

# Opinion: GOP puts party before country

By Paul Begala, Newsweek

As the poet predicted, the center cannot hold. But it's not because both the right and left are tearing at it equally. In an age in which journalism and punditry are terrorized by the demands of false equivalency, it is time to speak a simple truth: conservatives are to blame.

It was not liberals who ended the career of Richard Lugar. The longest-serving Republican in the Senate was unceremoniously dumped last week by the Tea Party fringe. He was not, as the saying goes, caught with a dead girl or a live boy. He was just too doggone moderate, too ready to compromise with the Democrats. Thanks for that, Senator Lugar. Oh, and you're fired.

Today's Republicans are different. They truly have put partisanship ahead of patriotism, as the political scientists Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann document in their book, *Even Worse Than it Looks*. "The GOP," they write, "has become an insurgent outlier in American politics. It is ideologically extreme; scornful of compromise; unmoved by conventional understanding of facts, evidence, and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition."

Careful, guys, they're going to revoke your pundit license. Don't you know you're supposed to say "Both sides are to blame"? Their response is powerful—and as damning of conventional media analysis as it is of the GOP: "'Both sides do it' or 'There is plenty of blame to go around,'" they write, "are the traditional refuges for an American news media intent on proving its lack of bias." They describe the standard calculus of compromise—both sides moving toward the

middle—as “a strategy that is simply untenable when one side is so far out of reach.”

Sure, the Democrats hated George W. Bush. But when he wanted to meet them halfway on education, even Ted Kennedy helped him. And when he wanted to make an impressive commitment to fighting AIDS, TB, and malaria in Africa, Harry Reid and Joe Biden—along with Richard Lugar—made it happen.

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