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Richard Mourdock and Keith Judd vs. Washington

By [Dana Milbank](#),

Richard Mourdock stands a good chance of being elected to the Senate. Keith Judd is a federal inmate in Texas. And the similarities don't end there.

Both men were beneficiaries of voter protests on Tuesday against the Washington status quo — one protest harmless, the other insidious. The benign vote went to [Judd, who won 41 percent of the ballots](#) against President Obama in West Virginia's Democratic presidential primary. It was an embarrassment for the president but purely symbolic. The more worrisome protest [vote benefited Mourdock, who bested](#) six-term Sen. Richard Lugar in the Indiana Republican primary. That election has the potential to make the broken system in Washington more caustic and less functional.

Murdock, a geologist by trade, is Indiana's state treasurer. Perennial candidate Judd, who goes by the nickname "Dark Priest" and has an extremely long mullet, lists himself as a past member of the Federation of Super Heroes and is doing time for making threats at the University of New Mexico.

Yet the two men are equally irrational in their plans for changing Washington. And the two are equally likely to succeed with these plans, which is to say they have no chance at all.

Judd wants voting rights for incarcerated felons, and he proposes to abolish the income tax and fund the government with "free money." Mourdock's solution is just as implausible: an end to bipartisanship and compromise. "One side or the other has to win this argument," he said the day after his primary victory, adding that "the highlight of politics, frankly, is to inflict my opinion on someone else."

That Indiana voters would make such a protest statement is understandable. These are hard times, and Americans correctly perceive that the federal government has become unable to deal with problems big and small. But the Hoosiers' proposed cure — sending to Washington an ideologue who calls for confrontation over compromise — will just make the illness worse.

Over the past couple of decades, and particularly since 1994, both parties have been sending increasingly disagreeable characters to Washington. Not surprisingly, the disagreeable characters fail to agree on things — and the voters, angered by the deadlock, replace them with ever more disagreeable characters.

This is a two-party problem, but it's far worse now among Republicans, who have replaced not just moderates but also reliable conservatives such as Utah's Robert Bennett and now Indiana's Lugar with angry belligerents; the purges seem to have less to do with ideology than with the victims' willingness to cooperate with Democrats.

Most worrisome is that voters themselves seem to be succumbing to the unthinking partisanship of their leaders. As Post pollster Jon Cohen [has documented](#), Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to say that the economy is in bad shape and that President Obama could do more to lower gas prices. During the Bush years, it was the reverse. As recently as the 1990s, there was no such partisan divide on the economy.

This helps to explain the phenomenon of Mourdock, who told CNN the morning after his victory that he's "a huge student of American history" and informed MSNBC that bipartisanship means "Democrats coming to the Republican point of view."

Actually, if Mourdock looks at history, the federal debt didn't explode until the hyper-partisan era arrived. The system has broken down precisely because of the absence of collegiality and compromise: Republicans don't yield on taxes, and Democrats resist serious spending cuts.

Murdock argues that all will be well if conservatives dominate Congress and the White House. But that won't happen anytime soon, and even if it eventually does, it will inevitably lead to the same sort of backlash that allowed the tea party to block the Obama agenda after 2010.

Murdock prevailed in part because he ridiculed Lugar for living in the Washington area. But this history student should know that's how it was done for most of our history. The lawmakers who beat the Nazis, won the Cold War and led the nation to economic dominance didn't do three-day workweeks in the capital and jet home on weekends; they got to know each other and learned to work with each other.

It is Mourdock who is outside the tradition envisioned by the Framers. If he thinks the way to success in Washington is to banish collegiality in favor of confrontation, he might as well grow a mullet and join the Federation of Super Heroes. It will work equally well.

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