

## The most dangerous sentence

Danger walks among us. It stalks us every day of our lives, especially if we're politicians, and especially if we dare to utter the following sentence... "I changed my mind!" Those four, simple, innocent words which, when strung together in that manner, can have a disastrous effect on a candidate's entire political career and persona.

My premise is, quite simply, that it is eminently human and natural to change one's mind. Indeed, it is unnatural not to! Devolution (read: change) from some previously-held position is actually evolutionary thought! We must change our minds from time to time in order to further define ourselves and clarify our own personal philosophy. In fact, most of us already do it when new information comes to light OR when we experience a true epiphany (by the way, you don't have to be religious to have an epiphany; you just need to have an open mind).

That said, there's a huge difference between changing our beliefs and changing our belief system, but that distinction seems to disappear as soon as one enters the political arena.

## Enter the flip flop

Origins of the term *flip flop* or latch is a circuit that has two stable states and can be used to store state information. Its origin is 1918. The term *flip flop* which described a cheap thong-type sandal probably came into being in the mid-nineteenth century. An 1861 letter to the editor of The New York Times mentioned poorly equipped troops in the Seventh Regiment Volunteers wearing *flip-flaps*. Later, the letter reads: "The men have not yet been supplied with shoes, and yet still march *flip-flop*. Why?"

In political speak, *flip flop* has been used to describe candidates who've vacillated between two positions. For example, the earliest mention of *flip-flop* in a political context (as a change in someone's opinion) was in an October 23, 1890 report of a campaign speech in New York City. John W. Goff, candidate for District Attorney, said of one of his opponents: "I would like to hear Mr. Nicoll explain his great *flip-flop*, for three years ago, you know, as the Republican candidate for District Attorney, he bitterly denounced Tammany as a party run by bosses and in the interest of bossism..."

Fast forwarding nearly a century later, it appeared in the 1976 Presidential election campaign, when President Gerald Ford used it against his opponent Jimmy Carter. In 1988, Michael Dukakis used it against his opponent Richard Gephardt, saying, "There's a *flip-flopper* over here." A very versatile (and equal opportunity) epithet, it has been adopted by Republicans and Democrats. The appellation was heard, repeatedly, in the 2004 Presidential campaign to describe Massachusetts Senator John Kerry and stuck thanks to a chorus of repetition.

It's now been dusted off and is being used against another Presidential candidate, former Governor Mitt Romney. This time, the focus is on Romney's stance on abortion (or as the left prefers to call the issue, *reproductive rights*). While *flip flopper* may be a catchy term, it's often a misguided missile launched against people whose thinking has evolved over time and resulted in a change of a particular belief.

Though it may seem that these new positions are proof that the individual has completely reversed himself or herself, it may be unfair to claim that it has changed their entire belief system. In the Mitt Romney example, I'm guessing that his opinion on abortion is not a reversal of his belief in the overall sanctity of life in general, but of a specific aspect of how our society protects it. In any case, and regardless of our political affiliation, we should not be criticizing each other because we've changed our minds, but instead focus on what has led us to those changes.

If change was for political expediency, then fire at will, otherwise let us praise those who continue to grow by redoubling their quest for truth and knowledge.

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