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Harkin Leads Senate in Unanimous Vote Demanding Political Balance on American Forces Radio and Television Service

Democracy Radio and Media Matters for America commend amendment addressing implications of AFRTS broadcast of Rush Limbaugh radio program

June 16, 2004 (Washington, DC) -- Democracy Radio and *Media Matters for America* today lauded Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) and the entire United States Senate for calling on the American Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) to provide political balance in its public affairs programming. On June 14, 2004, Senator Harkin introduced an amendment to the 2004 Department of Defense authorization bill, calling on Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to develop appropriate methods of oversight to ensure the news service presents balanced political programming. The measure passed in the Senate by unanimous consent.

“It’s gratifying that the United States Senate recognizes that AFRTS is failing to provide politically balanced radio programming to its soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines,” said Tom Athans, executive director of Democracy Radio. “Our fighting men and women hold a variety of political beliefs and they deserve to hear diverse programming that more fairly reflects those beliefs.”

For the past seven weeks, *Media Matters for America* has been monitoring *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, resulting in the capture and publication of Limbaugh’s offensive statements regarding the abuse of Iraqi prisoners. In addition to publicizing Limbaugh’s now infamous comments likening the torture of Iraqi prisoners to a “Skull and Bones initiation,” *Media Matters for America* has written two letters to Secretary Rumsfeld requesting that he consider removing the conservative talk radio host from AFRTS.

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A recent survey by Democracy Radio discovered that *The Rush Limbaugh Show* is the sole program of its kind on AFRTS that offers political commentary. AFRTS is a broadcast service funded by public tax dollars and reaches nearly 1 million U.S. troops every day.

“Not only is it unacceptable that our troops are being conditioned with this destructive propaganda, it is abhorrent that the American taxpayer is now paying for the broadcast of a reckless radio host who called the torture of Iraqi prisoners ‘brilliant’ and ‘effective,’” said David Brock, president and CEO of *Media Matters for America*. “The Senate action is a step in the right direction to ensure that Limbaugh’s messaging can be countered with more credible voices reaching out troops.”

Media Matters for America also established an online petition calling for public support for the removal of Limbaugh’s show from AFRTS, which has garnered more than 25,000 signatures to date.

“As an Air Force veteran, it’s amazing to me that the armed forces of the United States would broadcast only conservative talk programming,” said Athans. “The military I remember considered it a duty to be non-partisan. Hopefully this Senate resolution will remind them of that duty.”

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Democracy Radio, Inc. is a non-profit organization dedicated to ending the political imbalance that exists on America's radio airwaves by developing, funding and launching compelling progressive talk radio programming that will compete and succeed within the challenging marketplace of talk radio. Recently, the organization has worked to syndicate talk radio host Ed Schultz, who has the only Progressive show to match Rush Limbaugh's ratings in local markets across the country.

Media Matters for America is a Web-based, not-for-profit, progressive research and information center dedicated to comprehensively monitoring, analyzing, and correcting conservative misinformation in the U.S. media. Media Matters for America is the first organization to systematically monitor the media for conservative misinformation – every day, in real time – in 2004 and beyond.

For more information, log on to <http://www.mediamatters.org>.