

## Partners in Governance Conference

April 21, 2016

Interactive Table Discussion

“Chicken-geddon”

**A debate about chickens is raging in the town of Heartland, U.S.A., population 2,000. As a growing number of residents have taken to raising chickens within city limits complaints from other residents have increased steadily. At the same time a groundswell of support for this traditional American practice and local source of organic eggs has also arisen. The community seems split in two by the issue.**

**After interviewing Ms. Adele Leghorn (pro-chicken, and convinced there is a conspiracy to ban them) and Mr. Shamus Armbruster (anti-chicken, and convinced town hall is on his side), and attempting, but failing, to get a response from the Mayor’s office, Pete Pounder, the local reporter, publishes the headline: “Back Door Chicken Ban Deal.”**

**After the story breaks Ms. Leghorn’s facebook page announces plans for a loud demonstration at the next city council meeting which will involve chickens and very large omelet. Mr. Armbruster begins to stake out the Town Legion and City Hall in order to “run into” his old pal the Mayor and press his case personally. Pete Pounder plans a follow-up story on the official reaction to the furor. Town Hall is under siege.**

**In a remarkable coincidence Ms. Leghorn, Mr. Armbruster, Pete Pounder, the Mayor, Alderwoman Bauer, Alderman Jones, and the town’s newly hired part time PIO Jane Grier find themselves seated together at one table for the town’s annual Fireman’s Fundraiser Social.**

### **Ms. Adele Leghorn**

Ms. Leghorn loves her chickens and the extra income the eggs bring, and has made this clear to her Alderwoman Alice Bauer, who seems to be on her side. She posts videos and pictures of her chickens, as well as of her daily fresh organic breakfast omelets (which look delicious) on Facebook and Instagram. Alderwoman Bauer has been reposting these on her own social media. Accompanying these posts are requests to friends and neighbors to call the mayor and council and demand an open chicken policy in the city. When her own demands addressed to other local officials on social media go unanswered her ingrained distrust of government kicks in and she begins loudly proclaiming a conspiracy by officials to ban chickens within the city limits altogether.

### **Mr. Shamus Armbruster**

Mr. Armbruster is Ms. Leghorn’s neighbor. He works at home nights and sleeps during the day, and the chicken din from next door is making life difficult, as he has made clear to his Alderman Alan Jones. He posts videos of the chickens and their noise with time stamps at all hours of the day and night and advocates a ban on all chickens within the city limits. Mr. Armbruster contacted a local reporter and indicated that the mayor (with whom he graduated from high-school—they still have drinks together occasionally at the local legion) agreed with him that a chicken ban was necessary. After seeing his Alderman Jones joking at the local diner with friends about “Chicken-geddon” and “Chicken-gate,” he decides he is being made a fool of and decides to hire a lawyer.

### **Mr. Pete Pounder**

Pete is the local reporter. Ms. Leghorn has contacted him repeatedly with her claims about the secret plan to ban her chickens and her extra income. Mr. Armbruster's claims about official support for his plan seem to confirm the story. Pete's calls to the Mayor's office have failed to generate a response. Pete gets a story into the paper just before the deadline outlining rumors of a "Back Door Deal on Chicken Ban."

### **Mayor Johnny Cornrow**

Mayor Johnny, who grew up on a farm, and is both aware of the racket chickens can make (he has also heard about this endlessly from his drinking buddy, Mr. Armbruster), and sympathetic to those who claim it their right to raise chickens on their property. He advocates a compromise ordinance limiting each homeowner to 5 chickens (no roosters) who must be penned. He was preparing to introduce it at the next Council meeting. Now he feels cornered by Pete's article, this once again reconfirms for him that Pete has an anti-government bias and tends to jump to conclusions (which is why he didn't answer Pete's calls). Now he wants PIO Jane (in whom he is very disappointed, he thinks she should have been on top of Pete's story with an official response) to announce the proposal via the town's Facebook page.

### **Alderman Alice Bauer**

Ms. Leghorn's Alderwoman Alice Bauer was raised on farm and enjoys seeing the chickens in the yards as well as the fresh eggs. She supports an unrestricted chicken policy and has made this clear to Pete. She re-posts Ms. Leghorn's chicken-grams, along with other pictures of prize winning chickens in the city on her personal social media pages. When PIO Jane declined to re-post on the city's page a picture of a Heartland girl's Rhode Island Red that took 2<sup>nd</sup> prize at the State Fair she tells Pete, who includes this information as supporting evidence for the conspiracy.

### **Alderman Alan Jones**

Mr. Armbruster's Alderman Alan Jones is newly elected and eager to serve his constituents conscientiously. He patiently listens to Mr. Armbruster's rages about his lack of sleep. He assures Mr. Armbruster that he understands the severity of the problem, and that he will do what he can to solve it. On the other hand, he tries to get Mr. Armbruster to recognize how property rights and tradition seem to support the pro-chicken side of the argument. This angers Armbruster, who distrusts politicians anyway. When Mr. Armbruster spots Alderman Alan at the local diner joking with his friends about the "Chicken-geddon" and "Chicken-gate" he storms out with an angry look on his face.

### **PIO Jane Grier**

Everyone in Town Hall is angry at the town's new part-time Public Information Officer. She was told by the Mayor not to engage Pete since he is biased against them. So she had no knowledge of the upcoming article. But now she is being accused of "allowing" Pete to publish unsubstantiated rumors without any kind of official response. She is being pressured by Alderman Alice to post pro-chicken posts. And the Mayor has just come to her with a desperate plan to announce his compromise via Facebook. She is also the organizing officer for the annual Fireman's Fundraiser Social, and secretly responsible for bringing all these people together "by coincidence."

## Post-Role Play Analysis:

What are the kinds of actions that each of these individuals could have, and still can, take to both faithfully represent their constituents and their positions, **and** rebuild the trust in Town Hall that the furor is threatening to destroy?

**What might they have done differently to this point?**

**AND**

**What might they do moving forward?**

**With respect to:**

- I. **Social Media: their own as well as the official city accounts**
- II. **Traditional Media, the local newspaper, and the town's new low-power FM local radio station.**
- III. **The upcoming Council meeting**
- IV. **Their habits around town**
- V. **Their relations with citizens**