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## Republican wants Paulin's seat in state Assembly

By ILENE NECHAMKIN

Rene Atayan, chairman of the Bronxville Republican Committee and challenger to five-term state Assemblywoman Amy Paulin (D-88th District) of Scarsdale, is planning a vacation later with her 10-year-old son Ara in her home state of Michigan. Because he is a Tigers fan, they will attend a game at Detroit's Comerica Stadium, she said in a telephone interview with the Inquirer Monday morning. "Then we will drive through Detroit, and Flint, where his grandpa's house is, and then to Bay City, where his grandma grew up," she said.

"And I'll tell him that the reason I'm showing him these places is, 'Now you'll understand why your parents get so set about policy decisions.'"

For Atayan, the blight and decay, unemployment and fiscal mess in Michigan tells a cautionary tale for New York, not because of its over-reliance on a single industry, but because of the "corrosive" union labor issues. "A lot of ideas sound great, but then reality strikes, and you see the consequences," Atayan said.

Atayan attributes New York's rancid economy to bad policy and ill-conceived programs that resulted in unreasonably high, unaffordable taxes. "Just in the last 10 years, taxes have gone up exponentially," she said. "And a lot of people are moving away; multigenerational families have left. That's not what we want. We want [New York and Westchester County] to be a place where you can plan your future, where young people can go back to the houses they grew up in."

Taxes are too high "across the board," she said, and, if elected, Atayan promises to address state issues, particularly unfunded state mandates that are "bankrupting municipalities."

"We need to try to dismantle these onerous mandates at any level to allow local governments [to act on] their own volition," she said.

The pension plan mandate, for example, "is so large and onerous and makes no sense that municipalities should cover the risk for a poorly managed fund."

(Close to home, 2010-11 pension costs are 5.8 percent of the payroll for village employees and 14.57 percent of the public



Rene Atayan

safety payroll. Pension contribution levels concerned budget planners who opted to lessen the impact of the pension increase for 2010-11 of \$843,234, by amortizing the increase over six years.)

Atayan wants to "release people from taxes and spur business growth." As people and businesses leave the state, unemployment rises, she said. "Small businesses I know are holding on by their fingertips, just scraping by. The government layers on paperwork, licensing, fees. It's too difficult to start and maintain a business here, and there's no incentive."

She said that her sister and brother-in-law recently moved their business from Manhattan to Connecticut, out of concern for their liability and legal exposure. "I tip my hat to anyone who stays and would like to support them in their decision to stay," she said.

Atayan is also outraged at the recent affordable housing agreement stemming from a 2006 lawsuit by the nonprofit Anti-Discrimination Center to enforce fair housing goals in which a judge ruled that the county had misrepresented its efforts to desegregate largely white communities. (Westchester is now required to build or acquire at least 750 homes, 630 in towns and villages where blacks account for 3 percent or less of their populations, and

Hispanics 7 percent or less. Half of these housing units must be priced for low-income buyers.)

She's also outraged that Bronxville and Scarsdale and other largely white communities were portrayed as racist outposts — especially because they're not.

"I don't call it affordable housing because it doesn't have anything to do with housing for workers. I call it subsidized housing," she said.

Westchester County has a variety of housing stock, she said. "People point to Bronxville as elitist, but there's everything from studio apartments, rentals and condos, to multimillion dollar houses, to senior housing. There are so many ways to live here."

Local communities must be empowered to plan on their own, she said, and the fact that the decision doesn't specifically require housing for teachers and first responders indicates there's "something else" behind it. Atayan believes the decision was motivated by a desire for wealth redistribution and social engineering. "And the remedy has very little to do with minorities. If none of them sign up for the housing, no minorities are given housing ... it's all about power and control." She is concerned that the planners will supersede local zoning laws. "Who knows more about a town or village than the people who live there? It's the stunning arrogance of the judge, a philosophy of we-know-better."

Residents of Mount Vernon, say, should find the decision "insulting," she continued, "because they want to live there, and it ignores the reasons why they chose to live there."

"People who aspire to live in upscale communities also found the decision insulting. People want to aspire and work toward a goal. They don't want to be handed anything. That's not human nature."

For Atayan, the race for the Assembly seat boils down to a simple choice: "between large government and we-know-better and a laissez-faire attitude and support of individual rights."

When asked, she said she would limit big government to national security and infrastructure.

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# Republican wants Paulin's seat in state Assembly

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## Budget

Asked about state budget issues, Atayan laughed. "The budget is so poorly managed, it's almost comical, if it wasn't so sad." She promised an "adult approach" to the process. "I'm a citizen legislator, not a professional politician, and I'm willing to step up to the plate."

She acknowledged that candidates have made similar pledges to repair a dysfunctional state government for years. "But they haven't attained a critical mass in the Legislature. When most people are walking in lockstep with Sheldon Silver," the speaker of the Assembly, "it's difficult for the minority. But common sense dictates we do this, and talk across the aisle ... Why would we manage the tax money of our hardworking labor force this way? There's a duty to manage it properly. We shouldn't have taken it in the first place, and we shouldn't have protracted meetings about how to spend it. It should be coming back to the community ... We should allow our towns and villages to manage revenue the way they want."

Atayan had harsh words for entitlement programs. "People aren't stupid," she said, "and they're treated like they're helpless children." At present, she has no specific eliminations in mind. "We have to go through the list and see what can be trimmed," she said. "Every layer of bureaucracy is another opportunity for fraud." But trimming the government doesn't necessarily reduce the programs, she said, just administrative costs.

"Local governments and charities administer money better," she said. "People should be allowed to retain their income and donate to local charities."

Entitlement programs have a "tangible" and negative effect on charitable contributions, she said. "There's less discretionary income to begin with and, psychologically, people begin to assume that the state is taking care of everything and there's no real need. You see that across the board." She said that studies show that Europeans' charitable contributions "pale in comparison to ours, because they assume that government is taking care of it."

Atayan grew up in Lansing, Mich., the daughter of an Assyrian father fleeing the Armenian genocide, and a Polish mother. "It was a controversial marriage at the time," she said. When her father played minor league baseball, he was assigned to the Negro League; she said she endured racist epithets in school.

"But the flip side was, it didn't matter for him, or me. It didn't matter what the

government said, what anyone said. We knew who we were. You don't need the government telling you who and what you are and pigeon-holing you, and it's infantilizing when you don't let someone do for himself ... Forced social engineering is wrong."

Affirmative action programs force people to live with a stigma, when others wonder whether they achieved on their own merit "or someone else paved their way." She referenced the writings of Thomas Sowell, a senior fellow of the Hoover Institute at Stanford, which maintain that members of the post-affirmative action generation will also doubt the validity of their accomplishments. Atayan

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— STATE ASSEMBLY  
CANDIDATE RENE ATAYAN

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said she swam on the varsity boys team in high school, majored in engineering when there weren't many women, and after graduation, worked in the automobile industry — "no other woman! But I received no special treatment, and didn't want any. That has an insidious corrosive effect on self-esteem," she said.

Atayan recognized that civil rights legislation and enforced desegregation in the South might be a sort of we-know-better imposition. "But people knew that certain things when we were growing up were wrong," she said. "And we've come full circle. So you have to ask, 'Is that, the decision, the mandate, the best way to solve the problem?'"

## Campaign

Asked to comment on Assemblywoman Amy Paulin she said, "I know Ms. Paulin is a lovely person and well liked by many. I have publicly stated that I would not question her work ethic," noting her

record of sponsoring and passing "a considerable number of bills."

"But the focus of her efforts has not been in the overall best interest of the district, as additional layers of bureaucracy, fees, taxes, and onerous mandates on businesses and local governments have in fact hamstrung us as a community. If her efforts had been focused on eliminating these things, vs. erecting them, we would be in a far healthier position today, able to weather the current economic downturn. And while she may bring some monies back to the district, it is a fraction of what was taken."

Changing Albany means changing its elected officials, Atayan said. "My opponent is a 10-year incumbent who has been a willing participant in the dysfunction in Albany and a rubber stamp for Sheldon Silver.

"Each year Ms. Paulin has said 'yes' to incremental increases — they may have seemed benign at the time — 1 percent here, 4 percent there — but compounded over time, our state and local taxes have doubled! People, the voters, and elected officials, need the intestinal fortitude to say, 'Enough, this isn't working.'"

Atayan, a graduate of Michigan State, moved from Manhattan to Westchester County in 1991, first to a house in the Bronxville P.O., then to Bronxville proper where she serves on the Chapel School Service Learning Committee. She is also a trainer for the FEMA Eastchester Citizens Corps, chairman of the Junior League Public Policy Committee, and a representative to the board of the Eastchester Volunteer Ambulance Corps. After working in sales and industrial applications in Michigan, she worked in ad sales and development for Time-Warner in Chicago and New York, and later was a sales vice president for iNEXTV.

After Sept. 11, 2001, Atayan "scaled back" and started Atayan Inc., a marketing and sales consulting firm, to concentrate on raising her two children, Ara and Alina, who is 16. Both children attend public school in Bronxville. She met her husband Christopher when they were 8 years old. And she gardens in what little free time she has.

Atayan's campaign has been disrupted by the recent deaths of her parents. She spoke to the Inquirer from Michigan where she was closing up their house. "My dad was excited by my candidacy," she said. "He was in World War II and dismayed by the direction of the country. And a lot of older folks I know here don't feel they have a voice in determining what's happening."