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For Immediate Release

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Greensburg, PA - U.S. Congressman John P. Murtha today delivered the commencement address to the graduating class of Seton Hill University. The prepared text used as the basis of his speech follows.

When I was a young boy, my great grandmother said to me, "you were put on this earth to make a difference". I have never forgotten these words. Some of you will go on from here to become doctors, teachers, biologists, and some of you will go on to become politicians and community leaders. No matter what path you take in life, remember that each one of you can make a difference.

I am sure most of you know of the position I took against this Administration's war policies in Iraq. This decision did not come to me easily, nor did it happen over night. Indeed, this decision was one of the hardest I have ever made, yet I knew in my heart and in my gut that I had to speak out. I became almost haunted by the words of my grandmother, "one person can make a difference". With every day that passed with the facts not matching the rhetoric, with claims of progress and victory contradicting the real conditions on the ground, I grew more and more certain that my time had come to make a difference.

I had to speak out because I believed our men and women in uniform had done everything they could militarily in Iraq, and that the true victory would have to be scored politically by the Iraqis themselves. I spoke out because the war was seriously depleting our financial resources and tragically taking the lives of so many. I spoke out because I believed the future of our military and of our great nation was at stake. I spoke out because the dissenting message, no matter the good intent, had been smothered and ridiculed for too long.

It was time to make a difference, it was time to demand a change of direction in Iraq.

It has been nearly 6 months since I went public with my resolution to re-deploy from Iraq. Since then, we have lost more than 356 American lives in Iraq. Nearly 20,000 of our fellow Americans have been wounded in this war, and over 2,400 have been killed. Scores of Iraqis are dieing every day in sectarian related executions and in suicide bombings. One thousand Iraqis died just last month. Our troops are indeed caught in the middle of a civil war.

There are those who say we can not re-deploy our forces from Iraq. We must stay. Yet there continues to be no plan for progress and no plan for success. I am convinced that our military presence in Iraq is more of the problem instead of the solution and we must re-deploy.

More and more of the American public agrees with me every day, including many of the best and brightest in our military. They tell me that I kicked open the door for honest dialogue. They tell me I have given a voice to the voiceless. They tell me I must keep saying what I have been saying. Marin Luther King, Jr. said, "our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Whether you agree with my position on the war in Iraq or not, the point I would like to leave you with here today is that there will be a time in your lives that you will be called upon to make a difference. There will be times when you will be confronted with a choice to speak truth to power, or to remain silent on things that really matter. Remember then the words of my great grandmother and get out there and make a difference.