



Episode 673: It's Better for You Peons to Drive 55, Says Hillary: More on Cars and Liberty with Eric Peters

Guest: Eric Peters

WOODS: We've got a bunch of items to talk about. Let's start with Hillary Clinton's views on driving 55 miles an hour. You have an item up at EPAutos.com, and it is true that she made these remarks about 10 years ago, but as we were saying before we started recording, it seems unlikely that her position on this has evolved the way her position on gay marriage evolved. If a position she holds seems to be unpopular after a while, by a fascinating coincidence, at the exact moment that happens her opinion changes. But I'm afraid her opinion always seems to change in one particular direction, and it doesn't seem likely to change on this one.

PETERS: I highly doubt it. I think that Hillary has demonstrated that she's an instinctive control freak, and instinctive control freaks really love the idea of restricting speed. So that's one of their things, the idea that anybody would drive, in air quotes, "too fast" for their liking. And it's particularly interesting with regard to Hillary, because probably she hasn't driven a car herself in 30 years.

WOODS: And I'm sure the cars that do drive her are going exactly 55 all the time.

PETERS: Well, yeah, if you ever had the misfortune to encounter one of our Dear Leaders' or even our sub-Dear Leaders' little processions with the motorcycles and the armored limos as they go blasting around the corner at top speed, you'll know perfectly well that they're not restricted by driving 55 or anything else.

WOODS: What are the reasons for driving 55? I mean, basically what does it's boiled down to: safety and gas usage. So she says — her statement was, "The 55 mile speed limit really does lower gas usage. And wherever it can be required, and the people will accept it, we ought to do it." So she's focusing only on the lower gas, but I'm sure they probably also tried to justify it on safety grounds.

PETERS: Well, I haven't heard that. The emphasis has always been on saving fuel, and if you look back —

WOODS: Okay, okay, but hold on a minute. But surely, though, there's a reason that we have a speed limit at all, and that would be safety, right?

PETERS: Well, allegedly.

WOODS: Yeah.

PETERS: It's this idea that velocity equals risk; the faster the velocity, the greater risk. It's kind of a non sequitur. Every day you've got airplanes out there at 30,000 and 40,000 feet that are operating at 506 miles an hour, and yet they're not crashing into each other and dropping out of the sky. And the same is true with cars.

WOODS: All right, so what's the deal with — I mean, wouldn't we actually save gas if we went more slow? I mean, I can think of how I would respond to that, but I've got to hear the Eric Peters response to that, because it does seem — you know, you could see the government saying that. We have this limited resource, and we have to go to war for it half the time in their view, so what are we going to do?

PETERS: Well, first of all, let's dismiss the idea that it's a limited resource. I'm pushing 50, and my entire life I've been hearing about peak oil and how we're on the verge of running out. And yet, there seems to be more oil than ever, and if you look at the cost of fuel right now, notwithstanding that it's gone up a little bit, it actually cost less right now in real terms than it did in 1970. And if something costs less and is in more abundant supply, that kind of indicates that there's probably plenty of it. The peak oil fallacy is just that. It was based on what was possible technically in the late 1950s and the '60s in terms of identifying where oil was and bringing it to the surface economically. Well, you know, it's 50 years down the road, and technology has improved, and there are more sophisticated ways of identifying deposits and bringing them up, and that's reflected in the low cost of the oil and the gas right now. So that's the first point.

And the second point I'd make is that people like Hillary, politicians generally, tend not to be very mechanically minded, not to know very much about things like math and science. And the whole 55 thing is as dated as an 8-track tape player. It goes back 40 years, back when most cars had three-speed automatic transmissions, or maybe a 4-speed manual, and yeah, you would see a significant fuel economy increase by reducing the speed. But modern cars, typically if you have an automatic, have at least six and many of the current ones have seven, eight, nine, and soon ten speeds with multiple overdrive gears on the top. Most manuals have at least six forward gears. And they're designed to operate as efficiently at 75 as the cars of the past were designed to operate at 50.

WOODS: I'm looking now at a report — this is just the executive summary — a Cato Institute report back in 1999, talking about what happened in the years following the repeal of the 55 mile an hour federal speed limit law, where these states then were actually allowed to make a decision on how fast — we really entrusted them with this important decision of what the speed limit should be.

And it says, "In 1995, the Republican Congress repealed this law. At the time, the highway safety lobby and consumer advocacy groups made apocalyptic predictions

about 6,400 increased deaths and a million additional injuries if posted speed limits were raised. And Ralph Nader" – who has been a guest on this show – "even said that history will never forgive Congress for this assault on the sanctity of human life. But almost all measures of highway safety show improvement, not more deaths and injuries since 1995. 33 states raised their speed limits immediately after the repeal of the mandatory federal speed limit, but the traffic death rate dropped to a record low level in 1997."

PETERS: Right.

WOODS: So I bet there was a profuse apology from the highway safety lobby and consumer advocacy groups after that.

PETERS: Well, there never is when it comes to this stuff.

WOODS: (laughing)

PETERS: You know, when they're proved wrong in a way that ought to really embarrass anyone, they're never called on it. And I'd like to make a little point about this, you know, the safety issue. Arguably if you are out on the road and you are made by the law to drive at a speed that is not appropriate for the road, not appropriate for the conditions, too slow, you tend to get bored and you start to nod off. And that in and of itself is a problem with regard to safety. If you are actively involved in the driving of your car, driving it at an appropriate speed – and by the way, the interstates were designed in the '50s with the idea that most cars, assuming 1950s cars, with bias tires, four-wheel drum brakes, and the technology of the '50s would safely operate at 70 to 75 miles an hour. So that's, what, 60 years ago.

WOODS: You know what, another thing, I'm looking at this "consumer advocacy groups." What arrogance –

PETERS: Yes.

WOODS: – that they're going to – I mean, I think I can make – I am the consumer. I don't need them. Who told them that I needed their representation? I'll make my own decision regarding the tradeoff between speed and gas usage and my gas budget and whatever. Why would I need them to represent me? I'll make my own decisions.

PETERS: Yeah, it's very what I call "cloverific," this idea, the effrontery that some people are possessed of that they can speak for us. They presume to speak for us and then dictate to us what our choices are going to be. And on this business of saving gas, well, wait a minute now; I paid for the gas that I put in my car, right? I just bought it. So it's my gas. I should be free to use it however I wish to use it, shouldn't I?

WOODS: Yeah, right.

PETERS: Why are these people asserting ownership over the fuel that I just purchased. Now, they have an argument if they're paying for it, but they're not.

WOODS: They're not.

PETERS: I mean, I'm paying for the gas I put in my car. And if I want to drive a car that's got a big, powerful engine and uses more fuel than a car with a smaller engine, well, I feel like that ought to be my right.

WOODS: Let's shift gears now; I want to talk about something you wrote about, the "Blue Lives" Matter movement.

PETERS: Yeah.

WOODS: So tell me what that's all about and what your take on it is.

PETERS: Well, it's kind of in response to the whole Black Lives Matter thing, ostensibly. There's a guy, the governor of Louisiana, John Bell Edwards, who's one of the people that's pushing this. But it's very different from the Black Lives Matter thing. The complaint that the Black Lives Matter people have, which I think is entirely legitimate, is that cops view their lives as less valuable than their own lives, and I think that's abundantly clear, and not just with regard to blacks. I think generally cops view our lives as less important than their lives. For example, they are constantly openly saying that their safety, their perceived safety, whether they feel safety, justifies putting us in the crosshairs of a gun, literally.

So it's really concerning, because it's of a piece with this business of giving people rights, different "rights," and I'll put it in air quotes, based upon things like their sex or their orientation or whether they're male or female, things like that. Well, it's idiotic. Rights are universal if they're real rights. Everybody has the same and equal right.

WOODS: Okay, but I can imagine people coming back and saying you might not like some of the laws that the police have to enforce, you might not like a lot of the police themselves, but they are performing a service that even in a completely free market would be performed by someone, and it is a — it's exaggerated how risky it is. There are far more dangerous professions to be in, but it's more dangerous than being an actuary, for example, and so we ought to expect that people are trying to uphold the law against the bad guys, and so maybe they do deserve a little extra consideration. I think that'd be the response.

PETERS: Well, first of all, the majority of the things that they do — they enforce laws, and that's their own term. They are "law enforcement." That's the chosen appellation that they have picked for themselves. And their primary obligation is not to protect us; it is to enforce laws. And I submit to you that the majority of the laws that they enforce are statutory laws that involve no harm caused to anybody, that are merely affronts to a statute. Things like ranging from "buckle up for safety," or whether you

choose to put a certain, arbitrary, decreed-to-be-illegal substance into your body, things of that nature.

If they were to restrict themselves to keeping the peace – that is, to dealing with people who violate the rights of others, who hurt other people, who abuse other people's property, and so on – I think I'd be more sympathetic to them, and certainly I think most people in a voluntarist or a free society, which I wish we had, would happily support that and pay for that. But that is not what they do chiefly, unfortunately, and I think that's one of the reasons why people, including middle class people, white people now, increasingly find themselves at odds with law enforcement.

WOODS: The average person, though – now, this is an objection I want to hear addressed. I get a lot of libertarians who just don't like the police, and they want to stick it to the police. My only interaction with the police ever has been when I've been pulled over for speeding. I've never had any other problem with them. And I don't want to sound like some naive idiot, saying, well, if you don't cause trouble you won't have any problems, but you know, I am a regular guy who does regular things, and I don't shout from a bullhorn at 2 o'clock in the morning and then shout, "Police state," when somebody carts me away. So what am I missing here by having this kind of regular-guy view of the situation?

PETERS: Well, I don't know; I'm a regular guy, too. Most of my interactions with police have been of the same kind, except with regard to random checkpoints, which really kind of gets my backup. This happened to me just recently, in fact. I was driving home, and they had one of those sobriety, dragnet-style checkpoints, where they stop people without any probable cause, without any reason to suspect you of having done anything at all, compel you to submit to a cursory search of your vehicle, to a cursory interrogation, and to have your papers presented.

And it sticks in my craw, because I think that fundamentally that is something that should not occur in a free society, and I think that it has helped to acclimate the public to this police state that exists and is growing and to me is very disquieting, and I'd like to see it stopped. I think that if you as an individual have not done something to cause harm or to give a reasonable person a reason to believe that you are about to do something wrong, that the police should have no business with you whatsoever, and legally speaking you should be free to walk away. And the cops should have absolutely no legal basis to detain you, to harass you in any way.

WOODS: Well, I did a couple of episodes in which this subject of the checkpoints came up. I was talking to a lawyer named Warren Redlich, who has had a lot of success telling people exactly what they should do and what they're allowed to do and what they are not required to do at these checkpoints, so I'm going to link to those episodes also at TomWoods.com/673, which is the show notes page for this episode.

Let's talk about your "Libertarian Lexicon" – I'm also going to be linking to all the items that we've been talking about; that'll be at TomWoods.com/673. Let's talk about your "Libertarian Lexicon," because it reminded me of a funny, very effective thing that

some friends of mine did in college that I think needs to be updated for today. But what's the need for this "Libertarian Lexicon," and other than "clover," which is kind of restricted to your site, what are some terms that people need to know the real meaning of?

PETERS: Well, verbiage is important, as you know. It defines the term of any discussion that you have, and I think it's important to not let certain terms go without definition. You have to use that as the basis of your discussion. Now, with regard to some of the terms I mentioned in the article, of course "clover" is a term that's kind of inside baseball, the E.P. Autos, but that's kind of a shorthand term for people who are kind of a passive, unconscious control freak. They're generally not bad people. They're not the kind of people who would attack you and threaten you with a gun out in public or walk over to your house and knock on your door to try to make you do what they want, but in a very glib and unconscious way, nonetheless, their entire worldview is based on violence. They vote for politicians who are then going to do violent things to other people as a proxy. They don't feel any compunction about doing that. That's one category of people.

And another category of people is a "hero," and I use that as a kind of turnabout on the term that's used by themselves. And a "hero" is an armed government worker; that is, a cop or a soldier. That's what they are. It's a brutal term, but I think it's an accurate and fair term. Another term that I use is "uncle," and that's just shorthand for Uncle Sam; that is the federal government, the personification of the federal leviathan that has its nose in our business to the nth degree.

WOODS: I want to mention what I was telling you before. We did a – well, I can't take any credit for it, but it was the publication I worked for in college, did a – I forget how exactly they named it, but it was some kind of lexicon of commonly used words and phrases, and the point of it was that we found that on our campus there was a suffocating left liberal bias everywhere, and it extended all the way down into the language that was used, the way people would be described, the terms that would be used in the student newspaper. So for instance, an ordinary conservative would be called an "ultra conservative," or just an obvious moderate would be called a "conservative." So they were always off in a left-wing direction. Or "hatred" – well, you know, "hatred" obviously just means –

PETERS: Disagreement (laughing).

WOODS: Yeah, exactly. You have an unapproved view. So we came up with this whole – we had like 50 to 70 of these words, and it was hilarious, because they were obviously correct, that you'd look at these – so what we're trying to do is translate these words the way that the Left uses them into ordinary language, so that people will know what it means when they're accused of "hate" or what it means when they're accused – and now that we have the social justice warrior group out there and they've got all kinds of crazy words, you know, "microaggression," all these crazy non-concepts are out there, I think it's time to redo that lexicon, and I actually think that could be made into a short, novelty kind of book that would sell like crazy. I don't have time to

do it, but somebody out there's got to be clever enough to come up with the Left Liberal Lexicon that you could pitch to a huge number of people – I mean, libertarians and conservatives – and it would be a cute little novelty book, and I think it would sell really well. Now, I'm almost talking myself into doing it, but I refuse. I am not taking on any additional projects.

Tell me what's coming up here. Okay, it's may of 2016. As somebody who is – oh, let's see, by the time people are hearing this, it'll be June of 2016. As somebody who is an observer of automobiles specifically, leaving out the liberty aspect, what part of year is the most eventful for you? Is the new model year the same for all models? Or is it staggered throughout the year? When do things get interesting?

PETERS: Well actually, it used to be that, you know, the new models tended to all show up toward fall, but now they are staggered, because there's much more competition in every segment. So some manufacturers will bring out next model year's car literally within the first or second month of the calendar year. So it's gotten to the point where it's sort of a rolling rollout. So you just kind of have to keep abreast of the developments that are happening. One thing that doesn't pertain necessarily to new models but that is burgeoning right now is this Takata airbag scandal. Are you familiar with it?

WOODS: No, tell me about it.

PETERS: Well, initially it was thought to affect only certain Japanese manufacturers, particularly Honda, which bought airbags from a big supplier called Takata; it's a Japanese company. But as it turns out, Toyotas, Subarus, and then a number of domestic models also have these airbags, and these are the bags that are defective by design and have actually exploded and sprayed shrapnel, metal pieces, into people's faces. And I think they've killed people, and I know that they've harmed a number of people severely: taken out eyes, ripped out flesh, and so on and things of that nature.

And it affects literally millions of cars, and the problem is how to deal with this. The dealer networks are absolutely overwhelmed with the number of cars that are affected, so one thing that's being looked into, which I favor and I think this would be a good opportunity, actually, is for the federal government to accede to the legal installation of a cutoff switch if your car is affected, so that you can turn the damn thing off so that you don't have to worry about having it blow up in your face while you drive around for six months or a year waiting for them to get to your particular car to fix it.

WOODS: Well, this makes me think of the general issue of airbags. I know what I've read about them, and I know – what I've basically read is that the seatbelt by and large is a good thing to wear but that the airbag may do more harm than good. Has there been any improvement? Is it just the nature of the airbag that it's going to be this way? What's the real truth of it?

PETERS: Well, let's get back to the point that you made earlier about the consumer advocate. I don't need anybody making these decisions for me. I think that in a free country, whether it's seat belts or airbags, the device ought to be made available by manufacturers if they believe that there's a demand for it, and if you or I as an individual think that, you know, that's something I'd like to have and I'm willing to pay for it, great. That's the way it ought to be. What I object to is that these things are forced upon us by consumer advocates and by similar people within the federal government who have taken it upon themselves to make decisions for us as if we're idiot children and they're our parents. That's the philosophical point that I'd make.

As far as the practical or utilitarian distinction between the two, everything is a risk-reward, cost-benefit analysis. Safety belts generally are good; however, there have been cases where people have been trapped in a car that's, for example, gone off the side of a road into water or it's on fire. It's not likely; it's not common, but again, it's something that I think, it's your life and it therefore ought to be your choice.

Airbags are more technically complicated. You're dealing with literally an explosive device, quite literally, inside the car, several of them. Most new cars have at least six. A number of new cars have more than 8 or even 10 or 11 of the things. Each one has a tiny explosive cartridge of gas that explodes rapidly that causes the bag to inflate, and it's inherently potentially a dangerous thing. They have hurt people; they have killed people, and again, that is why this type of thing ought to be up to the individual to decide for themselves to have or not have.

WOODS: And you could do that by simply not mandating anything, and then people could decide – they could make the tradeoff between how much safety they want and how much comfort they want, and then they could come up with a bundle that makes sense for them. And that goes for absolutely everything. We've often said about when it comes to the airlines, that simply privatizing the TSA is not the answer, because you take a private firm that has to enforce government rules, that's not going to – okay, so they'll more efficiently enforce crazy government rules. That's not the – we want to privatize the whole thing, including the rules. And so some airlines will be more restrictive, and there'll be more invasive in the search, and some will be less, and so you'll see if maybe there are some that are as a result safer or less safe. You'll just have to see that, and you'll have to make your own decision. And then everybody will be happy. Everybody will get the bundle of desired outcomes and traits that that person wants. To me that's so obvious I don't even understand the other side, and normally even when I don't agree with it I at least understand the other side. I don't even understand why I can't make that choice. You don't have to make it.

PETERS: Here's another way to look at it. Right now I could go out if I want to and go to Wendy's and have a triple burger with bacon. But I also have the choice to go out and have, let's say, a chicken breast with lettuce on it. I'm free to make that choice for myself based on what's important to me, whether it's the calorie count or the amount of fat, etc. and so on. And can you imagine how preposterous it would be if we had the government telling us you can't have more than one hamburger and only one patty in any given week, or you must have a skinned chicken breast because it's

healthy and safe for you? Well, that's kind of I think where we're ultimately headed. The philosophy behind things like the seat belts and the airbags and the helmets that people are required to wear on bicycles and motorcycles is all of a piece philosophically, and if you accept that idea that the government has a legitimate right to forcibly control you, not because of anything you've done to anybody else but to keep you safe, to keep you healthy, then there's no end to the micromanagement that we might be subject to.

WOODS: I want to make sure and remind people of course they should check out EPAutos.com. You can also go to EricPetersAutos.com, but it's even easier to go to EPAutos.com. There is no other libertarian car guy, as far as I'm concerned, and you look at all the stuff that's there and you know that even items you're going to miss, Eric is going to be on top of, and it's a great community of people. It's a wonderful site to get to know and to visit regularly. EPAutos.com, and of course we'll link to it at TomWoods.com/673. Until next time, Eric; looking forward to talking to you, and just keep gathering items, and we'll keep having episodes.

PETERS: Thanks, Tom, always a good time.