

The Tribune-Democrat



Dispense justice for all | Courts will weigh Murtha's guilt, innocence

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— It will be well after the Nov. 4 election before a lawsuit aimed at U.S. Rep. John Murtha, D-Johnstown, is resolved. Murtha was sued for slander on Sept. 25 in Pittsburgh by a Marine who says the congressman tarnished his reputation with comments about a late 2005 incident in Iraq.

Murtha in May 2006 said Marines had killed innocent people “in cold blood” in the town of Haditha.

Eight military personnel initially were charged for their roles in the incident, and seven have since been cleared of wrongdoing by the military.

“What Murtha did is outrageous, and I am seeking punitive damages,” Noah Geary, a Pittsburgh attorney representing discharged Marine Justin Sharratt of Canonsburg, Washington County, said after filing the suit.

We certainly hope justice is done in this case.

That would mean that if Murtha truly damaged someone's reputation with false accusations, that he face the music in court.

The rules should be no different for public officials than for the rest of us.

We would also hope that the courts – military and civilian – are making every effort to be certain that those who are cleared of wrongdoing deserve that treatment. War means dangerous circumstances, but even in such a setting, crimes against civilians should not be tolerated.

We assume that is the standard being used here.

We also understand that there is a political side to this situation – although Geary said: “There's no political motivation whatsoever. This is purely a legal endeavor.”

Republican challenger William Russell has made Murtha's Haditha comments his rallying cry in attempting to unseat the longtime incumbent.

While the courts ultimately will decide Murtha's fate concerning the lawsuit, voters will have their say in a month.

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