

June 23, 2006 What They're Saying

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Newspaper columnists, editorial-page editors and other prominent individuals from across Pennsylvania 12th Congressional District and around the nation have expressed their opinions on Congressman Murtha's position on the war in Iraq and other related issues, including:

- * The war in Iraq
- * Congressman Murtha's continued support of our troops
- * Congressman Murtha's patriotism and character
- * Questions about Congressman Murtha's military record
- * Karl Rove's accusations that Congressman Murtha has deserted our troops

Click on the above links to read what some of the aforementioned are saying about the specified topics.

On the War in Iraq:

"Nearly three-fourths of U.S. troops now serving in Iraq favor a military pullout from that country within a year, according to a survey of service members at four U.S. bases there.

"The survey of 944 U.S. troops in Iraq, conducted in late January and early February by pollster John Zogby, also found more than 40 percent of troops said they are unclear on the goals of the U.S. mission in Iraq.

"Among the findings:

* "Only 23 percent of troops said U.S. military forces should stay in Iraq "as long as they are needed," and 29 percent supported an immediate pullout.

* "Forty-four percent said it was definitely or mostly true that the Pentagon had provided them adequate equipment, while 30 percent called that statement mostly or definitely false.

-- From the Marine Corps Times, Mar. 13, 2006

"We didn't agree with Jack Murtha in November when he called for an immediate withdrawal of United States forces from Iraq. The timing was not right. But the times have changed ...

"...There's a growing sense of self-determination (in Iraq), which is a critical trait on the road to democracy...

"...This is not retreat. This is not cut-and-run. This is recognition of the reality in Iraq - one that has evolved into an Iraqi problem that only the Iraqis now can solve...

"On CBS's '60 Minutes' Sunday night, Jack Murtha predicted the 'vast majority' of U.S. troops will be out of Iraq by year's end if not sooner. We hope he's right. The time has come."

-- From an editorial in the Tribune-Review, Pittsburgh, Pa., Jan. 17, 2006

"...U.S. Rep. John P. Murtha of Johnstown stirred up a hornet's nest when he suggested the United States should withdraw its troops from Iraq soon. It was a hornet's nest that needed to be broached.

"President Bush owes the American people more than repetitious slogans such as 'Stay the Course' and '9-11' and 'We're Fighting Terrorism.'

'Iraq is not the center of terrorism; it's the center of an insurgency, and there's a big difference,' Murtha said at a Philadelphia news conference. 'It's not going to get better with us over there. They'll let us fight forever. I say it's up to them.'

"That has nothing to do with American patriotism.

"It is more about common sense."

-- From an editorial in The Tribune-Democrat, Johnstown, Pa., Dec. 22, 2005

"...For at least broaching the topic of a withdrawal of U.S. forces after nearly three years and more than 2,000 deaths, Murtha deserves praise deserving of a true patriot. Those who question the 31-year congressman's motives should be rightfully shamed into silencing that unfounded criticism....

"... Murtha's call for an end to this military foray and its related carnage - which he sees up close as a regular visitor to the wounded at Walter Reed U.S. Army Hospital - is a welcome departure from the cookie-cutter politicians of either party who are afraid to speak up lest doing so upset their coveted poll numbers, perhaps derailing a re-election bid or aspirations for higher office. Whether you agree with him or not, his voice should be heard and given fair-minded consideration, not greeted with the type of partisan bash-down that so often characterizes Washington dialogue...

--From an editorial in the Herald-Standard, Uniontown, Pa., Nov. 27, 2005

-- The following was written by James Fenton, a Fort Wayne, Ind., attorney whose nephew, Matthew Fenton, died May 5 at Bethesda Naval Hospital. On April 26, Matthew was hit in the forehead by shrapnel when a suicide bomber attacked his convoy in Iraq. Congressman Murtha visited the family at Bethesda during Matt's final hours.

"...My brother John lost his beloved only son, and he remains brokenhearted to this day. I honestly do not know how he summons the strength to go to work or to go on with something resembling a normal life. And Matt's death has also left a large extended family in various stages of grief.

"...why was Matt in Iraq three years after the 'Mission Accomplished' speech? It is difficult not to see the logic of Rep. John Murtha's position that our troops have done all they can or should be asked to do and should now be withdrawn. The Iraqis have some difficult issues to resolve, but those are for the Iraqis to settle.

"Murtha, D-Pa., is beloved at Bethesda for his frequent and unpublicized visits to the wounded troops and for his kindness toward the families there who are struggling with great personal loss. The congressman spent time with my brother during the last hours of Matt's life, and John will never forget his kind words and consoling sentiments. John, as well as Matt's entire family, are appalled that this very distinguished member of Congress, himself a decorated Marine, should now be subjected to a smear campaign by this incompetent administration and its media lackeys.

"But attacking the messenger will only get you so far. Murtha is correct. No more fathers should have to suffer, as my brother John is suffering even now, because of this administration's failure to foresee the disastrous position in which it has placed our brave soldiers and Marines. And this administration should call a halt to its disgraceful smear campaign against Murtha."

James P. Fenton, The Journal Gazette, Fort Wayne, Ind., July 24, 2006

"...this is a wise man, whose judgements are built on experience and whose opinions are very much to the point and worthy of attention and respect."

-- From an interview with the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Editorial Board, Aug. 1, 2006

On Congressman Murtha's Continued Support of Our Troops:

"...No other congressman supports our military more than Murtha...

"...John Murtha has never steered us wrong. If he believes it is time for troops to come home, then we agree. We hope a timetable will be set and that our people will make it home without more loss of life."

-- From an editorial in the Daily American, Somerset, Pa., Nov. 19, 2005

"...Murtha served in Vietnam as a Marine and was wounded twice. A blue-collar Democrat from Pennsylvania, he is especially sympathetic to the concerns of the military - both regular troops and Pentagon generals. His views carry special significance because he cannot easily be tarred with an antiwar brush...."

-- From an editorial in the Boston Globe, Nov. 22, 2005

"...The congressman, a decorated combat veteran, has spent his entire public service as a friend of the military men and women who serve our nation. He is bravely, and at a significant political peril, trying to stop any more of them needlessly from dying...Congressman Murtha, thank you for standing courageously for your convictions. Thank you for speaking for the soldiers who are silenced by a repressive chain of command, starting with the Commander-in-Cheif. "

-- From an editorial in the Uniontown Herald-Standard, July 27, 2006

On Congressman Murtha's Patriotism and Character:

"No journalist, no human being is truly objective. Most do try to be fair. Let me be upfront: I like and respect Rep. John Murtha, D-Pennsylvania. And not only for what he has done - forsaking the safe harbor of his college student deferment at 19 during the Korean War to enlist in the Marine Corps, then after becoming a husband and father of three, volunteering at the age of 33 for combat in Vietnam, where he was twice wounded and received the Bronze Star with Combat 'V', two Purple Hearts and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry.

"I like him because he has never forgotten where he came from. Long before he retired as a colonel, he had been an enlisted man. He knows that the most important people in the U.S. military are not the generals with their drivers and their fawning attaches, but the sergeants and the junior officers to whom he has always talked directly and whose causes, and their families, he has made his own.

"I like him because, having been with him, I know he goes every week to Walter Reed Army Hospital and Bethesda Navy Hospital to encourage the young Americans who have lost their limbs, their eyesight and their youth in the occupation of Iraq. And because, unlike so many of the Washington Warriors sporting their Old Glory pins on their lapels, Jack Murtha goes to the wakes of the funerals of the fallen, whose names he knows and whose families he seeks to console."

-- From "The Democrats get a face," a column by Mark Shields, published in the Williamsport Sun-Gazette, Dec. 3, 2005

"...In Congress, Rep. Murtha has been a hawk among doves, a man filled with political acumen and suspicious of anything smelling of the post-Watergate reforms others in his congressional class embraced. When U.S. troops went to Lebanon, Mr. Murtha went to see them. When we invaded Grenada, he cheered them on. When America dabbled in El Salvador, he supported aid to defeat a communist insurgency.

"Mr. Murtha was, in short, Johnstown: a place where working people expect others to work, are slow to embrace the new, and will happily join up for a war so long as the cause is good and they are sent there to win. Cambria County, in which Johnstown is the lone city, cast aside the leftover traditions of the New Deal last year and voted for George W. Bush. They voted for Mr. Bush because they believed him when he said the Iraq war was necessary, and because they accepted his sincerity about banning abortion, saving their guns and restoring old values that fit them like their fathers' steel-toed work boots. In short, they voted for George W. Bush because they believed he was like John P. Murtha.

"Last week ... George W. Bush lost Jack Murtha.

"He lost Middle America.

-- From "They don't know Jack," a column by Dennis Roddy published in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Nov. 20, 2005

"...Murtha's call released a torrent of doubts from Americans who supported the war but want to know why things have gone sour.

"The congressman has made it legitimate to voice criticisms that previously would have been denounced as unpatriotic...

"If the White House wants Americans to support a continued Iraq presence, it will have to absorb the Murtha message: Talk straight, come clean, hold people accountable, offer a clear plan for the future without misleading statistics. And stop insulting critics who point to mistakes that are apparent to everyone."

-- From "Murtha has backed Bush into a corner," a column by Philadelphia Inquirer columnist Trudy Rubin, Dec. 7, 2005

"I wish we in Missouri had a Capitol Hill delegation full of Murthas...

"So, I say, hurray for Pennsylvania. Keep your brave congressman.

"He is not a coward.

"We all know where the real chicken hawks roost. We all know who truly cares about our soldiers and the real interests of America."

-- From "We know where the real chicken hawks roost," a column by Don Corrigan, editor of Times Newspapers, St. Louis, Mo., published in The Tribune-Democrat, Johnstown, Pa., Dec. 11, 2005

On Congressman Murtha's dedication to Pennsylvania's 12th Congressional District:

We found what PA Republican State Chairman, Robert Gleason, said to be quite significant:

"I cannot deny that Murtha has done a wonderful job for our region. He's brought home the bacon. If that's how you want to judge a congressman or any elected official, he gets five stars."

-- From The Washington Observer-Reporter, Washington, Pa., July 25, 2006

When asked, "What kind of job has Murtha done for the district," Brad Cober, vice chairman of the Somerset County Republican Committee and longtime county commissioner, responded with the following:

"The Murtha situation is really tough for me. I have nothing but great things to say about Murtha. Without his efforts, the Meyersdale bypass wouldn't have been built. We all know what he's done for the Windber Research Institute and Kuchera Defense Systems. And he helped me out when my dad was ill with cancer and needed Social Security disability. I'll make no qualms about it: If I lived in Murtha's district, I'd be voting for him."

-- From The Tribune-Democrat, Johnstown, Pa., July 31, 2006

On questions about Congressman Murtha's military record:

"It should come as no surprise that an arch-conservative web site is questioning whether Representative John Murtha, the Pennsylvania Democrat who has been critical of the war in Iraq, deserved the combat awards he received in Vietnam.

"After all, in recent years extremist Republican operatives have inverted a longstanding principle: that our combat veterans be accorded a place of honor in political circles. This trend began with the ugly insinuations leveled at Senator John McCain during the 2000 Republican primaries and continued with the slurs against Senators Max Cleland and John Kerry, and now Mr. Murtha....

"The accusations against Mr. Murtha were very old news, principally coming from defeated political rivals. Aligned against their charges are an official letter from Marine Corps Headquarters written nearly 40 years ago affirming Mr. Murtha's eligibility for his Purple Hearts - 'you are entitled to the Purple Heart and a Gold Star in lieu of a second Purple Heart for wounds received in action' - and the strict tradition of the Marine Corps regarding awards. While in other services lower-level commanders have frequently had authority to issue prestigious awards, in the Marines Mr. Murtha's Vietnam Bronze star would have required the approval of four different awards boards....

"A young American now serving in Iraq might rightly wonder whether his or her service will be deliberately misconstrued 20 years from now, in the next rendition of politically motivated spinmeisters who never had the courage to step forward and put their own lives on the line."

-- From "Purple Heartbreakers," a column by James Webb published in the New York Times on Jan. 18, 2006. Webb was a secretary of the Navy in the Reagan administration and a Marine platoon and company commander in Vietnam.

"...the charges are remarkably flimsy....

"What's maddening here is the unblushing hypocrisy of the right wing and the way it circulates - usually through Web sites or talk radio - personal vilification to abort honest political debate. Murtha's views on withdrawing troops from Iraq are certainly the object of legitimate contention. Many in Murtha's party disagree with him. But Murtha's right-wing critics can't content themselves with going after his ideas. They have to try to discredit his service."

-- From "Murtha and the Mudslingers," a column by E.J. Dionne published in the Washington Post on Jan. 17, 2006

"...Since it is unseemly for a leadership that never served its country to attack the patriotism and veracity of decorated soldiers and sailors who did, this administration has returned to its proven tactic of finding surrogates to do its dirty work. Today, neoconservatives are hoping that by muddying the waters of Jack Murtha's military record they can neuter another of their most passionate and sincere critics.

"... Like the attack last year on John Kerry's service, this administration has shown yet again that it is not above crude tactics for disseminating its message on the sly. The trouble is in so doing they attack the very military institutions that they've put in harm's way. If Jack Murtha's military record - which the Republicans loved to tout when, for example, he was an advocate for the first Gulf war or higher defense budgets - is now fair game for scurrilous attacks, then who's next?

"John Kerry and Jack Murtha both love their country and proved their patriotism in the crucible of war and on the battlefield of public service. But far more is at stake than even these good men's reputations. They have the honor of their service, as do the hundreds of thousands of Americans in uniform in harm's way today, and that's enough..."

-- From "A Swift-like attack," a column by Jim Rassman published in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on Jan. 20, 2006. In 1969, John Kerry led his Swift boat through heavy fire on the waters of the Mekong Delta and pulled Rassman to safety after Rassman's own Swift boat was blown to pieces. Rassman, a former Army Green Beret, is a registered Republican. Kerry was wounded that day and earned a Bronze Star for valor.

"...We hope that most people have enough sense to see this blatant character assassination for what it really is."

--From an editorial in the Uniontown Herald-Standard, editorial, Jan. 19, 2006

On Karl Rove's accusation that Congressman Murtha has deserted our troops:

"The only bullets Karl Rove has ever dodged were legal.

"Last week, after learning he would avoid indictment for his role in the slinging of an Iraq war critic, Rove had this to say about two men who risked death in service of country, John Murtha and John Kerry:

"‘Like too many Democrats, it strikes me that they are ready to give the green light to go to war, but when it gets tough and when it gets difficult they fall back on that party's pattern of cutting and running.'

"In any sentence with the names Kerry, Murtha and Rove, there is only one possible coward. It's not the Pennsylvania congressman nor the Massachusetts senator.

"The only combat for which Rove ever volunteered was political. In that realm, he's mastered the coward's way, the sly attack from the hidden place, the anonymous flier full of innuendo, the invective by surrogates, the timely leak to the friendly writer. The shiv goes in the back, but the fingerprints are smudged.

"Sadly, it works. So it gets rewarded and imitated.

"Jack Murtha, by contrast, served 37 years in the Marines and volunteered for duty in Vietnam. When he expresses despair over Iraq, he speaks for many fine warriors who have his ear."

-from an editorial in the Philadelphia Inquirer, June 18, 2006