reshaping immigration laws. "The reason to pass immigration reform is not to bolster a Republican Party," he said. "It's to fix a system that's broken. Good policy yields good politics."

His comments came days before he is to host a naturalization ceremony at his new presidential center just outside Dallas. On Wednesday, he will deliver an address on the virtues of immigration before 20 people are sworn in as citizens. Three panel discussions on the contributions of immigrants will follow.

The former president was interviewed during his trip last week to Africa, where he has been working to fight cervical cancer among women. He dismissed assumptions that he spends so much time on Africa now to redeem mistakes in Iraq, calling such talk "absurd psychobabble."

While he offered thoughts on immigration, he declined to speak out on other urgent issues of the day, like same-sex marriage. He urged patience as Egypt goes through its tumult, saying that the Arab Spring in general was still "a good thing because people are demanding their rightful place."

Mr. Bush, whose travels overlapped with Mr. Obama's in Tanzania, declined to offer judgments about his successor. Asked about Mr. Obama's decision to continue some of the counterterrorism programs he inherited, Mr. Bush said, "I think the president got into the Oval Office and realized the dangers to the United States, and he's acted in ways he thinks are necessary to protect the country."