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By Terri T. Johnson

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U.S. Rep. John P. Murtha is, and always has been, a staunch Democrat.

However, when it comes to solving the plethora of problems confronting the country and the world, bipartisanship is the only answer, Murtha told an early Monday morning American national government class at Washington & Jefferson College.

The congressman from Johnstown spoke for more than an hour via video conference with the 30 or so freshmen and sophomores in Joseph DiSarro's political science class.

After a brief visual tour of his Washington, D.C., office and introductions to his aides, Murtha spoke candidly about his role after 35 years in Congress.

The recently passed stimulus package was a major topic, both from Murtha and in questions posed by the students.

The Western Pennsylvania district he represents has fared better than other regions in the country, Murtha said, adding after the loss of steel jobs in the past decades, the area diversified. But job retention is essential as is the creation of new jobs. He cited his role as a member of the Appropriations Committee and its allocation of \$34 billion in education funds.

"But I don't know what will happen when you get out of college," he told the students. When Murtha, 76, graduated from high school, he said many of his friends obtained jobs without further education that sustained them until retirement. He attended W&J and worked the overnight shift at a service station before joining the U.S Marine Corps. That's why he makes the military a high priority.

When questioned about the recently ordered 17,000 additional troop build-up in Afghanistan by President Barack Obama, Murtha said he's "worried" that the U.S. feels it can only solve matters militarily. He recommends diplomacy and less military aid.

When asked about other areas of threat, Murtha said the United States would have a difficult time deploying additional troops into another region.

"Our military is worn out and tired," he said. Suicides, divorces and homicides among returning veterans deployed, often numerous times to war zones are increasing, Murtha told the students.

As for a short-term threat, Murtha referenced Pakistan and the nuclear potential of Iran and the Koreans.

Long-term, he said, the United States must look to the competitive nature of China, especially involving dependence on foreign oil.

Health care was another topic, including providing the returning veterans with adequate psychological counseling as well as physical rehabilitation.

Once again, Murtha stressed the need for bipartianship.

"There are 44 million Americans without health care, and it's probably more now," he said. With more people losing their jobs and homes to foreclosures, more also are losing health insurance.

"The first thing is to get people back to work," he again stressed. "And to get the banks to lend money."

As to how to achieve bipartianship, Murtha said there are no easy answers to uniting Democrats and Republicans. He's disgruntled with the younger representatives who, he said, conduct personal attacks on each other.

As for his fellow Democrat, Obama, Murtha said, "He inherited monumental problems," and he hopes the world judges the man on what he does and not that he is the first black to serve in the Oval Office.

As for tonight's State of the Union Address, Murtha will be there, clapping at the appropriate times.

However, he told the students, "I don't get too excited about the State of the Union Address."