

Murtha Urges Speedy Return of Iraq Troops

### **Crowd Overflows Auditorium to Hear Representative Speak, Answer Questions Sunday**

**By Diana Samuels**

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The U.S. has spent too much on the war in Iraq and has ruined its international credibility; now it should withdraw its troops, Rep. John Murtha (D-PA) told local residents at a town hall meeting with Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) on Sunday.

"I'm not saying there's going to be complete peace when we leave," Murtha said. "But there's a civil war and the only people who can solve it are Iraqis."

The crowd of about 500 gave Murtha standing ovations after his speech and after he answered audience members' questions. There were too many people to fit in McCormick Auditorium at Norris University Center, so about 100 watched the speech on a live video feed in the Purdue Room, said Leslie Combs, district director for Schakowsky.

Schakowsky, who has also spoken in favor of withdrawing troops, invited Murtha to speak in her district, Combs said. Northwestern was chosen as the venue for the town hall meeting because it was a local facility that fit the size needed and because community members knew where Norris was, Combs said.

Schakowsky called Murtha the "most credible voice in our country to bring our troops home and to end this war in Iraq."

Murtha introduced a House resolution in Nov. 2005 that called for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. It was defeated by a 403-3 vote.

In his speech, Murtha criticized the Bush administration's methods in the war in Iraq, saying the U.S. went to war without a threat to national security, without enough troops to constitute an overwhelming force and without an exit strategy. He told stories about visiting injured soldiers in hospitals, and he and Schakowsky cited statistics about the cost of the war - \$8 billion a month, or \$3,100 a second, Schakowsky said.

"Our country is going to be a long time in overcoming this," Murtha said. "Our credibility has been destroyed."

"We have diverted ourselves away" from the more important issue of battling terrorism, Murtha said. News organizations are no longer calling the war a "War on Terror" anymore, Murtha said. Instead, they are calling it the "War in Iraq."

"We went into Afghanistan," Murtha said. "That's where the terrorism was, that's who attacked us."

Murtha said he expected the president to announce a "significant" withdrawal, of about 50,000 to 75,000 troops, this fall.

"It won't come about because (the president) wants it to," he said. "It will come about because of the public pressure that's been put on him."

Throughout the event, Murtha emphasized the power of Congress and its constituents, and the importance of the midterm elections this November.

"Don't think that the president of the United States is all-powerful," he said. "He's only as powerful as the people he represents. The public is saying, 'We want to redeploy our troops, the time has come.'"

Audience members praised Murtha's message.

"I think it's so nice to hear someone so nice and straightforward and honest," Oak Park resident Sydney Baiman said. "It's just such a delight."

Evanston resident Benjamin Solomon said he appreciated Murtha's "forthright support for our troops without equivocation."

"As a World War II veteran, I was very moved by John Murtha and his concern for our soldiers," Solomon said.

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