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Liberal Networks Rewarded John Murtha With One Year's Good Press After His Call For Retreat On Iraq

The Making of the Majority Leader, 2006?

For almost precisely one year, the liberal networks have lavished praise and attention on anti-war Congressman John Murtha. Now Murtha is attempting to cash in on that fawning press coverage, asking fellow Democrats to vote Thursday to give Maryland's Steny Hoyer the boot and make him the new House Majority Leader.

Murtha became a media hero back on November 17, 2005 when he demanded retreat without victory in Iraq. ABC, CBS and NBC that night all led by touting Murtha's credentials. "When one Congressman out of 435 members of Congress speaks out against the war in Iraq, it normally wouldn't be news, but it was today because of who he is: Congressman John Murtha, a Vietnam veteran," NBC's Brian Williams extolled. CBS's Bob Schieffer was similarly boosterish: "John Murtha is not a household name, but on military matters, no Democrat in Congress is more influential."

CNN's Bill Schneider awarded Murtha his "Political Play of the Week," likening his call for withdrawal to Walter Cronkite's 1968 anti-Vietnam War commentary. Like many in the media, Schneider rejected criticism of Murtha's current Iraq scheme by playing the Vietnam hero card: "Murtha, who earned two Purple Hearts, a Bronze Star and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, has his own vision of cowardly." He then showed a Murtha ad hominem attack: "I like guys who got five deferments and never been there and send people to war and then don't like to hear suggestions about what needs to be done."

The media bias became even more obvious when another top Democrat, Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman, wrote a November 29 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed saying the troops should stay: "What a colossal mistake it would be for America's bipartisan political leadership to choose this moment in history to lose its will and, in the famous phrase, to seize defeat from the jaws of the coming victory." The same networks that led with Murtha's defeatist rhetoric two weeks earlier said nothing about Lieberman.

Since then, Murtha has gotten a free ride from the press, while reporters have taken it upon themselves to scold any

anti-Murtha critics. ABC's John Donovan, who fawned over Murtha in a January 2 *Nightline* interview, contended that by disagreeing with Murtha, "the White House and its supporters set out to immediately smear Murtha's standing as an American." On June 18, after Karl Rove criticized Murtha and John Kerry's defeatism, CBS's Schieffer on *Face the Nation* complained to GOP Senator Lindsey Graham: "He's talking about two men who were wounded in combat when he says that. Is that really fair?"

On May 17, Murtha convened a press conference to claim U.S. Marines in Haditha had "killed civilians in cold blood." Instead of pressing him to justify the inflammatory charge, the networks followed Murtha's cue and began an anti-military feeding frenzy. Over the next three weeks, ABC, CBS and NBC aired 99 stories suggesting U.S. military misconduct. ABC *Nightline* host Terry Moran

darkly suggested a comparison to the notorious My Lai massacre: "Will Haditha be the My Lai of the Middle East?"

Just five days after his "killed in cold blood" smear, Katie Couric (then with NBC) was happy to laud Murtha for being honored by the Kennedy family as a "Profile in Courage." Murtha, Couric chirped, "definitely" fit the definition of courage, which she read to her *Today* audience: "Mental or moral strength enabling one to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty firmly or resolutely."

This Monday, Couric hosted Murtha on her *CBS Evening News*. Reminding Murtha of his call for retreat, Couric set him up as a victim: "There was hell to pay, though, Congressman, for what you said. You were called a 'defeatocrat, a 'liberal turncoat.'" But every step of the way, Couric and the rest of the liberal media were defending and admiring Murtha's cut-and-run prescription. If he wins a top House job on Thursday, Murtha should be sure to thank the media for their ardent support. — Rich Noyes

The liberal networks have spent the past year adoring John Murtha and scolding critics of his cut-and-run prescription for Iraq.

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; **Brent Baker**, **Rich Noyes**, **Tim Graham**, Editors; **Geoffrey Dickens**, **Brad Wilmoth**, **Megan McCormack**, **Mike Rule**, **Scott Whitlock** and **Justin McCarthy**, Media Analysts; **Michelle Humphrey**, Research Associate; **Michael Chapman**, Director of Communications. Sign up for daily *CyberAlerts* at www.mrc.org.