## Presidential candidates vying to be the guy next door insult the intelligence of American voters

Not even his grandmother could save President Barack Obama from the pummeling he was getting from Mitt Romney in the first presidential debate two weeks ago.

Instead of responding to a withering assault on Obamacare by the Republican candidate with a pointed riposte, the president invoked his grandmother, mentioning that she had been a recipient of Medicare benefits. Beyond affirming the obvious, that Medicare is a good thing, the point of revealing that the president of the United States once had a grandma with health problems apparently was to demonstrate that he's an ordinary guy.

It's as though being ordinary is a prime qualification for leading the most powerful country in the world.

Romney works hard to demonstrate his ordinariness by campaigning in blue jeans. If this scion of a millionaire family and a self-made millionaire hundreds of times over can't claim to be blue collar, at least he can say he's a blue pants kind of guy.

Viewers of the Republican convention may recall how Ann Romney enthralled the audience with a story of how she and her husband were so much like ordinary economically disadvantaged newlyweds they had to subsist on canned tuna.

Vice President Joe Biden and challenger Paul Ryan fought for rights to the ordinary low ground in their debate, interrupting each other to lay claim to the more humble working class background. Both mentioned that they had admirable mothers, something to which ordinary people can relate. Ryan added that he had a friend who, like a lot of ordinary young Americans, was deployed to Afghanistan (though Biden may have trumped that by managing to include a mention of his son's service in Iraq in an answer to a foreign policy question).

And so the political campaigns of 2012 continue to insult the intelligence of American voters by assuming they want to be led by ordinary people.

How the political calculation that appearing ordinary is a winning strategy came to be accepted wisdom is a mystery. History suggests voters are smarter than that.

The most revered president of the 20th century came from privilege and wealth more in keeping with an aristocracy than a republic and never held an ordinary job in his life. That was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the only American president elected four times.

John F. Kennedy was rich and privileged, as were three of the four presidents whose likenesses are carved on Mount Rushmore. The same can be said of many presidents of lesser

stature.

Others came from humbler backgrounds, the likes of movie actor, soldier, haberdasher, farmer and, in the case of the fourth face on Rushmore, small-town lawyer who as child studied by candlelight and walked to a distant school. But they weren't elected for their ordinariness.

American voters care about wealth. They want fairness in the opportunities to acquire it and they want taxes levied in a way the recognizes the ability to pay and they put a premium on a prosperity that lifts all economic classes. But they are discerning enough to judge candidates for president on their position on the issues and not their position in the economic or social hierarchy.

Nor do they begrudge those they elect as presidents the perquisites of the nation's highest office. Citizens don't expect their leaders to act like or be treated like ordinary people.

If Jimmy Carter is held in lower esteem than his modest but hardly disastrous record would indicate, it could be because he made a concerted attempt to make the White House ordinary and took pains to affect an ordinary look by (Mitt Romney take note) wearing jeans and a baggy cardigan sweater in the oval office and during presidential photo ops.

Americans don't want their presidents to be ordinary. They want them to be exceptional.