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Longtime Bush aide stumps in Seattle

By Angelo Bruscas, P-I Reporter

From Bill Gates to President Bush to rock star Bono, undersecretary of state Karen Hughes drew on some of her global connections to spread the word in Seattle Monday that private and corporate giving can help reshape lives internationally in a post-9/11 world.

The longtime Bush aide and former presidential communications guru has a new job now – to enhance America’s image abroad.

But on Monday, Hughes met with the Gates Foundation and members of the Initiative for Global Development to encourage Americans at home to do more and give more in world efforts to reduce poverty, eliminate the spread of Aids in Africa and encourage free trade and rebuild countries in chaos after natural disasters such as the tsunami in Indonesia.

“I was really drawn here by the generosity of human nature,” she told about 40 prominent Seattle business leaders at the World Trade Center, handing out a Bush proclamation declaring Monday as National CorporatePhilanthropy Day.

“I could not think of a better place to honor this day than here in Seattle, because of your well-deserved reputation for generosity and concern, not only for the welfare of citizens of this community but also of people throughout the world. Only in America would business leaders come together like this, without any prompting or prodding from the government.”

Hughes noted that Bill and Melinda Gates and Bono were named Time magazine’s people of the year for their efforts to spur billions of dollars in donations.

“They are united by their recognition of our responsibility to share, the recognition of the massive problem of world poverty, and their responsibility to do something about it,” Hughes said.

She talked about how Bono’s remarks earlier this month at a national prayer breakfast moved her, as the Irish leader of the band U2 praised the Bush administration for helping to increase funding and giving to fight Aids in Africa.

“You talk about surreal. Here he was in his leather jacket with those cool pink shades in front of all these Washington power brokers,” she said. “I couldn’t help but think that even though he wears his sunglasses indoors, which is something not very many people I know do, Bono despite that sees so clearly the world’s terrible problems and our responsibility to our fellow human beings.

“It made me very proud as an American to hear this Irish musician praising our country’s leadership.”

Much of Hughes’ new job duties as undersecretary of state has been to improve America’s perception in the Arab world, as well as in Latin America, Africa and other places where aid is needed the most. She spoke to the global development group because its goal is to help reverse international poverty by lobbying government leaders and policy makers to make the issue one of their highest priorities.

“From the Gates Foundation to the government, the people of America are responding to that call in a really remarkable way,” Hughes said.