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BY RANDY GRIFFITH

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Barack Obama has the "window of opportunity" new presidents have used to advance initiatives without major opposition, U.S. Rep. John Murtha told a political science class.

"His may be longer than others because he has been so frank about what needs to be done," Murtha, a Johnstown Democrat, said from the video screen in Ray Wrabley's American presidency class at Pitt-Johnstown.

Speaking from Washington by teleconference, the 19-term congressman said Obama can use the legislature's cooperative spirit and Democratic majority to move forward on economic stimulus, scale down involvement in Iraq and put more troops in Afghanistan.

But the honeymoon won't last forever, Murtha said, predicting the new president will have to work with fellow Democrats who don't always agree with his ideas.

"I represent a very conservative district," Murtha said. "His view on gun control and abortion is different from mine. That doesn't mean I won't work with him in other areas."

Student Bryce Troyan of Richland Township asked if cooperation between Obama and Congress could bring troops home from Iraq sooner, but Murtha warned, "We have a lot of work to do to prepare (Iraq's government) to take over."

Obama is off to a good start by stressing a foreign policy of diplomacy, Murtha said.

"We can't solve these problems militarily," Murtha said. "It has to be done

with better diplomacy.”

Obama should learn from Bush’s mistakes by building his foreign policy around a strong secretary of state with Hillary Clinton, instead of relying on the secretary of defense.

Military intervention should be done in cooperation with allies, he added.

Student John Hartman said he was concerned about Hillary Clinton’s campaign position against talking with enemies without preconditions. Obama supports open dialogue.

“Isn’t that a conflict of interest?” Hartman asked.

“I don’t know if any of us knows the answer of what may happen,” Murtha said. President George W. Bush’s supporters criticized House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s 2007 meetings with Syrian leaders, but the administration has since opened its own communications with Syria.

Murtha said he hopes Obama’s goal of bipartisan cooperation can help end a vindictiveness he has seen develop between the two parties.

“We have to get over this partisanship that’s so bitter,” Murtha said. “It used to be, we had policy disagreements. In the past 10 years, it has been so bitter; a bitterness that goes on beyond the end of the day. That’s not the way it should be. The public understands it should be less vindictive.”