

## ***Thoughts While Shaving***

***By Mel Lavine***

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Has Occupy Wall Street changed the conversation? Some Democrats apparently believe that “We Are the 99%” is a catchword that will resonate in 2012.

Take Charles E. Schumer of New York, a key Democratic strategist in the senate. “The whole battleground has changed,” he said in an interview with John Harwood of the New York Times. Schumer contends there has been “a major shift in public opinion,” in part because of the consequences of the Occupy Wall Street movement, even after many of the protesters and their tents are gone from parks and other sites.

According to Schumer, as the rich get richer and the 99% fall farther behind, the movement has handed the Democrats a gut issue even as the weak economy is taking its toll on President Obama's standing in the polls.

But as Harwood points out, the Democrats have to prove "that they can harness the sort of political energy Republicans reaped from the Tea Party in 2010." Schumer does not disagree.

In fact, the senator says, "This is our challenge."

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A friend of mine who sometimes monitors the likes of Bill O'Reilly and Rush Limbaugh says they have been telling the Occupy Wall street protesters to quit whining and get a job. I can't confirm they actually said it but I still can believe it.

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Newt Gingrich, we hear, is emerging as the alternative to Mitt Romney for the Republican nomination. But, as Debra J. Saunders reminded us in the San Francisco Chronicle, Gingrich may be carrying too much baggage on the long road to the election. In 1998 he was forced out as House Speaker. The year before he was reprimanded in a bipartisan vote – 395-28 – for ethics violations connected to a course he taught on American history. He professes to be a model for family values. I'll let you fill in the blanks. There's also the windfall that Gingrich, a Washington insider, reportedly reaped from Freddie Mac, a mortgage company he'd cited as an example of government incompetence.

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Selwyn Raab, an old journalist pal, reminded me that there's been talk of a candidate in the wings if delegates fail to unite behind, say, Gingrich or Romney. The name is a most familiar one, Jeb Bush, the recent governor of electoral rich, must-win Florida. But, as my newspaper uncle used to say, "Remains to be seen."

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