

# On highway issues, and Mr. Shays' road

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Published May 17 2005

I'll be the first to admit that mathematics was never my strong point in school. Alert reader Malcolm Davies caught a mistake in my last column. I'd messed up the liter/imperial gallon/U.S. gallon conversion. Mr. Davies worked out that at 88 pence per liter, the equivalent price of a U.S. gallon would be \$6.72, rather than the \$4.43 I'd calculated.

Imagine filling up the Hummer at those prices. Wanna make a bet we'd see a lot fewer behemoths around town?

On the round-trip drive to New York City on Mother's Day, (trying to stifle road rage because I was stuck behind some idiot crawling along in the outside lane), I realized I'd omitted another pet road peeve from my previous rant. Answer me this: What moron of a road planner designed roads so that the ramp for vehicles entering a highway comes before the ramp for those exiting?

Surely there would be many fewer accidents if the reverse were true, because all the cars filtering right to exit would be off the highway before the cars filtering left to enter it appear. Every time I see the chaos as cars entering and leaving a highway jockey for position, I can't help wondering what thought process (or lack thereof) went into this design.

But enough road-ranting. Spring is in the air, and I'm feeling playful. So here's another "Guess who said it" for you:

"Should any political party attempt to abolish Social Security, unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history. There is a tiny splinter group, of course, that believes that you can do these things. Among them are \$ a few Texas oil millionaires and an occasional politician or businessman from other areas. Their number is negligible, and they are stupid."

No, it's not Al Franken. That quotation came from none other than Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower in a letter to his brother Edgar, dated Nov. 8, 1954. Astonishing, isn't it?

I find it fascinating to see how far the Republican Party in its current form has drifted from its roots. And I'd venture that few in politics are feeling this more keenly than moderates like U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Bridgeport.

Last month, Shays earned two public rebukes from Greenwich Republican Town Committee Chairman Alfred Camillo for his opposition to congressional intervention in the Terri Schiavo case and his call for House Majority Leader Tom DeLay's to resign over ethics violations. Camillo's comments make clear how difficult it is to be moderate Republican these days.

The GOP chairman wrote: "If one person, an elected Republican official, year after year, month after month, continuously attacks fellow Republicans in positions that are supported by a wide majority of Republicans around the country, and if the Republican official is on certain issues is going to be aligned with the Democrats, then we certainly, as Republicans, have the right to question that."

I wouldn't fancy being in Mr. Shays' shoes, because now he's in the position of being attacked from the right and the left. He's angered Democrats by voting as a moderate on bills when there is no chance they will pass, and then for appearing to change tack and fall back with the party line when his vote is necessary for passage. Under a known DeLay tactic called "catch and release," moderate Republicans are permitted to vote against party lines if a bill is unpopular in his or her home district, without reprisal from "The Hammer" -- unless that vote is necessary to support the bill's passage.

A recent example is Shays' vote with the DeLay camp to defeat the Capps amendment, an attempt by Rep. Lois Capps to strip the provision in the energy bill that would shield the manufacturers of MTBE from product liability lawsuits. MTBE is a fuel additive that has resulted in groundwater contamination in more than 1,800 community water systems in 29 states (including our own). Despite a reputation as an environmentalist, Shays was the only member of the Connecticut delegation to vote in favor of giving producers of MTBE total immunity from lawsuits.

I admire Mr. Shays for being the first Republican to call for DeLay's resignation and for speaking out against the interference of Congress with the workings of the judiciary in the Schiavo case. Mr. Camillo, on the other hand, appears to put party loyalty over the need for higher ethical standards and the preservation of a traditional Republican value: states' rights.

But let's face it: Mr. Shays is in a lose/lose situation. I don't envy him.

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