

“Just Like Us – But Is That Good?” **by Betsey Newenhuyse**

Have you ever seen the movie “Dave”? It stars Kevin Kline as an ordinary Joe who is a dead ringer for the current President of the United States. When the real prez suffers a stroke and lapses into a coma, Dave is brought in as a stand-in. The scheme goes awry when Dave turns out to be a much better and more loved leader than the real president, who was something of a jerk. The film is a lot of fun; Dave is the president we always wish we had, and it feeds the notion that a well-intentioned nice guy could probably do a better job than whoever happens to be occupying the Oval Office at any given time.

Well, Dave, meet Scott Lee Cohen. Scott Cohen is a Chicago pawnbroker who made a ton of money and won the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor of Illinois. But then, after it came out that Cohen assaulted his former wife, hung out with prostitutes, evaded taxes and overall made even Rod Blagojevich look statesmanlike – well, okay, but you see my point – after those revelations, Cohen was forced to step down. And it was clear that even in the stinking swamp that is Illinois politics, Cohen was a pretty nasty critter. So he had to go.

But not long ago when Cohen was on another Chicago radio station, a number of listeners called in and said he should run as an independent. Treated him kind of like an everyman folk hero who’d gotten a raw deal.

Huh? But I think there’s a segment of the population today who are so rabidly anti-authoritarian that they think that if the establishment is against you, by definition that’s a good thing. If you have absolutely no credentials or accomplishments, why, that’s a strike in your favor. Achievement – isn’t that elitist and overrated? Speaking of which, I guess Joe the Plumber is still around. He says God hasn’t

yet told him to run for office. Hmm, maybe he and Scott Cohen should team up. Well, we're all about bipartisanship, right?

And it's said that part of Sarah Palin's popularity is that people think they can relate to her – that whole hockey mom thing. Unlike Scott and Joe, Palin has at least held elective office, but the secret of her appeal is that a lot of folks think she's just like them. And these days we like to think that about famous people. There's a feature in one of the celebrity magazines called "Stars! They're Just Like Us!" It shows paparazzi photos of stars coming out of Starbucks, pumping gas, walking their dog – just doing normal-person things.

It wasn't always like this. Back in the golden age of Hollywood, stars were mysterious, removed. Can you imagine, say, Cary Grant pumping gas in sweats and a baseball cap? People wanted their celebrities and their leaders to be, well, above average. Not like them.

You hear a lot about "populism" these days, the idea of everyday people triumphing over the fat cats. It sounds good -- but it's easy for populism to slide into a know-nothing kind of attitude. So I worry about a culture that exalts mediocrity and resents merit. I don't think the only test of an elected official should be whether he's just like you!

But neither should the only test be expertise – we've all heard the old cliché about how Mussolini made the trains run on time. Which brings us back to Dave, the pretend president. Yes, he's a regular guy. But beyond that, he seems to be a man of character and integrity – unlike, oh, Scott or Rod or, well, you name it. Wouldn't it be nice if you could find that outside a Hollywood script?

I'm looking ... For Prime Time America, this is Betsey Newenhuyse. For Moody Radio, this is Betsey Newenhuyse.