

Consort of the Onion Queen

I am the First Man of Elba, New York, Onion Capital of the World, or so we claim, and who, really, is going to call us on it? The czarina, or technically town supervisor,

of Elba, which borders my native Batavia, is my wife Lucine, whom I believe to be, since the retirement of Gov. George Deukmejian, the highest ranking Armenian-American elected official in America. Or at least she will be until the voters of California elect Cher to the U.S. Senate.

This is one of the first things you learn upon marrying an Armenian: the list. “Famous Armenians” isn’t like drawing up a catalogue of “Famous Irish-Americans” or “Famous Jewish-Americans.” You’re not picking and choosing, selecting Pat Moynihan and Hank Greenberg but leaving John O’Hara and Neil Diamond for the next draft. “Famous Armenians” begins with the sad sentimental poet of Fresno, William Saroyan, and goes on to include the guy who played Mannix (Krikor Ohanian, aka Mike Connors), Cher Sarkisian, Dr. Jack Kevoorkian, mogul Kirk Kerkorian, Andre Agassi, and, for baseball fans, Steve Bedrosian. Well, diasporans, add to your list Lucine Andonian Kauffman, town supervisor of Elba, New York, El Dorado of the mucklands.

She was appointed to fill the uncompleted term of her retired predecessor, but when Lucine had to run her first race, I took on the job of campaign manager, a post for which I had prepared a lifetime. Rudy can’t fail, as they say, especially when the candidate is unopposed. Still, in order to minimize our vote, I had printed bumper stickers depicting onions against the colors of the Armenian flag and bearing the motto, “Ayo Gernank!” Antonio Villaraigosa

had recently run for mayor of Los Angeles boasting “Si, se puede,” or “Yes, we can,” so I asked my California father-in-law how to say that in Armenian. We lost the Turk vote, but principle has its price.

My role model as first spouse has been Pat Nixon, not Hillary Clinton, especially if the phone rings at 3 a.m. because a road hasn’t been plowed. I declined to adopt a social cause, disease, or a Just Say No campaign of my own, though one friend, mindful of his own affliction, urged the distribution of brown bracelets as part of an IBS awareness campaign. Opting, for once, for good taste, I just said no.

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Lucine has largely and astutely ignored my advice on political matters. I wanted her to be the first elected Republican official in America to come out for Bush’s impeachment, but she has instead promoted local agriculture and business and tried to ensure that revenues equal expenditures. Given the Palin precedent, I’m touting my wife for vice president in 2012. She spent a hell of a lot less on the new salt storage shed than Sarah P. did on the Wasilla ice rink.

The Republicans are indulgent of Lucine’s non-Republican husband, but then in a healthy society politics plays so small a role in our lives that who really gives a damn how others vote? Cold ideologies melt in the warmth of daily communal life. I think of the local civic organizations in which, say, Assembly of

God churchgoers and gays work side by side in the cheerful labor of neighbors. They can be friends because they are, to each other, rounded and fully dimensional. They are people, not cartoons. This is nigh impossible in larger places, where such disparate folk would never meet and would exist to each other only on the flat screen of the TV set. Instead of Kate and Dave they would be “Religious Nut!” and “Fag!” How dreary. How lifeless. How very Red and Blue.

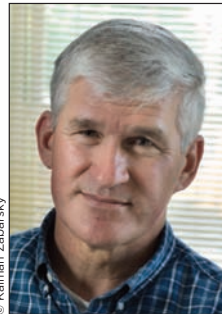
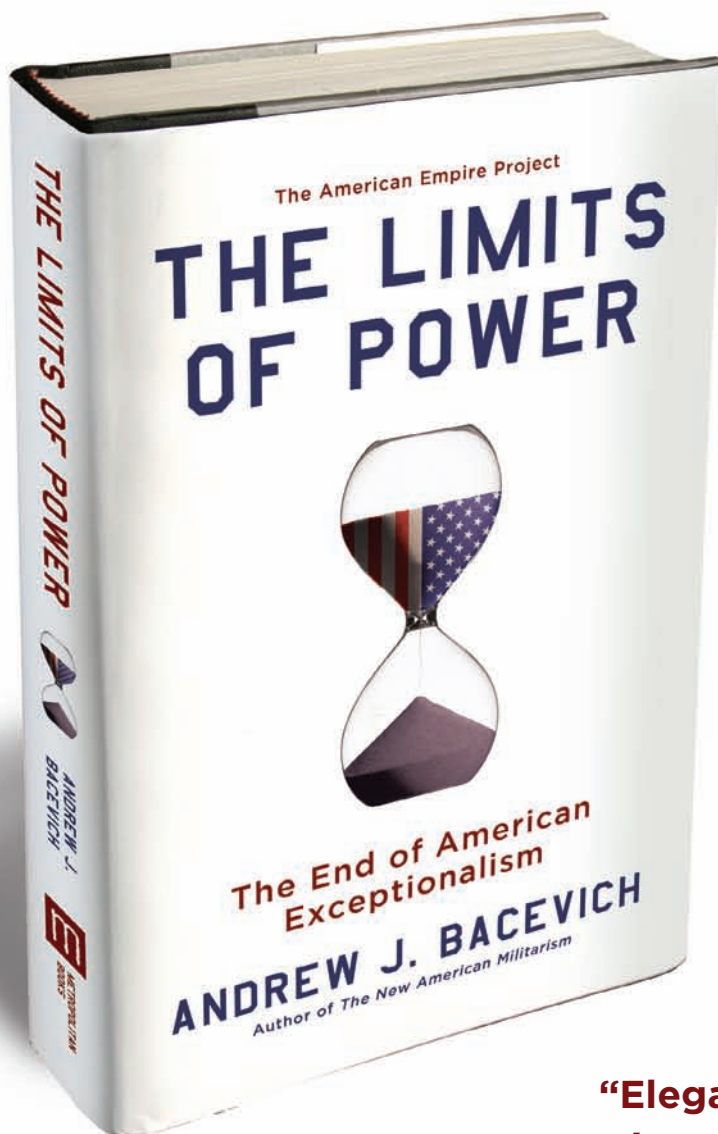
Elected officials are encouraged to stick campaign signs in their front yards, and we have reached an accommodation. We always put signs up for friends who are running. For higher (which is to say lower) office, we agree to one apiece: this year she chose the Republican state senate candidate and I stake

my frame for the only old-fashioned patriot on the New York presidential ballot, Ralph Nader. The last Democrat sign I put up was for a Muckdogs booster who was on a mission perdu: running as a (D) for coroner in our lopsidedly (R) county. I proposed a desperate campaign promise—“No premature burials!”—but though she ran a fine race, her candidacy was DOA.

Given that the Republicans cede New York’s carpetbag U.S. Senate seat to Hillary Clinton, a friend has urged me to start the rumor that Lucine is “exploring” a run as an antiwar, pro-organic farming, pro-Bill of Rights Republican against the militaristic liberty-shredding Democratic schoolmarm. Maybe Cher would do a benefit concert? Ayo Gernank, baby. ■

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