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ROLE

MAYOR ZAMBENE OF THE CITY OF URBANA

You were pleased to learn that the Director of Public Works, Water and Sanitation, was ready to visit you and discuss how Urbana may be able to access national funds to create a community savings and loan association (CSLA) so people can borrow money to build toilets in their houses and contribute funds to construct piped water systems in selected sites within the community.

With this program, you will be able to convince all the naysayers in Urbana that you are working tirelessly to improve the lives of all people in Urbana...and not catering to vested interests and pandering to those who elected you into office. After a grueling campaign and stiff competition from the Chair of the Citizens' Action Committee, you have to show the people that as the new Mayor you are working quickly to address priority basic needs, like water and sanitation.

The Director of Public Works, Water and Sanitation had insisted on having a dialogue with a multi-stakeholder group composed of representatives from local government, the private sector and civil society organizations. You are relieved to know that the Director had now approved the list of invitees to this dialogue. You have been reluctant to invite those who may potentially oppose the program, for political reasons or personal vendetta...but you have concluded that it is difficult for anyone in Urbana to disagree with such a basic need as clean water and toilets. You remind yourself that you need to meet with the Owner/Manager of the Water Trucks and the Treasurer of the City Council in the next couple of days so they can appreciate your keen interest in having this program approved by the Director of Public Works, Water and Sanitation.

You are worried that the Chair of the Citizens' Action Committee, who was your main rival for the Mayor's post, will oppose the program, not because it is irrelevant or unnecessary, but because the Mayor is the main proponent.

You have attempted to exclude the Director of the NGO, W.A.T.E.R. from the dialogue as all the past encounters with this NGO Director have made you look inept and incompetent, in front of many people. But because the Director of Public Works, Water and Sanitation had clearly insisted that a CSO representative promoting women's participation in decisions about community development be invited, you had to swallow your pride and invite the Director of the NGO.

As the new Mayor, elected for a first term, you are motivated to show demonstrable results. One term is not enough time to pursue difficult reforms needed in Urbana. You will need to pave the way for re-election in about three years. You need to move quickly and pursue programs that clearly benefit the community.

You realize you will need the support of those you trust and have known for a long time. There are many minefields in politics...people can question your motivation, attack your personal integrity, expose falsehoods or spread misinformation.

Your chief ally, the owner of the water trucks, has been your primary financial and personal supporter. Throughout your campaign, you made sure that the owner of the water trucks maintained the company's profitability, sometimes by looking the other way when questions of payoffs and bribes and allegations of abuse, were raised. As a consequence, you end up spending more time with the water truck owner than you do with your own family. This has led to nasty rumors about just what type of a relationship you have with the truck owner.

Before you entered politics you were a successful farmer, but with rapid urbanization in neighboring districts, you had foreseen the dire conditions you now see – farms have been abandoned for work in the industrial zone. Men are at work or looking for work most of the time, leaving their wives and children to fend for themselves. And basic needs like water and sanitation are not provided for. You congratulate yourself on your foresight – leaving farming, and pursuing political leadership so that you can have advance information on the government's national plans for the development of communities like Urbana. If only you can find a profitable venture in the private sector....

You are trying to project an image of a Mayor whose heart is in the right place. Certainly, you have all the farmhands you had hired during the planting and harvest season, who can attest that they were paid just wages. And you had loaned them money in times of crisis in the family because of illness or death.

But politics is different – and unpredictable. You lose patience with people who question your motives or make you lose face in public. Your blood boils each time you are face-to-face with the Director of the NGO W.A.T.E.R. in a public meeting. You remind yourself to keep control of your temper in the presence of the Director of Public Works, Water and Sanitation as the Director of the NGO will surely try to discredit your ideas.