

Gary Murrell's responses to questions posed by the Kitsap Sun newspaper.

Q: Has the troop surge in Iraq been a success, and should the U.S. continue to deploy a higher number of military personnel to Iraq to serve the goals of the surge? :

A: As even top military leaders understand, there will be no successful military solution in Iraq. The escalation of the war in and occupation of Iraq has been as catastrophic a policy as the original decision by Congress, including Norm Dicks, to abdicate its constitutional duties by giving the Bush administration a blank check to wage a preventive, and thus illegal, war. As a Vietnam Era vet I understand, as someone who has not served in the military never will, the awesome responsibility that a vote for war entails. By the summer of 2008, when several thousand troops might be withdrawn from Iraq, the United States will still have, at 140,000, more troops than when the escalation began - - supplemented by 180,000 Blackwater-type mercenaries. While the number of U.S. troop deaths have diminished during the escalation, in part because the United States is paying 70,000 Sunni militias a monthly salary with the stipulation that they do not kill U. S. troops, we still see, on a sickeningly regular basis, two American deaths here and three deaths there day after day and every day dozens of Iraqis are killed and wounded. According to most independent analysis, one million Iraqis have been killed in the last five years and four million more are displaced. Electricity is delivered sporadically, oil output is down from even the corrupt Saddam years and of the oil that is being pumped, one-third is siphoned off by criminal elements. The U. S. invasion of Iraq has emboldened and strengthened Iran, created terrorists where none existed before and sent the Middle East into an arms race. The wars and occupations are doing to the United States what two world wars did for Britain; driving us into a recession and accumulating massive debt, draining the treasury, wrecking the constitution and destroying our republican form of government. We know from history that republics which embark on the course of empire do not long remain republics.

Q: At what point should the U.S. begin withdrawing more troops from Iraq? :

A: The United States should immediately begin withdrawing troops from both Iraq and Afghanistan. One of my first actions as a member of congress will be to join with any other member who will work to pass legislation to begin withdrawing U. S. troops within 180 days. I would not vote for any more funding for either occupation that is not tied to the immediate withdrawal of U. S. troops. We must not have permanent military bases in either country. But we can not stop there. We must bring our troops home from around the world. We must close American prison camps around the world. Immediately. We must close all foreign military bases. We must not allow U. S. troops to ever again be deployed around the globe without a declaration of war by congress. We must take the advice of George Washington and Dwight Eisenhower to rid ourselves of entangling alliances such as NATO and other military treaties that distort and poison our republican form of government.

Q: How should the U.S. pursue its interests in Afghanistan from this point forward? :

A: Like Iraq, there is no U. S. military solution to the destruction we have created in Afghanistan. As I commented in a previous question, the U. S. should immediately withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. And, like Iraq, since the United States destroyed the country, we have a responsibility to fund reconstruction and to assist the United Nations in the formation of a peace-keeping force drawn from countries in the region.

Q: What steps should the federal government take to reduce energy use, find new energy sources, and address the global warming issue? :

A: A good start at addressing energy issues and global climate change, which threatens the world's poor most directly and will reinforce geopolitical inequality and conflict, would be for the United States to finally adopt a national energy policy. Certainly the congress should repeal the tax breaks for the oil companies and if those companies do not invest their windfall profits in developing alternative energy sources, the congress should institute a windfall profits tax. We must also embark on a massive program to develop alternative energy sources - - solar, wind, wave and geothermal through an aggressive policy of tax incentives for investment in and development of those industries. We should, at least, see a solar panel on every house and building in the United States within the next ten years. While we work to develop alternative energy sources the very last thing we should wish for, as Mike Davis warned in a recent article, "(under the false slogan of 'energy independence') is new frontiers in hydrocarbon production that advance 'humankind's ability to accelerate global warming' and slow the urgent transition to 'non-carbon . . . energy cycles.'" Politicians who call for more oil drilling in the United States and off our coasts are offering more of the same policies that have led us to this precarious moment, the Anthropocene Era - - an Earth epoch defined by the emergence of urban-industrial society as a geological force - - in world

climatological history.

Q: What, if anything, should the federal government do in the short term to reduce gas prices? :

A: There is very little that congress can do in the short term to bring gas prices down. Repealing the Enron exemption on speculators would bring some relief but until we have a national energy policy, one that encourages the development of alternative energy sources, we will remain dependent on imported oil. Although very late, we need to invest in the development of cars and public transportation that do not rely on oil-based engines. We should reduce speeds on freeways to 55 mph.

Q: The U.S. public debt in 2000 was \$5.67 trillion. The debt is now more than \$9.5 trillion, and the federal budget deficit this year is about \$400 billion. Why is this so? Are you alarmed by this; and what, if anything, should be done about it? :

A: The Bush administration and a complicit congress have made massive cuts to government revenue and squandered the surplus left by the Clinton administration by slashing taxes for the rich and miring the United States in a three trillion dollar illegal war and occupation in Iraq. We must end wars, occupations, and the attachment to empire which is bankrupting our republic, bring military forces home from around the world and reorient government so that it is focused on measures directed to the general welfare and away from welfare for generals. We must cut the bloated military budget by at least 50 percent, stop the Star-Wars system debacle and development of other wasteful weapons designed for 20th century war in a 21st century world. We have to end tax loopholes for corporations and the rich and re-institute a truly progressive income tax.

Q: Some say Congressional earmarks — often labeled "pork" — are a reason that federal budget problems exist. Do you agree with that assessment? Even if earmarks are not a major driver of the budget deficit, should the Congressional appropriations process be reformed to either limit earmarks or require requested projects undergo some kind of independent review? :

A: The earmark system has corrupted the congress. Certainly it appears that members of congress trade government contracts for campaign contributions. Congressman Dicks, rated number 10 of 435 members of congress for putting earmarks in the budget, has taken close to \$500,000 in campaign contributions in the last six years from military contractors for whom he has put earmarks in the budget. Some sunlight has been brought to the system, but it is still mired in secrecy which must end. Congress must bring the entire earmark system into the light. No member of congress should ever take campaign contributions from companies for whom he or she has put earmarks in the budget. We must adopt public financing of campaigns to remove this unseemly connection between earmarks and lobbyists and campaign contributions. The earmark system itself isn't inherently corrupt. As a member of congress I would try to put earmarks in the budget for development in the 6th District but I would focus on restoring infrastructure, building a mass public transportation system and retooling military industries to keep family wage jobs by financing programs developed for the people rather than pouring our hard-earned tax dollars down the rat-hole of weapons designed to kill people around the world. I will never take campaign contributions from companies for which I have put an earmark in the budget. I will never force a government agency to sign a contract with a company for an item that they don't want such as Norm Dicks did with his "boat to nowhere."

Q: What local projects would you like to secure more federal funding for? :

A: A healthy environment equals a healthy economy. I will focus most forcefully on projects for the 6th District that will address regional transportation issues and revitalize economically hard-hit communities. We must devise a system of public transportation - - trains and buses at least - - powered by our most abundant resource, hydro-generated electricity. We must wean ourselves from too close dependence on the military-industrial complex of which President Eisenhower warned. Instead of millions of dollars spent on weapons, we should turn the genius our military industries to innovations for re-building infrastructure and encourage our fabulous scientific minds to developing alternative energy sources for the Northwest and the world. We should make the Pacific Northwest the leader in alternative energy in the United States.

Q: Now that we have several years of experience with the federal No Child Left Behind Act, what changes would you propose to the act. Would you vote to continue it, amend it, or end it? :

A: The No Child Left Behind Act is doing incredible damage to children. I would vote to end it. The failures are too numerous for an exhaustive list but among the major failures are: disappointing results, failing schools, lack of

quality teachers, narrowing the curriculum, lowering standards, ignoring children, bad tests, fake results, factory style learning and loss of the best teachers. The program should be ended.

Q: How should the federal government respond to regional transportation issues? :

A: As I said in a previous response, we must develop a regional, innovative mass transit system of electric trains and buses. It should be fast, frequent, and user friendly. We must make it easy and enjoyable for commuters to reach their destinations by public transportation. Citizens in Grays Harbor County on the coast or communities on the Olympic Peninsula should be able to travel by public transportation to Olympia where they can easily access North/South commuter lines that serve what is now an exclusive automobile corridor along I-5. We have to move away from dependence on automobiles to a publicly financed, world-class system of public transportation.

Q: Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire has joined other governors in calling on the federal government to fund major infrastructure projects as part of the second wave of economic stimulus. Do you support such a move? Why? :

A: I do support the move by Governor Gregoire calling on the federal government to fund infrastructure projects but not just for the Pacific Northwest. As a member of congress I will sponsor or support legislation creating a Works Green Administration, modeled on the New Deal Works Progress Administration, as proposed by Congressman Dennis Kucinich. We must begin a massive, country-wide program to restore infrastructure and transform our communities, through living-wage jobs, directed at installing alternative energy projects directed at homes, businesses and government.

Q: What are three noteworthy mistakes of Congress over the past 10 years? :

A: 1. Vitiating the separation of powers and diminishing the inherent Constitutional powers of congress by giving the Bush administration war-making powers which belong only to Congress. The war in and occupation of Iraq has been a catastrophic blunder. As many have said before me, the worst foreign policy decision in the history of the United States. Congress, including Norm Dicks who voted for the war and for every piece of funding legislation, is no less to blame than the executive branch. 2. Savaging the Bill of Rights. From Patriot Acts I and II and the Military Commissions Act to the Homegrown Terrorism Act, congress has severely, if not permanently damaged the Bill of Rights. As a member of congress I will move vigorously to restore our constitutional protections. 3. The failure to impeach the most criminal president in the history of the United States and thereby implicating congress and the people of the United States in war crimes.

Q: What are three things Congress has done over the past 10 years that has made a tangible positive difference for a large number of Americans? :

A: 1. At long last, raising the minimum wage. However, congress needs to quit addressing a "minimum" wage and begin working on establishing a "living wage" system. 2. Passing the Ensuring Continued Access to Student Loans Act that will assist students in obtaining loans for college. However, we must end this insane system that saddles graduating students with crushing debt and adopt a system of publicly financed education from pre-school through graduate school - - which includes technical schools. The success of the GI Bill after World War II shows us that the investment in our young people will be paid back many times over throughout their lifetimes. As a former student who is still paying student loans, I understand the effects of a system designed on one's ability to pay rather than one's ability to learn. 3. Adoption of the prescription drug bill. However, the bill is seriously flawed and turned out to be a billion-dollar subsidy for the drug industry. We must adopt a system of single-payer health care. The fact that the congress can not even bring itself to say those words - - single-payer - - is an indication of the unseemly power that the drug and insurance industries hold over our elected officials.