October 16, 2006 Murtha opinion piece in Washington Post

For Immediate Release

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Dear Colleague:

Yesterday an opinion piece I wrote was featured in the Op-Ed section of the Washington Post. I received calls from all over the country this morning from people saying that my editorial should be a "must read" for all Democrats. It is on their behalf that I am sending yesterday's editorial to you.

Sincerely,

JOHN P. MURTHA

MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Washington Post

October 15, 2006

Pg. B1

Confessions Of A 'Defeatocrat'

By John P. Murtha

The Republicans are running scared. In the White House, on Capitol Hill and on the campaign trail, they're worried about

losing control of Congress. And so the administration and the GOP have launched a desperate assault on Democrats and our position on the war in Iraq. Defeatists, they call us, and appeasers and -- oh so cleverly -- "Defeatocrats."

Vice President Cheney has accused Democrats of "self-defeating pessimism." Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld has faulted us for believing that "vicious extremists can be appeased." The White House calls Democrats the party of "cut and run."

It's all baseless name-calling, and it's all wrong. Unless, of course, being a Defeatocrat means taking a good hard look at the administration's Iraq policy and determining that it's a failure.

In that case, count me in. Because Democrats recognize that we're headed for a far greater disaster in Iraq if we don't change course -- and soon. This is not defeatism. This is realism.

Our troops who are putting their lives on the line deserve a plan that matches our military prowess with diplomatic and political skill. They deserve a clear and achievable mission and they deserve to know precisely what it will take to accomplish it. They deserve answers, not spin.

Our military has done all it can do in Iraq, and the Iraqis want their occupation to end. I support bringing our troops home at the earliest practicable date, at a rate that will keep those remaining there safe on the ground. It's time that the White House and the GOP start working with Democrats in Congress to come up with a reasonable timetable for withdrawal and for handing the Iraqi government over to the Iraqis.

The administration's use of Rovian catchphrases is nothing but propaganda designed to stifle the loyal opposition. We Democrats are determined to restore our nation's military strength, refocus on the real terrorist threat, bolster security safeguards at home and reestablish the credible standing we once had in the world. That is not defeatist. It is a call to formulate and execute a winning game plan for the War on Terror.

Most Democrats voted against the 2002 resolution authorizing the use of military force in Iraq. Regrettably, I was not one of them. Since entering Congress in 1974, I have always supported the president on issues of war. But in this case, I made a mistake -- and unlike certain members of the administration, I'm willing to say so. If I had known in October 2002 what I know now, I would never have voted for the resolution.

Some of my Democratic colleagues questioned whether Iraq posed an immediate threat to our national security; some were not convinced that Iraq was accelerating the development of nuclear weapons and had an active chemical and biological weapons program; and almost all believed that Iraq was not involved in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. They turned out to be right on all three counts. Nevertheless, since our forces deployed to Iraq, Democratic support for the troops has never wavered.

In the past nine months alone, $962 billion has been appropriated for the Defense Department, $190 billion for the war effort. A vast majority of Democrats voted for the funding. Democrats also identified shortfalls in body armor, armored vehicles and electronic jammers to defeat roadside bombs. Democrats uncovered problems with the military readiness of our ground forces in the United States and fought for measures to restore it. That's hardly defeatist.

When U.S. forces first entered Baghdad, the Iraqi people cheered as the statue of Saddam Hussein was torn from its pedestal. Forty-two months and $400 billion later, we are caught in a civil war in which 61 percent of Iraqis think killing

Americans is justified and the Iraqi people butcher one another at an alarming rate. We are considered occupiers. The longer we stay, the harder it becomes for the Iraqis to find their own destiny.

The administration's "stay-the-course" strategy is not a plan for victory. It's not even a plan. All we have is a new military blueprint to keep 140,000 troops in Iraq through 2010.

We are seeing an astonishing and unprecedented parade of retired U.S. generals calling for a new direction in Iraq. These are voices of bravery, experience, conscience and loyalty. These are men who have been taught to look coldly and objectively at the facts of bloodshed. Can they all be wrong? How about the 15 intelligence agencies that recently offered the opinion that this war has not made us safer? Are they all defeatists? Are they to be ignored?

Was Gen. Eric K. Shinseki, former Army chief of staff, a defeatist when he said that it would take several hundred thousand troops to prevail in Iraq? His recommendation was ignored. Or what about Gen. Jay M. Garner, our first administrator in Iraq, who recommended that the Iraqi army be kept intact and used to stabilize the country? His recommendations were ignored. The Iraqi army was disbanded and the former military took their munitions and went off to form the core of the insurgency. Was former secretary of state Colin L. Powell defeatist when he warned: "If you break it, you own it"? Was Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower a defeatist when he ran for president in 1952 to change the course of Democrat Harry S. Truman's administration in Korea?

Will the White House toss the same tired insults at Sen. John W. Warner (Va.), the Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who has voiced concern over the situation in Iraq? Or at former secretary of state James A. Baker III when the commission he is co-chairing delivers its report on reassessing our options in Iraq?

This administration's insistence on a "go-it-alone, stay-the-course" policy in the face of objections from a majority of Americans and Iraqis and most world public opinion, and in the face of a deteriorating situation, defies logic.

The United States is about to begin its fifth year of occupation and fighting in Iraq. That makes this war longer than U.S. participation in World Wars I and II, and longer than the Korean War and our own Civil War. With every year of occupation, our efforts to fight global terrorism and our military's readiness to fight future wars have further deteriorated, along with our standing in the world. Meanwhile, the radical Islamic cause wins more and more recruits.

Despite the presence of more than 140,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, 23,000 Americans injured or killed, tens of thousands of Iraqi deaths and the expenditure of nearly a half a trillion dollars, here are the dismal results:

*In September, 776 U.S troops were wounded in Iraq, the highest monthly toll in more than two years.

*Over the past year, the number of attacks against U.S. personnel has doubled, rising from 400 to more than 800 per week.

*Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, recently acknowledged that sectarian violence has replaced the insurgency as the single biggest threat to Iraq.

*In the past two months, 6,000 Iraqis died, more than in the first year of the war.

*Last week, electricity output averaged 2.4 hours per day in Baghdad and 10.4 hours nationwide -- 7 percent less than in the same period in 2005.

*A Sept. 27 World Public Opinion poll indicated that 91 percent of Iraqi Sunnis and 74 percent of Iraqi Shiites want the Iraqi government to ask U.S.-led forces to withdraw within a year. Ninety-seven percent of Sunnis and 82 percent of Shiites said that the U.S. military presence is "provoking more conflict than it is preventing." And Iraqi support for attacks against U.S.-led forces has increased sharply over the past few months, from 47 percent to 61 percent.

Now, Karl Rove may call me a defeatist, but can anyone living in the real world deny that these statistics are heading in the wrong direction? Yet despite this bleak record of performance, the president continues to stand by his team of failed architects, preferring to prop them up instead of demanding accountability.

Democrats are fighting a war on two fronts: One is combating the spin and intimidation that defines this administration. The other is fighting to change course, to do things better, to substitute smart, disciplined strategy for dogma and denial in Iraq.

That's not defeatism. That's our duty.

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