TIME TO TAKE A STAND

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By Harut Sassounian, Publisher, The California Courier, 28 October 2010

Who to Vote for and Who to Vote Against?

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In two short years, Pres. Obama's popularity has plummeted precipitously. Disappointed by his administration's disastrous performance, the American public has turned on Democratic incumbents, many of whom fear losing their congressional seats.

Even though several key races are too close to call, political pundits expect that Republicans will take over the House of Representatives, and possibly the Senate. If these predictions come true, there will probably be total gridlock in Washington until the next presidential and congressional elections in 2012. Until then, all new initiatives undertaken by the Obama administration will be stalled in Congress, making it almost impossible to pass any bills on important national issues.

In such a confusing situation, how would Armenian-American vote? Those who are staunch Democrats or Republicans have an easy choice to make. They would vote for their party's candidates, regardless of their position on issues.

However, those who care about Armenian issues have a somewhat more difficult task. They could take the position that since Democrats have not delivered their promises on the Genocide resolution, they would punish them by voting instead for Republican candidates. The problem is that traditionally most Republican members of Congress have been less supportive of the Armenian Genocide issue than Democrats. Thus, voting for all Republican candidates, while perhaps emotionally satisfying, will not benefit the Armenian Cause. On the contrary, Armenians would be

helping to elect candidates who are less sympathetic than the current members of Congress, many of whom are Democrats.

Another option is to sit out the elections completely, since neither Democrats nor Republicans delivered on Armenian issues when they were in power. This is not a good option, however, as it would squander decades of political investment the Armenian community has made in American civic life.

The option I recommend for the consideration of Armenian-American voters is none of the above. Do not vote blindly for your party's candidates, and do not sit out the election.

The optimum choice is to vote for candidates of any party who have demonstrated a proven track record of active support on Armenian issues. Those who are reluctant to vote on the basis of a candidate's stand on Armenian issues should remember that most voters make their selection based on their perceived self-interest. Jews, Blacks, Hispanics, Turks and other ethnic groups vote for candidates who support their causes. Those in high-income brackets typically vote for candidates who promise to lower their taxes, while poor people usually support those who favor funding more social services. Why should Armenians be the exception and shy away from supporting candidates who favor their issues? Voters make their electoral choices on the basis of their interests. It is then up to elected officials to balance the conflicting interests of their constituents.

Armenian-Americans can keep their friends in Congress by re-electing the 120 Democratic and 36 Republican House members; and 12 Democratic, 2 Republican, and 1 independent Senators all of whom received top grades from the Armenian National Committee of America. At the same time, Armenian-Americans can reduce the number of their opponents in Congress by supporting candidates who are running against the 18 Democratic and 22 Republican House members who received a failing grade from ANCA. To check the individual record of Members of Congress, please consult the ANCA's report card by clicking on ANCA .

Finally, everyone must be aware that the day after the Nov. 2 elections is the unofficial start of the next presidential campaign. In this regard, it is distressing that Pres. Obama came to Los Angeles and Glendale last Friday and not a single Armenian protested his appearance. How could Armenians ignore the fact that the President did not keep his promise to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide during his first two years in office? As Pres. Obama was desperately seeking to convince voters to support Democratic candidates, Southern California's large Armenian community missed a unique opportunity to show the President its displeasure before the national media.

By their absence, Armenians sent an ominous message to all candidates: You can promise anything

to Armenians to get their money and votes, and after the election, you can break your promise with impunity!

Armenians need to wake up from their lethargy. If they want elected officials to take them seriously, they must reward their political friends and penalize their opponents!