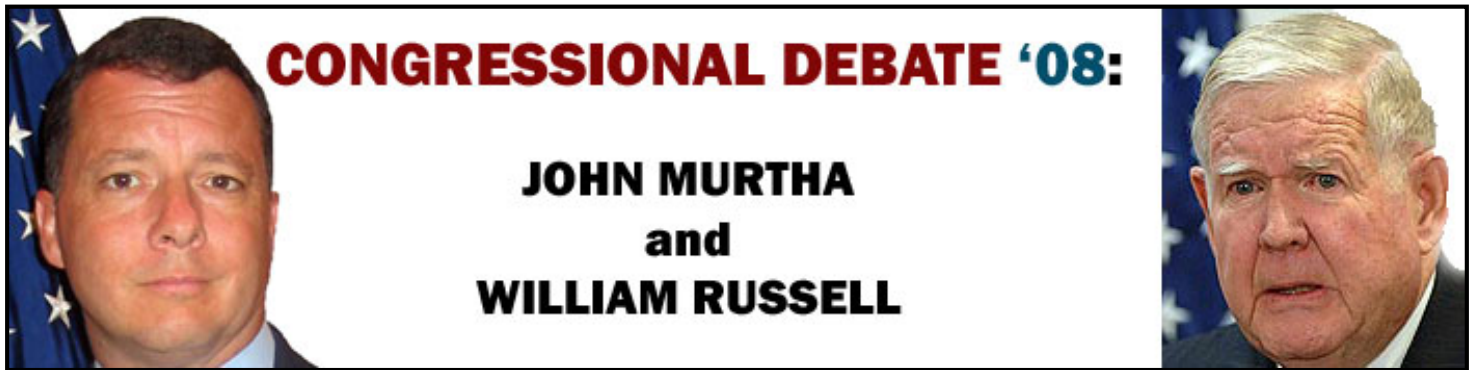


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## THE MURTHA-RUSSELL DEBATE



[Transcript](#) by Rusty Howell

### THE MURTHA-RUSSELL DEBATE | Uniontown, Pennsylvania | October 9, 2008

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to Uniontown in Pennsylvania's 12th Congressional District for the first and only scheduled debate between Congressman John Murtha, a Democrat; and retired Army Lieutenant Colonel Bill Russell, a Republican. Both men are from Johnstown.

I'm Brit Brokaw of the *Uniontown Tribune* and I will be moderating tonight's debate. I will be asking each one of these gentlemen the same questions so that they may express their views on issues facing the 12th District, the nation, and the world. In the spirit of fairness I will allow each man to respond first on alternating questions.

We'll begin the debate with the financial industry and the national economy.

**Brit:** Congressman Murtha, with the numbers on Wall Street continuing to decline despite the injection of nearly \$900 billion by Congress last week, what do you see as the solution to our economic problems?

**Rep. Murtha:** This is the biggest crisis I have witnessed since being elected in 1971.

I'm not sure if this latest bailout is going to have the effect we hope it will have.

I don't know what this stems from; there are all kinds of economists talking about different things.

The stock market could rebound if measures are implemented by the Treasury Department.

We passed what we thought was a package that would loosen the credit. What more we have to do, I don't know.

One solution is to reduce the budget deficit. I vote against most tax cuts.

There are many issues that will require the two parties to come together. It used to be that you would argue in the daytime, disagree with the policy, but in the evening you liked people.

**Brit:** Thank you Congressman Murtha. Colonel Russell, the same question, the financial industry and the national economy. With the numbers on Wall Street continuing to decline despite the injection of nearly \$900 billion by Congress last week, what do you see as the solution to our economic problems?

**Col. Russell:** Intervention of government into business, has caused the financial crisis, and the two entities should be held accountable, not the American taxpayer.

When you have government/business intervention in the private sector it seems to develop the worst behavior on both parts-politicians and CEO's (chief executive officers). I'd like to see Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae go away and move all of those functions into the private sector where they belong, where good business practices and principles will take over and drive sound business decisions both on the part of corporations and individuals.

The recent bailout is business as usual by the Washington establishment, and does nothing to correct the problem that led to the crisis.

Mortgage brokers, who collect fees for writing new mortgages, are already re-advertising and renegotiating mortgages using the same unsound practices that created this crisis in the first place. So the taxpayer is being asked to fill in one \$700 billion hole while government mandates are already digging another.

Common sense would call for a change in regulations to allow and encourage private capital into the market; the determination of the cause of the crisis; a halt to the practice of government-mandated unsound mortgage brokering; the accountability and prosecution of those that betrayed the public trust; the requirement that those that created the crisis pay for their own insurance and the immediate audit of the failed banks.

Unfortunately, the bailout bill does none of those things and the American taxpayer will once again foot the bill.

**Brit:** Thank you Colonel Russell. Now let's turn to the issue of energy independence. We are sending \$700 billion a year to foreign countries to purchase the oil we need to fuel our economy. Colonel Russell, what would you do as a member of Congress to promote domestic sources of power and create local jobs that would directly impact our area?

**Col. Russell:** As the chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, Congressman Murtha has never in the past seized the opportunity to develop the area's coal and natural gas reserves that could lead toward energy independence and national and economic security.

We have technology to produce coal to liquid fuel which has been around since the the 1940's; as well as the technology to produce clean coal for electrical power and energy consumption. We have enough coal in the U.S. to produce a million barrels of liquid fuel that would be used in cars, airplanes and trucks every single day for the next 20,000 years; we are the Saudi Arabia of coal and we have key coal deposits in this area.

It is the role of the federal government to provide for the national security and the development of domestic sources of energy is a national security priority. By investing in the development of our natural resources, this would lead to freedom from Middle East politics and OPEC and spur the local and national economy.

Because of the need for premium jet fuel by the U.S. Air Force, coal to ethanol to kerosene technology would produce the needed energy source that could also be used throughout the airline industry.

The development by private industry has been blocked by federal regulations.

That's why we have not built a new nuclear plant in 30 years, and that's why we need to develop the coal to energy industry.

**Brit:** Thank you Colonel Russell. Congressman Murtha, we are sending \$700 billion a year to foreign countries to purchase the oil we need to fuel our economy. What would you do as a member of Congress to promote domestic sources of power and create local jobs that would directly impact our area?

**Rep. Murtha:** As the local area's federal representative, I will continue to assist with sewerage, water and highway infrastructure to draw business to the region.

I'm trying to attract the defense industry to this area all the time. I never stop working that issue.

We've been pretty successful.

With the aging population of the area, I continue to help hospitals through federal funding, along with providing funding for National Guard facilities.

We're trying to make sure we get our share of federal money for the taxpayers.

It is frustrating that southwestern Pennsylvania is lagging behind other areas in the state in attracting business.

Everytime we do something it doesn't have the impact we would like to see. We lose jobs that we shouldn't have lost and that's part of the problem.

I am concerned that Sony is looking to relocate to Mexico, which will translate into another economic blow to the region.

But the economy may be on the upswing, with the furtherance of clean coal technology.

Legislation, supported by me and some West Virginia representatives, has been introduced for consideration.

We have to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. I'm also a proponent of safe drilling for oil. We'll eventually burn coal and that may be our

salvation.

**Brit:** Thank you Congressman Murtha. Since national security has been mentioned, let's now turn our attention to the war in Iraq. Congressman Murtha, how would you assess the situation in Iraq and what do you see there for the future?

**Rep. Murtha:** I oppose the war in Iraq, but I remain a staunch supporter of the soldiers serving on the battlefield.

Nobody has done more to make sure the troops had what they needed, not only in combat, but when they come home.

The soldiers and Marines along with their families are overextended with long and multiple deployments.

I voted to go into Iraq, in hindsight, the decision was my biggest mistake.

They weren't a threat to our national security.

A timeline for troop withdrawal is important to the U.S. and Iraq.

We need to force the Iraqi's to take control; to take responsibility for this, when we do it for them, there is no incentive.

When you have timelines, they then have the incentive to do it themselves.

I believe the Iraqi's should be paying a fair share of the war expenses, but they have refused.

They have a \$79 billion surplus, we have a deficit, this thing has been bungled since the start.

Victory in Iraq will take place when the citizens are overseeing their own destiny. However, it will not be without conflict, because of the differing factions.

They may be fighting among themselves, but that is something we can't solve, it is very fragile at this time.

There has been some progress.

Tactics have changed, we're not breaking down doors the way we were before and our intelligence is better and the Iraqi's are doing better for themselves, so it's time for us to get out.

**Brit:** Thank you, Congressman Murtha. Colonel Russell, the same question for you. How would you assess the situation in Iraq and what do you see there for the future?

**Colonel Russell:** I acknowledge that the war in Iraq is costly, but it is a small price to pay for keeping America safe.

When you look at fighting the war here on our own streets, it would be far, far higher. I think 9/11 proved that.

As for a timetable for withdrawal, an exit strategy must be event driven.

If a date is set the enemy will just wait you out.

It is difficult to rebuild a country that has lived under a totalitarian regime for more than 30 years that failed to provide adequate water and sewerage systems, highways, electrical service, or an economy that would allow citizens to maintain homes.

Once you topple a regime like this you have a complete dearth. We are starting to grow a parliament; civil and administrative functions are beginning to provide the care for the people and allow them to grow an economy. It's going to take some time.

We're probably going to have some form of representation there to provide stability and particularly given the threats from Iran and other insurgent movements that crop up in the area, we're going to be there long-term. But the level of violence and soldiers' deaths will come down.

**Brit:** Thank you, Colonel Russell. While we are on the subject of Iraq, recently, U.S Marine Lance Corporal Justin Sharratt of Canonsburg filed a federal lawsuit against Congressman Murtha, alleging that the congressman had denied him of his constitutional rights of the presumption of innocence and of due process. The complaint's allegations stem from Murtha's public statements in 2006, prior to any trial. It involved an incident in Haditha, Iraq, and Murtha stated that "they" (Sharratt and his squad members) had "killed innocent civilians in cold blood". Of the eight squad members, Sharratt and six others have since been exonerated by a military court. An eighth Marine is awaiting trial.

Colonel Russell, do you have a comment you would like to make on this lawsuit?

**Colonel Russell:** Yes, I support Justin Sharratt and believe that this lawsuit is both viable and understandable.

**Brit:** Thank you, Colonel Russell. Congressman Murtha, the same question for you. Recently, U.S Marine Lance Corporal Justin Sharratt of Canonsburg filed a federal lawsuit against you, alleging that you had denied him of his constitutional rights of the presumption of innocence and of due process. The complaint's allegations stem from your public statements in 2006, prior to any trial. It involved an incident in Haditha, Iraq, and you stated that "they" (Sharratt and his squad members) had "killed innocent civilians in cold blood". Of the eight squad members, Sharratt and six others have since been exonerated by a military court. An eighth Marine is awaiting trial.

Congressman Murtha, do you have a comment you would like to make on this lawsuit?

**Rep. Murtha:** I decline to comment on the lawsuit.

Are the trials still going on?<sup>1</sup>

24 people were killed and no weapons were found at the Haditha site, which to me indicates there was no security threat to the Marine unit.

Since I spoke out, the procedures have been changed substantially. I had a number of criticisms about what was going on in Iraq at the time.

We were breaking down doors and we shouldn't be. If we are going to win this battle in Iraq, we're going to have to win the hearts and minds of the people.

**Brit:** Thank you, Congressman Murtha.

That concludes the question segment of the debate. We do have enough time left for brief closing statements. A coin was tossed prior to the debate tonight and Congressman Murtha will give his closing statement first. Congressman Murtha.

**Rep. Murtha:** Thank you for your support and help as I remain focused on the values and issues most important to you.

Today, our nation faces many challenges. Here at home, we must promote economic growth, strengthen America's infrastructure, improve access to health care, protect Social Security, and bring fiscal sanity back to the federal budget.

We must end the war in Iraq, rebuild our military, restore our international credibility, and ensure that our veterans have the health care and resources they rightfully deserve.

I look forward to working with you to address these challenges.<sup>2</sup>

**Brit:** Thank you, Congressman Murtha. Colonel Russell, your closing statement, please.

Colonel Russell: Thank you, Brit. Thank you ladies and gentleman for your presence here tonight and also to all of you watching at home. In addition to my remarks during this debate, in closing, I believe as a conservative that the family is paramount to supporting a free society and that the rights to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, as well as the right to self-defense, are endowed by the Creator.

Our nation has an obligation to secure and enforce its borders and we are a people who are identified by a single language - the English language and I support making that our official language.

In terms of education, I believe parents have the right to select the correct education for their children without financial regulatory penalties and I believe children should be schooled in the knowledge that we are an exceptional nation.

**Brit:** Thank you Colonel Russell. Ladies and gentleman and viewers at home, that concludes our debate this evening. We thank you for your attention and remind you that the election is less than four weeks away on November 4th. So don't forget to vote. See you at the polls. Goodnight from Uniontown.

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*Disclaimer:* In reality, this debate has never occurred, nor is a debate likely to take place before the election. The moderator, Brit Brokaw, is a completely fictitious character. However, the statements (with two footnoted exceptions) made by both Murtha and Russell are almost verbatim reproductions of statements attributed to them in interviews conducted by the editorial board of the Uniontown *Herald-Standard*. Links to the actual interviews and the footnoted exceptions are listed below.

[footnote 1](#) Exchange between Jason Mattera and John Murtha in the Capitol building.

[footnote 2](#) Welcome statement on homepage of Murtha for Congress campaign website.

Link to [Murtha interview](#)

Link to [Russell interview](#)

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