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The Selling of America by **Garry Frank and C. Kenneth Meyer**

Elwood James became a volunteer firefighter when he turned eighteen years of age. This was a momentous time for Elwood since he was always fascinated with fire trucks, ladders, pike polls and hose, and he was especially intrigued with the “ear busting sirens” that blazed when the “big red trucks” left their fire barn that was located across the street from his childhood home. Of course, he knew that his youthful dream of being fitted for a helmet and the lettered and numbered turnout gear would have to be set aside for the realities that he now faced as an adult. Now, he was properly dressed in a uniform and he was trained to assist individuals, families and even animals who faced the terror of fire, accidents, and other adversities.

The image of his local fire department was further emblazoned in his mind and he, like his parents and neighbors, had nothing but the highest respect for those who placed their lives in harm's way so that the public might be served. He also enjoyed the yearly pancake feed and “bouyla” that the firefighters cooked up each year in order to raise money so that they could give new toys to those children who had lost theirs in household fires.

Elwood chuckled to himself as he pleasantly recalled the days of his youth and the gift of wonderment, imagination and fantasy that characterized those days when his basic character and attitude toward government service was being formed. But that was then and this is now and time had changed everything! It was nice to reminisce, but now, as fire chief, he had to shoulder the responsibility of managing the fire department that was the focus of his childhood dreams. And, who would have predicted, other than his parents, that Elwood James, a young man with an unrelenting thirst for achievement, would become the first African-American to serve in the Johnsonville fire department?

Johnsonville was characteristically Southern in its architecture and urban design and although it was laid out in a typical grid pattern, one could easily ascertain the “concentric zones” which made up the city's core business and the residential circles that encompassed new immigrants, older residents, and the ever sprawling neighborhoods and strip malls. With a population of nearly 60,000, Johnsonville was attempting to keep up the changing times and face the historical legacy of segregation and the present challenges of economic and racial integration. These challenges were daunting and required constant vigilance if they were to be fully met.

Not unlike other urban places, Johnsonville had run the course on tapping into the various sources of revenue generation including sales tax, users' fees, water and utility usage rates, hotel and motel excise taxes and the ever unpopular rise in property taxes. These traditional sources of local funding had been fully exploited and the residents of Johnsonville wanted to "hold the line" on any added taxation efforts. The city had also gambled on the future and took on the daunting challenge of attracting new industries and businesses and thereby, providing a source of good paying and secure jobs. To achieve this goal, the city exploited the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) schemes, tax abatement policies for new construction in underutilized and undeveloped areas of Johnsonville and provided an inducement to locate in town by reducing the water and utility rates for new businesses they had successfully attracted. However, the revenue generated did not keep up with the escalating costs of providing governmental services as the city's infrastructure continued to deteriorate, the existing housing stock aged, and the population became increasingly diverse.

Times were especially challenging for the department as the personnel costs of its small core of full-time firefighters ratcheted upwards and the cost of health care increased in double-digit, inflationary jumps coupled with the fact that their union negotiators were determined to see that they were treated fairly in the upcoming labor-management negotiations. Chief James also had to cope with the continuing sage of aging equipment, deteriorating old stock of hoses and the expensive maintenance associated with having a fleet of older ambulances, pumper engines and ladder trucks. And, he had to replace the dated protective clothing and safety masks and lay in the needed equipment required for the safe handling of hazardous materials and accidents.

Chief James presented his customarily well prepared budget before the city council and they in turn allocated the usual four percent increase in funding for the fire department. He spoke to the council about the state of his department and the rising costs associated with providing fire inspection, fire reduction and fire suppression in a city where the houses were aging, the population was growing, and risks of fire, as his statistics on fire incidents showed, were increasing. He knew that he sounded like other department heads and that he would not be able to get money from a "stone." At the end of council meeting, he returned to the fire station and retreated to his office. It was, he thought, the "...worst of times." Now what novel ideas could he come up with that might "liberate" his department from their financial exigencies?

As James thumbed through the New Reporter — the city's only daily newspaper, he noticed that the local gambling facility (Lucky Sevens Resort and Casino), had a "bumper" year with its 98 percent payoff rate for the tables and slots. He laughed about the absurdity of gambling and thought it was an unusual advertisement ploy to pay-back an average of ninety-eight dollars for every one-hundred dollars dropped into the machines or laid on the green felt tables. Yet, the

advertisement touted that it had paid out over 300 million dollars in winnings during the last fiscal year — a figure that James felt was astonishingly high.

The feature story on Lucky Sevens, as it was affectionately called by those who lived in the regional area and gamed there, was soliciting funding proposals from public and non-profit organizations that would help address recognized community needs. Chief James reflected on the added equipment and training that was required in his department when Lucky Sevens came on line and perhaps this was a chance to get some needed funding for the list of equipment and training needs that he had prioritized and had just presented before Johnsonville's City Council. The article indicated that the Marietta Hughes was the chair of the board of directors of Lucky Sevens and that all inquiries should be directed to her attention. He would contact her tomorrow, he thought, and she certainly would be receptive to his department, especially given the good relationship he had with the casino and their recognition that Johnsonville's fire department encumbered new expenses associated with largest gaming facility in their state.

Marietta Hughes seemed most anxious to inform Chief James about their Request for Proposals (RFP), and told him they would be happy to talk about the prospects of granting the department up to \$600,000. Hughes stipulated, however, that with funding at that high level, Lucky Sevens required that it be used to purchase a piece of equipment such as the First-Responders Hazmat Truck which fortunately Chief James had just received a low competitive bid of \$550,000. Hughes also stated that the new truck would be required to bare the logo of Lucky Sevens Resort and Casino on each door of the cab and on the back of the truck. She said the Logo would be shown with a picture that displayed a winning slot machine — of course, all red sevens, and the accompanying statement, "Sponsored by the Lucky Sevens Resort and Casino." James thanked Hughes for her courtesy, time and information and said he would examine the ramifications, if any, of their discussion.

Chief James was anxious to get the finances that would enable him to upgrade his department, but the idea of the "gaudy" logo and the accompanying statement bothered him. Not being a novice to the budgetary process, he realized that added funding from the city would not be forthcoming. He also knew that the city council had given all of their department heads the authorization to pursue outside funding at their discretion — funding from companies, philanthropic organizations, private donations and grants from governmental sources. At the fall meeting of the International City Managers Association (ICMA), the topic of extramural funding was addressed during a panel session, and the response, overall, was very positive — especially from the city managers. James also knew that the "gift" from the casino was not prevented under applicable state and local laws. Yet, the idea of advertisement on a city owned vehicle was deeply troubling, especially since he had grown up with the image that city vehicles should only display the logo of their city.

As he faced this “prisoners’ dilemma,” many examples raced through his mind and he reflected on the uses of city public space and equipment that were being occupied for purposes of advertisement — some corporate and others from non-profit organizations. He thought about the appropriateness of having corporate advertisement posted on the parking meters and he thought in a peculiar sort of way they served as “miniature billboards,” but revenue was, nevertheless, generated.

He had seen with his own eyes the advertisement posted on public transportation, buses, trams and commuter cars and thought that the buses that had been wrapped in their colorful “vinyl advertisement” were attractive. He further noted that The U.S. Marine Corps advertises on the reefers of truck lines and that public spaces have become as the Wall Street Journal suggested, “a corporate gallery for graffiti with a profit motive.” And, although he felt that public property should not be defaced, he had personally seen advertisement stuck or pasted on anything that stood still long enough for the “urban marketers and their guerrillas to leave their mark.” Of course, he had learned early on in his civic courses that speech was protected by the First Amendment, but should Johnsonville’s public property become the billboard for the future — fire trucks, water towers, city vehicles, police cars, traffic control signals, public parks, civic centers and arenas, ball parks, swimming pools and schools.

The enumeration of countless examples did not ease his decision making dilemma for the list seemed to be endless. He wondered if the trend toward advertisement on public property was merely a new type of blight that had been seductively brought into our urban spaces. If so, was this any different from the commercial advertisements placed on park benches, bus stands or even more dramatically, the public university’s advertisement printed in the media and shown on television and what about the advertisements that states and cities used to attract business to enhance their chances for economic development?

Chief James thought about the implications associated with commercial advertising overall, and particularly on his fire equipment. He wondered if it was truly worth it to get a new Hazmat truck that also “sported the casino’s graffiti.” What message would his department be giving to the city and especially to those who are most adversely affected by gambling — those least able to afford to gamble responsibly?

Questions and Instructions:

1. If you were faced with Chief James's dilemma, what would you do? What would you find alluring about Marietta Hughes offer? Or, what in Hughes's proposal do you find repugnant? Please elaborate.
2. If you either decided to accept or reject the offer from Lucky Sevens, explain the rationale that justified your decision? Would your justification be the same if you were making it before the city council or the citizenry? Please explain.
3. Explain how local governments have used commercial advertisement on buses and park benches as a means to generate revenue and the implications, if any, that would be felt if commercial advertisement was extended to publicly owned emergency vehicles. Justify your answer.
4. Please develop a policy statement that will guide the city council and departments on the appropriateness of commercial advertising on the city's emergency vehicles. You might want to determine if there is literature on public sector advertisement and if it differs from that used in the private sector. Present a copy of the policy statement you just prepared to the class and ask them to identify the advantages and limitations of your recommendation.

Timeline of Events:

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Mental Joggers:

Additional Notes and Observations:

Personal Reflections (topics or concerns that you want to address in other case analyses):

Case 34: Selling of America

Name:

Case Log and Administrative Journal Entry

This case analysis and learning assessment is printed on perforated pages and may be removed from the book for evaluation purposes.

Case Analysis:

Major case concepts and theories identified:

What is the relevance of the concepts, theories, ideas, and techniques presented in the case to that of public management?

Facts — what do we know *for sure* about the case? Please list.

Who is involved in the case? (people, departments, agencies, units, etc.)
Were the problems of an “intra/interagency” nature? Be specific.

Are there any rules, laws, regulations, or SOPs identified in the case study that might limit decision-making? If so, what are they?

Are there any clues presented in the case as to the major actor's interests, needs, motivations, and personalities? If so, please list them.

Learning Assessment:

What do the administrative theories presented in this case mean to you as an administrator?

How can this learning be put to use outside the classroom? Are there any problems you envision during the implementation phase?

Several possible courses of action were identified during the class discussion. Which action was considered to be *most practical* by the group? Which was deemed *most feasible*? Based on your personal experience, did the group reach a conclusion that was desirable, feasible, and practical? Please explain why or why not.

Did the group reach a decision that would solve the problem on a short-term or long-term basis? Please explain.

What could you have done to receive more learning value from this case?