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# Nationwide Equipment CEO meets with Afghanistan's president

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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- A Jacksonville company was among about 30 throughout the country asked to meet with Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai on May 24 to discuss the possibilities for doing business in the developing country.

"We've got a lot of interest and potential customers," said Ed Kostenski, president of [Nationwide Equipment Co.](#), which exports refurbished heavy construction equipment. "The need for infrastructure and rebuilding is phenomenal."

Kostenski was asked to meet with Karzai by the U.S. Department of Commerce, which hosted the Afghan leader for a forum. Karzai was in the country to give the commencement address at Boston University.

"Our coming together with President Karzai represents an opportunity to find quality opportunities for American businesses to do business in a free and democratic Afghanistan," said Dan McCardell, director of business liaison for the Commerce Department.

Other businesses at the meeting included Morgan Stanley, [Phelps Dodge Corp.](#), [Overstock.com](#) Inc. and Globecom Systems Inc.

Karzai told the gathering that Afghanistan is "wide open to do business," Kostenski said. It takes about a week to get a business license there, compared with several months when the country was controlled by the Taliban.

The greatest need, Karzai told the group, is for housing.

"He said you can make a lot of money building houses or selling building equipment," Kostenski said.

Nationwide has had great success in recent years exporting equipment to developing countries. Kostenski said there are risks involved in such endeavors but that they are manageable for companies willing to do their homework and position employees like Akthar Kazi, Nationwide's director of Middle East operations, in those markets.

"There are a lot of opportunities available to small companies," Kostenski said.

Kostenski's invitation to the meeting stemmed from a Commerce Department trade mission to Afghanistan in April, which the department invited Kazi to attend.

The invitation was the latest in a string of honors Kostenski has received. Last year, he was recognized by Bush as an example of a small businessman competing globally, and he received the 2004 Governor's Business Diversification Award for excellence in exporting.

In March, Kostenski was named to the Ex-Im Bank's Sub-Saharan Africa Advisory Committee, a 10-member panel that advises the Export-Import Bank of the United States on its policies to support U.S. exporting to Africa.