

You Can't Get There From Here

By Frank Islam. [Huffington Post](#): Posted: 11/18/11 12:44 PM ET

Our nation's Capitol is a misdirected place. That's true not only on a political but on an experiential level as well. Trying to drive anywhere in or around the city proves that the transportation grid is simply a reflection of the gridlock that dominates the debates or lack thereof in political circles.

You can't turn left on a light -- or an issue. You can turn right -- from either side of the aisle, at any time. You can make a U-turn anywhere you want -- that's what's called Washington logic and consistency. It can be applied by the administration, the members of Congress, and the esteemed justices of the Supreme Court with equal acuity.

Washington, D.C. may have more roundabouts than any other city in the United States. And if you miss your cross street off the roundabout, you just keep going around and around and around and getting nowhere -- this is similar to the holding of endless congressional hearings and the drafting of meaningless legislation doomed to failure.

This all reminds us of an old joke that goes something like this: A traveler on a country road comes to a creek where the bridge has been swept away by a recent flood. The traveler sees an old farmer standing next to where the bridge used to be and asks, "Is there a way to back track and find some where else to get across the creek?"

The farmer responds, "Yep. Just, go back two miles turn right and... No, go back one mile and turn left..." The farmer stops for a minute, shrugs his shoulders, scratches his head, and then says to the traveler, "Come to think of it, you can't get there from here."

Welcome to Washington, D.C.! A city where there are few bridges being built today (not even to nowhere) and few bridge builders.

It might be argued that the recent passage of the veteran's "jobs" bill with unanimous bi-partisan support in both the Senate and House is a sign that repair work has begun. In fact, just the opposite is true. This "carve out" for veterans from the President's substantial jobs proposal was a no-brainer.

Voting against this bill would have been like voting against motherhood and apple pie. Voting for it was not a profile in courage but of political expediency. It gave the appearance of doing something when in fact it did very little to address the underlying problems of the American economy. The truth is that this vote was one of avoidance rather than commitment.

The President's American Jobs Act was a comprehensive package that included a number of provisions that had previously been endorsed and supported by Republicans. Rejecting it too was a no-brainer. All it required was for partisan politics to prevail rather than reasoned discussion leading to joint problem-solving and compromise.

Unfortunately, compromise has become a dirty word in Washington. Compromise was on the wane in our nation's Capitol before the elections of 2010. It has become virtually non-existent since.

This is sad, even tragic, given that this nation's constitution was a product of compromise. Those newly elected officials who came to Washington D.C. with a professed admiration and belief in the constitution and what it represents do not seem to comprehend or choose to ignore this fact.

The constitution was not handed down from on high. It was hammered out in the halls and backrooms in Philadelphia by founding fathers who frequently didn't agree with one another but saw the necessity for coming together.

This willingness to compromise in order "to form a more perfect union" is best illustrated by Benjamin Franklin.

On September 17, 1787, when the constitution was read aloud for the first time Franklin wrote these words:

"I confess there are several parts of this constitution which I do not at present approve, but I am not sure I shall ever approve them." Franklin continued to request, "that every member of the Convention, who may still have objections to it, would with me on this occasion doubt a little his own Infallibility, and make manifest our Unanimity, put his name to this instrument."

We are living in the age of no compromise and in an era in which domination or subjugation of a political opponent triumphs over the interests of "We the People." There are few elected officials, if any, with Franklin's stature, intellect and accomplishments

Infallibility rules and "my way or the highway" is the mantra. This will not change during the 112th Congress for a variety of reasons - most of them political, personal, and no-brainers.

It can change, however, when the citizens express their will in the elections of 2012. While, "we can't get there from here" today, maybe "we will be able to get there from there" after that.

If we can, America will be restored and renewed by a group of elected officials who are willing to compromise in the best interests of the country and its citizens. If we cannot, we will not be able to get there from there - and the democracy and our country will be much worse off because of it.