

An open letter to Mitt Romney By Stanley A. Weiss

WASHINGTON—Dear Governor,

You first became a candidate for public office 18 years ago, when you ran for the United States Senate in Massachusetts against the incumbent, Edward Kennedy. The Senate you aspired to join then included a number of Republicans—from Bob Dole to William Cohen to John Warner—whose foreign policy expertise had earned them the title of "statesman." They were joined by equally impressive Democrats—like Sam Nunn and David Boren—who had helped Presidents of both parties shape America's foreign policy in the second half of the 20th Century.

All of them are gone from Congress now.

If polls are to be believed, the only remaining Senator from either party who readily fits into their company—who earned the title of "statesman" more than two decades ago, and who has played THE central role for the U.S. on arms control the past 30 years—is about to lose his seat today to a candidate that has charitably been described as a "tea party hothead."

The shame of it is not that six-term Indiana Senator Dick Lugar is on the ropes because his lifetime 77 percent rating from the American Conservative Union is now judged as "too liberal" for the increasingly right-leaning politics of Indiana. That is a judgment for the voters to make. The shame of it is that the challenger, state Treasurer Richard Mourdock, has been allowed to turn "statesman" into a dirty word.

He mocks Lugar for his work to build a bipartisan coalition to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorists, stating flatly that "The time for being collegial is past—it's time for confrontation." Never mind that Lugar's "collegiality" is what helped protect Americans from weapons of mass destruction for 36 years, or that Lugar actually served in the U.S. military while Mourdock avoided service and now believes that "some branches of the U.S. military might not be necessary in the 21st Century." In the new Republican party, America's real enemy isn't Tehran or Beijing—it's the Democratic National Committee. We've finally reached a point where the Tea Party believes its own bumper stickers.

As a World War II veteran who wore a Wendell Wilkie button to school and remembers when Republicans like Dwight Eisenhower embodied American foreign policy competence, I was willing to look past it when Sarah Palin called Africa a "country" four years ago. I was willing to look past Minnesota Congresswoman (and Tea Party favorite) Michelle Bachmann's assertion that her first act as President would be to close the U.S. embassy in Iran (which isn't hard, since it's been closed since 1980). I was

willing to give former Senator Rick Santorum a pass for implying that he wanted to go to war with China and bomb Iran; Herman Cain for appearing like he'd never heard of Libya; and Newt Gingrich for envisioning a foreign policy that extended to a colony on the moon.

But slapping Dick Lugar for being a statesman is a step too far.

Governor, now that you are the presumptive Republican nominee, you face a choice. You can either give in to the ignorance and intolerance of tea party purists like Richard Mourdock, who threaten to make the Know-Nothings of the 1840s look like MENSA members by comparison. Or you can engage in a wider, more intelligent discussion of the U.S. role in the world at this crucial moment in history, the way Republican statesmen have in the past. There is no in-between.

If there has ever been a time to look past sharp elbows and public polemics, it is now. China is a dictatorship without a dictator which owns an ever-increasing share of U.S. debt. Russia is a democracy with a dictator undermining personal freedoms while threatening to destabilize Asia's future. India is a democracy without a real decision-maker. Europe is a union without any real unity whose debt threatens a return to depression. Iraq and Afghanistan are wars turning to conflicts, as clashes over succession begin. Meanwhile, the Arab Spring has turned cold without any real stability in Egypt, Libya, or Yemen as Syria burns.

This is a serious time for serious leaders, not people who claim they can see Russia from their porch or whose foreign policy experience extends to eating Belgian waffles at the International House of Pancakes. Americans deserve an honest debate about our role in the world.

For two centuries, people like Dick Lugar have understood the role that discretion and subtlety play in foreign policy. When you've sat across a table actually negotiating the fate of thousands of nuclear warheads, as he has, you're less inclined to throw out sound bites for the evening news, or issue swiping public positions that win big points with bloggers while backing you into a corner.

The Mourdock Doctrine is not about keeping America safe, it's about making America stupid. It's exactly the kind of blind machismo that stumbled America into Iraq, mired us down in Afghanistan and believes the U.S. can go it alone at a time when every major issue facing our country—from organized terrorism to climate change to commodity volatility to global pandemics—can only be solved in cooperation with other nations.

It says a lot about Richard Mourdock that the one ad playing on endless loop in Indiana right now features two clips of President Barack Obama, one with him saying, "I've worked with Republican Senator Dick Lugar to pass a law" and the other, "What I did was reach out to Senator Dick Lugar."

In both cases, the clip ends before any context is provided. But if you play the full video, in the first clip, the President says, "I've worked with Republican Senator Dick Lugar to pass a law that will secure and destroy some of the world's deadliest, unguarded weapons." In the second, Obama says, "What I did was reach out to Senator Dick Lugar, a Republican, to help lock down loose nuclear weapons."

Governor, before people like Dick Lugar came along, American schoolchildren practiced putting their heads under desks. Don't side with the people who now want us to put our heads in the sand.

The author is Founding Chairman of Business Executives for National Security, a nonpartisan organization based in Washington, DC. This is a personal comment.

Update from the LA Times By Michael A. Memoli

May 9, 2012, 3:15 a.m.

The defeat of Sen. Dick Lugar in his bid for a seventh term in Indiana has given Democrats new hope of holding on to their narrow majority in the Senate.

The result could also play out in the race for president, fueling the narrative of an Obama campaign running as much against the tea party-infused Republican Congress as it is against Mitt Romney.

Within an hour of Richard Mourdock being declared the winner, the White House released a statement from President Obama hailing Lugar's "distinguished service."

"While Dick and I didn't always agree on everything, I found during my time in the Senate that he was often willing to reach across the aisle and get things done," Obama said.

He and Lugar worked together during Obama's brief time in the Senate on nuclear proliferation. Lugar was then chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Obama a rookie member.

"Senator Lugar comes from a tradition of strong, bipartisan leadership on national security that helped us prevail in the Cold War and sustain American leadership ever since," Obama added.

Also quick to praise Lugar was his long-time colleague, Vice President Joe Biden.

"The Senate lost a brilliant strategic mind, a man with absolute integrity. He will be missed," Biden said in a statement tweeted by his office Tuesday night. The two also spoke by phone.

On the campaign trail, Biden's campaign stump speech often includes a declaration that, "This isn't your father's Republican Party." It's part of a refrain that highlights what the campaign believes is a hard-right turn by the GOP, and its stubborn opposition to every administration proposal.

In his concession statement, Lugar showed no ill will to his Republican foe. He said he hoped Mourdock would ultimately win the general election, and that Romney would take back the White House for the GOP.

He also acknowledged that his support for Obama initiatives like the auto rescue, the START Treaty, and both of his Supreme Court nominees, hurt him. And he made clear his displeasure with the path his party, and the Democrats as well, have taken in recent years.

"Unfortunately, we have an increasing number of legislators in both parties who have adopted an unrelenting partisan viewpoint," Lugar said. The outside groups that helped defeat Lugar "have worked to make it as difficult as possible for a legislator of either party to hold independent views or engage in constructive compromise," he added.

"If that attitude prevails in American politics, our government will remain mired in the dysfunction we have witnessed during the last several years. And I believe that if this attitude expands in the Republican Party, we will be relegated to minority status. Parties don't succeed for long if they stop appealing to voters who may disagree with them on some issues," he said.

Romney issued no statement on Lugar's defeat. Other Republicans had chosen sides in the primary, and some were quick to rally behind Mourdock, including potential VP pick Marco Rubio.

It's unclear if the Obama campaign will get significant mileage, if any, from using the Lugar loss to tag Romney as the standard bearer for a party that had steered beyond the mainstream. Obama's own brand as post-partisan figure has been diminished. But in a fight for all-important swing votes, expect to see them continue to try.