Soon after the lights of the fireworks have faded from the sky, my family sits outside around the table decorated in red, white and blue and indulges in our favorite Fourth of July activity. It’s not a barbecue, a parade or even baseball. No, on Independence Day in my family, each member names the top five presidents of America and the all-time best president America has ever had. Grandpa, of course, lived through the Depression. He always said that there was no other person who could have pulled this country together at the time. Roosevelt steered the country through the Depression, the attack on Pearl Harbor and World War II and managed to emerge, if not unscathed, victorious. My grandmother always singles out Bill Clinton as her choice for the worst president in U.S. history. I suspect it has something to do with her extreme hatred of Hillary Clinton, who now, to my grandmother’s horror, is a senator representing the beloved New York. When pressed for her reasons, Grandma points not only to her, as she calls it, outrageous immoral behavior, but also to the national deficit and the WACO incident, among other things.

Roosevelt travelled four times, which is in itself a testament to his political career, most Americans had no idea he was ill. FDR, a man who could barely walk at times, was the symbol of American strength and courage throughout his presidency, and to those who listened to his famous Fireside chats, remains a hero to this day.

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Clinton, called “The Comeback Kid” because of his rise from a low position in the polls and relatively unknown status as a Democratic candidate for president, was an extremely popular president, maintaining high approval ratings even in the face of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Elected for a second term, the biggest argument in Clinton’s favor is how the American economy did so well under him, with unemployment rates at a low and economic prosperity at a relative high.

My father always picks the seemingly odd presidents for his top five, such as John Quincy Adams or Woodrow Wilson. He likes Adams because he was a man of honesty and honor. Adams accepted a Congressional nomination on two conditions: that he would never solicit votes and that he would follow his conscience at all times. My dad admits, however, that good people do not always make good presidents. Because Adams would not promote members of his party over those he felt were more deserved, he quickly lost support and was unable to accomplish much while in office.

Dad also likes Wilson, who was president during World War I, because of both his character and his politics. Wilson was an idealist, a purist in many ways. In his famous Fourteen Points speech, Wilson outlined the idea for a League of Nations, an organization that would be built of representatives from every country and try to preserve stability and peace worldwide. However, Congress would not support it, and the idea fell through. The United Nations is built from the ashes of the League. Wilson based both foreign and domestic policies on morals rather than politics. To him, WWI was not about making the seas safe for American ships, but rather to preserve democracy.

My mother always fights for the much maligned Jimmy Carter. He is remembered by most Americans as a failure because of an economic downturn during his term and, probably more importantly, because of his failure to free the hostages taken from our embassy in Iran. Mom respects Carter because of his decision to free those who fled to Canada to evade Vietnam. She thinks that it was better than prolonging the damage the Vietnam War had already caused the country. It was time to move on, and Carter realized that.

Carter was a champion of human rights and the environment. He let his foreign policy be dominated by his strong human rights values, which some consider foolish and some consider hero.

As for my sisters and I, we are still forming our opinions and just enjoying the arguments. The only thing every member of my family agrees on every year, without fail, is that the best country in the world is America, and that we are honored to be a part of it.

The Political Frenzy:
Schwarzenegger as governor?

Arnold Schwarzenegger. Just the name makes intimidating. It’s a wonder how he went from bodybuilding to acting with such ease, confidence and grace. Now that he’s trying to get into politics, how is his name going to stack up to the competition? Add that to the fact that he ran against the equally famous and politically inexperienced Gary Coleman, and you had one election where the media was positively drooling at the possibilities.

Indeed, in the bizarre mess of Californian gubernatorial recall, there is the disbelieving attitude of many about how things could have gotten so out of hand. It also doesn’t seem fair to us, as a nation, to be forced through another election, far from the real issues that we should be in the spotlight. Recently, accusations have been thrown at Schwarzenegger that he once made comments supporting Hitler. To counter these attacks an old bodybuilding coach of Schwarzenegger’s spoke to the press about the times he broke up neo-Nazi rallies in Austria. Once again, this is all fine, but it should be convenient for him.

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To keep the filming of the movie in question from being moved from the United States to Canada. Well that’s fine, in fact that’s great, but the American actors don’t seem to be the qualifying mark for governor. Not to mention the fact that he actually lives in California, and filming there would be convenient for him.

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It is doubtful he would do things to help the country even if he secretly agreed with them. Schwarzenegger, it seems, has obviously no qualifications to run for office except money.

Worst of all, the public seems to have no problem with this. In addition, I don’t think either side, Democratic or Republican, has any thing to worry about when it comes to Schwarzenegger’s questionable character affecting his actions as governor. If he were elected and publicly did everything he’s being accused of, California voters would surely just have another recall. Martin Sheen, get ready.