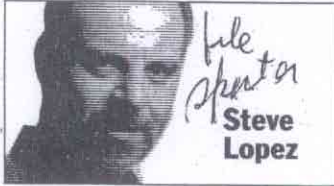


Wed., 1-12-14 PHILA (DG)



## A breakdown on the highway

Add it to the things you can't do anymore without risking your life.

Like wearing new sneakers, jewelry, or a leather jacket.

Like telling some blabbermouth in a movie theater to shut up.

Like asking the guy at the next table to watch his language.

It doesn't take much — a glance, a gesture — for some guys to think their manhood's been challenged. And now the list of things you can be shot for includes the simple dispute with the driver in the next car.

They were on the Schuylkill Expressway yesterday in Philadelphia's morning rush, on the way to work.

One car cut off another. They pulled parallel. One driver flips off the other. The other pulls a gun.

Eileen McGuigan, 36, mother of four, is dead. Shot in the head.

She was a passenger; her boyfriend was driving. The killer got off the road and disappeared into the city.

Long ago, I stopped honking my horn at drivers. I stopped yelling. I stopped the salute.

It happened when I began each work day looking through the previous night's police reports. There were days when it seemed that everyone who got pulled over had a gun. They were over sun visors, under seats, in glove boxes. They had guns in jackets, in tackle boxes, in lunch pails. There are more than 200 million guns out there today. In Philadelphia each year, 11,000 more guns are purchased that we know about.

### Writing wrong

And a national proposal to hike license fees for gun dealers, who undergo less regulation than pretzel vendors, has the Protectors squawking.

I write about the madness.

The Protectors respond.

Dec. 28

Dear Refried Beans:

I just read your column about U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter and decided I had better do something about it. . . . I sat down and wrote a direct election support check of \$999.00 and promised him more if he continues his coura-

geous effort against those who want to trash the Constitution. . . .

Now I could try to explain inalienable rights and the Founders of this Country philosophies to you but I fear it would be over your head. You see, it's a Caucasian thing, which you would never understand.

Dec. 29

Dear Lopis:

Why are you trying to drag us down to your minority level of living? We NRA members are not the ones causing our prisons to overflow — they are overflowing with the dregs of society — the Blacks, Latinos and Hispanics!!

We are America's farmers — coal miners — loggers — boy and girl scouts, 4H club members. We are the sportsmen, the hunters and fishermen. We go to church.

### Arlen's army

They always go to church.

They never sign letters.

They're dumber than bricks.

And they love Arlen.

These letters, among others, followed my column about Specter's position on the Brady bill (against) and assault weapons (for). He said a ban on assault weapons was "a limitation on hunters and sportsmen."

I made a mistake in that column, by the way. I said the NRA had spent \$170,000 on Specter since 1986. My apologies. It was \$384,000, according to an Associated Press tally.

Other politicians, meanwhile, are trying everything they can think of to reduce the number of guns out there. In New York, you can exchange guns for toys. In Philadelphia, for \$20. In Bucks County, state Rep. Thomas Corrigan would offer Sixers tickets, maybe a free pizza.

Specter could run a variation. Turn in a pizza and get a free gun. With a large pizza, he could throw in a dashboard mount. You never know when somebody might cut you off.

Let me make something clear.

Arlen Specter did not shoot the woman on the expressway. He is not responsible for the animal who did, either. And no, gun control will not end violence.

But when guns are everywhere, people are afraid to look at each other and civility is all but dead, there is higher ground, morally and socially, than to become a shill for the NRA and a hero to idiots.

A mother of four is snuffed out, in a car, on her way to work. More motorists will carry guns now. And it slips away a little more.

I'm surprised the NRA isn't doing a grave dance. There must be a few new memberships in this.