

Osama High

A play
By Greg Abbott

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52 pages

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OSAMA HIGH

CHARACTERS:

HENRY WAFFLER: The Red Apple School District superintendent. Not a good communicator. Has become wackier each year.

LEO CARSTENS: The Red Apple High School principal. Late 40s. Smart and a good communicator.

AMINA KETEMA: PTO president. Somali single mother who is attracted to Leo.

SHEILA SCRUMBECKER: The Red Apple School District school board chair.

ASAD KETEMA: Smart, but poor, Somali senior in high school. Student council president. Amina's son.

JONATHAN HIGHTOWER: Owner of Peter Poultry foods, the largest employer in town.

HAMID/AL-FARRACK: Representative from Somali delegation who is interested in donating money for a new school.

GREGORY RANDALL/DARRYL: School board member using his position as a stepping stone for a state legislative position. Darryl is slow-witted helper for the Vote No group.

MAN: One person to play all the male characters and audience members, including Herbert of the Vote No group.

WOMAN: One person to play all the female characters, including union president Teresa Hedbloom and Mary Krauss, a former PTO leader who is now on the school board, and Harriet, an Vote No member who is a former English major and stickler for details.

ACT I

Scene 1: Hard of Public Hearing

Scene 2: Student Council

Scene 3: Getting the Board on Board

ACT II

Scene 1: Terrorist Training

Scene 2: Stepping Up to the Plate

Scene 3: The Opposition Party

ACT III

Scene 1: The Visitor

Scene 2: After the Storm

SUMMARY:

Facing severe budget cuts to the school, the district tries for a seventh time to pass a building bond. Just as the campaign starts, a mysterious donor promises to give the district \$25 million if the building is named after him. Problem is, the donor's last name is Osama. Will the Parents Opposed to Other People Vote No group get people to turn down the money? Will the Vote Yes group get people to pass a bond the seventh time? As the Red Apple community struggles to a decision, it struggles with the changing face of a new normal in America and how everyone can get along.

OSAMA HIGH

ACT I: HARD OF PUBLIC HEARING

[LEO, SHEILA, HENRY and AMINA sit at a table. One mic is in the audience in front of the stage. Two actors sitting in the audience come up to play many community members who speak at a microphone in front of the stage.]

HENRY

And if you look at Slide 98 of the powerpoint, this shows how the demand of ACTs and NWEAs and the new MCA-IIs affect the curriculum expenditures because of multiple retakes, document preparation and PC demand. These assessments are mostly required by NCLB and IDEA for accountability. That ends my presentation. I will now turn it back over to Chair Scrumbecker.

SHEILA

Thank you, Superintendent Waffler for that very long [beat] and thorough budget presentation. We have now come to the point in our meeting for public comment on the budget cut plan. Do the six people here want to say anything? If so, please come to the microphone, give your name and limit your comments to two minutes.

HIGHTOWER

Good evening, members of the budget panel. I am Jonathan Hightower of Peter Poultry Foods. I am here to say that it is appalling that you are only cutting a mere 3 percent from your \$30 million budget. At our factory, we've had to adjust to hard economic times by making hard decisions. We laid off 10 percent of our workforce. Everybody has had to tighten their wallets and try to hang onto their houses to keep them out of foreclosure. I would suggest the same 10 percent cut to your school business as the other major businesses in town had to make. I think schools have to operate like a business and learn to live within its means. Thank you for your time, members of the panel.

SHEILA

Thank you Mr. Hightower. Anyone else?

WOMAN

I'm Teresa Hedbloom, the Minnesota Education Association union representative. I just want to let this panel know that for the fourth year in a row, teachers are looking at huge increases in the payments they make for health insurance with paltry raises. If this board doesn't step up its contract this year, you will be looking at a strike. This is not a threat. This is just to say that the economy hurts everyone, and unless teachers get at least a 3 percent raise this year, you could be looking at a strike.

SHEILA

Thank you Mrs. Hedbloom. Next?

MAN

I just want to say that I think you should fire the superintendent and all the administration. A monkey could run this school. If you got rid of those big \$80,000 superintendent salaries, that would save your 3 percent right there.

SHEILA

And can you state your name for the record, Mr.?

MAN

Anonymous.

[MAN sits down]

SHEILA

It's for our records. We need...oh, well. Next?

WOMAN

I say you get rid of those health classes teaching kids about sex and pornography and all that. Our kids don't need no school teachers telling them about condoms and encouraging them to have sex. Get rid of those classes, and that should save a million dollars all by itself.

SHEILA

Mrs. Houseman, could you state your name into the... Mrs. Houseman? Oh, well. Next?

MAN

I just think this board is fiscally irresponsible. You get millions of dollars from the state and all it seems to go to is administration and teacher salaries and buying fancy new computers. Well, in these hard times, everyone can't have a fancy new computer and Internet in the classroom. What happened to living within your means?

SHEILA

Anyone else? Mr. Hawkins? How about you? Mr. Hawkins?

MAN

I think he fell asleep about slide 72.

SHEILA

Well, seeing there is nobody else with any comments, I'd like to thank you for coming to our public input hearing and...

LEO

Pardon me, Sheila, but I'd like to say something.

SHEILA

Mr. Carstens? You have something to add? Usually we don't respond to citizen comments at the hearing. But I guess if you have something short.

LEO

Sheila, I never thought these hearings with the panel are much good. We can't even respond to their comments. Mr. Hightower wants us to cut another 10 percent. That would be \$9 million. That means 28 teachers cut. Class sizes pushing 40 kids a class in first and second grades. That means we stay with our 1957 history books for another four years and our 1974 math curriculum and books. That means we stop busing kids within two miles of the school. That means our 250 elementary students share a computer lab with 20 computers for another four years.

SHEILA

Mr. Carstens, you are out of order.

LEO

No, Sheila. This panel is out of order. We should be talking with these people. Having a discussion with them. Telling them why we just can't slice another 10 percent. Schools aren't businesses. They aren't learning factories. We can't throw away the kids who don't meet quality standards. We help them all. That's why we are not a business. And I am sick of everybody pointing to administrative salaries. We have two administrators – our superintendent and myself. And I run both the elementary AND high school. We have one staff person. We spend next to NOTHING on administration. If we spent the same amount on administration in schools as businesses do, we'd be spending 12 times more on administration here. Do you really want a monkey running your schools?

SHEILA

Mr. Waffler, can you please get Mr. Carstens in order.

WAFFLER

A monkey could be fun. Maybe a math monkey!

LEO

And for God's sakes. Those other comments? We don't teach kids how to use condoms. Our health program is horribly flawed but only because it teaches abstinence only. And our fancy new computers – all 20 of them – are 15 years old. We're trying to teach our kids for modern society. Should we go back to ink quills or chisels and stone tablets while we're at it? And to top it all off, our union's main concern about all these cuts is how they will pad their benefit package.

SHEILA

Mr. Waffler?

HENRY

Matty the math monkey. That does sound like fun!

HIGHTOWER

If this is the way you run public input sessions, it is no wonder none of the public shows. No wonder people think you should scrap this whole system and just start over. This is a crock and I'm leaving.

SHEILA

Mr. Carstens!

HENRY

Maybe we could get a math monkey from the zoo!

LEO

Mr. Hightower! I'm serious. I'd like to get your ideas. I'd like to have a discussion, not just this. Mr. Hightower.

[HIGHTOWER exits quickly]

HENRY

Thank God this isn't being recorded and put on public access.

SHEILA

Mr. Carstens, I think from now on your presence at these hearings will not be needed. I am going to make a motion that you be replaced. Maybe by the board's vice chair.

LEO

But don't you think these would be better as a...

AMINA

Leo, just let it go.

LEO

Shouldn't we have discussions about this? Shouldn't..

[LEO looks at AMINA]

AMINA

I make a motion we adjourn.

SHEILA

Second. We have a motion and a second. All those in favor say Aye.

EVERYONE BUT LEO

Aye.

SHEILA

Meeting adjourned. Henry, I want to talk to you about Mr. Carstens.

[SHEILA and HENRY walk quickly off stage]

AMINA

Leo? What was that all about? Did you really think you would have a discussion with Mr. Hightower and the Deliverance crowd? They don't like us, and Sheila doesn't like having an intelligent principal offering good ideas.

LEO

Amina, let's not get into this. Let's not do the race thing.

AMINA

It's true, Leo, and you know it. You have been the stick in their craw for years. You've helped grow community within the Somali people and a welcoming atmosphere in the school. Because of that, and the turkey plant, we keep bringing more Somali families in. That makes all of them uncomfortable. She's scared that if we actually sit down and talk, some of these racial issues are going to surface.

LEO

Amina, she's not racist.

AMINA

So is that why she just cut you off and is talking about you to the superintendent?

LEO

I don't know, Amina. I did get off on a rant, you know. We are proposing to cut 12 teachers and that isn't even enough for some people. We have been killing this school slowly with a thousand cuts for decades. Our kindergarten is up to 32 students in each classroom. That's crazy. And where are the parents?

AMINA

It's American Idol night.

LEO

That doesn't make me feel any better.

AMINA

Well, I'm here. I'm a parent.

LEO

We have 540 families in this district. You are the only one to show up.

AMINA

I'm on the panel.

LEO

Right. But you would have shown up anyway, right?

AMINA

Truth? If I wasn't on this panel, no way I'm coming to listen to a 98-slide powerpoint by Henry.

LEO

That's what I'm saying. That's why we need to really do something different. We need to get people's attention somehow and get them involved. Could you bring some members of the PTO together.

AMINA

All three of them.

LEO

Three?

AMINA

Counting me.

LEO

Amina, that's not making me feel any better, either.

AMINA

Well, I do have some good news: Asad was elected Student Council president.

LEO

Wow! That's great. He's a smart kid. Got a sense of humor, too, just like Jonah.

AMINA

Sure does. He's certainly Jonah's...

[AMINA gets choked up]

LEO

Hey, Amina. Sorry. Didn't mean to go down that path. It's just, you know. I miss Jonah, too. Damn war. Look at how much we spend on that thing. Billions in Iraq. Billions in Afghanistan. Nobody blinks an eye. But ask for a billion for schools and everyone cries taxes and runs for their wallets. Not fair.

[AMINA gathers up her purse]

AMINA

Better get going. Don't want to leave a teenager on their own for too long.

LEO

Hey, Amina. If you need anything, you just let me know. If Asad needs anything, you see me. I know vets benefits are next to nothing. I can help out.

AMINA

You just stay out of trouble yourself, OK?

LEO

I will.

[SHEILA steps in from offstage]

SHEILA

Mr. Carstens, I think Mr. Waffler wants a word with you.

LEO (to Amina)

Maybe I spoke too soon.

[AMINA exits. SHEILA exits. LEO gets up to leave just as HAMID walks up to the table.]

HAMID

Hello. I have heard you are a friend to Somali people.

LEO

Well, thank you. I'd like to think I'm a friend to everyone.

HAMID

I have also heard that you have had much difficulty in securing money to build a proper school for your children.

LEO

Uh, yeah. You could say that. We've been trying for six years, and..

HAMID

Many of my relatives have moved here from our homeland. Many attend your schools. Many have told me of the need to build a proper school. I would like to do that for you.

LEO

Well, thank you. Yes. We'd love to have you on our referendum committee. We can use people to campaign, get the word out about how we need...

HAMID

Not campaign. I and my associates would like to give you a new school.

LEO

So...you have a building you'd like us to use?

HAMID

New school. Some members in our group have access to – how do I say – friends who are in Dubai and are part of the OPEC.

LEO

OPEC?

HAMID

We want to know how much you request to build a new school.

LEO

How much? Well, it's somewhere between \$25 million – maybe \$30 million.

HAMID

We will consider your request. We will consider \$25 million for a new school. We only ask that it be named after our funder.

LEO

No problem! No problem at all. For \$25 million, we'll name it after him. We'll name it after his wife. We'll paint it his favorite color. We'll put his name on every classroom in the building.

HAMID

Then, that is settled. We will make our request. You will name it after our elder, Al-Farrak Osama.

LEO

Great. (pause) Uh, Al-Farrack Obama, was it?

HAMID

Not Obama. It is Osama. You may call it Osama High School, or Osama High.

[LEO stares offstage to HENRY and SHEILA]

LEO

(yelling) Uh, HENRY! SHEILA! Anybody? I think you guys better come out here.

[Lights out]

ACT I, SCENE 2 – STUDENT COUNCIL

ASAD

Hey, Mr. C. You want to go over the student council agenda?

LEO

Love to, Asad. What's hot on the students' minds today.

ASAD

Oh, just the regular stuff – resolutions for longer lunch hours and an open campus so everyone can eat at McDonald's. And one for no age limit on prom dates. And another for allowing cell phones in rooms during test days. Stuff like that.

LEO

Wow. Looks like a big agenda. But first, could you put me down for a little discussion on budget.

ASAD

We heard about the budget.

LEO

YOU heard? What did you hear?

ASAD

We heard that you went off on old Mr. Hightower and really stuck it to him.

LEO

You did, huh. What if I told you I simply wanted to change the format of the meeting from a hearing to a discussion?

ASAD

I heard he's all P.O.ed and you're in big trouble. Are you in big trouble, Mr. C?

LEO

No, I'm not in. [pause] Well, I guess. You know what, Asad, I guess I am. I got kicked off the budget panel and got my ears bent back and was told to keep my opinions to myself.

ASAD

Wow, Mr. C. That's the first time I heard of the principal getting called down to the principal's office. So you gonna talk about that?

LEO

No. I'm going to talk about the budget and cuts and how they're going to affect you guys.

ASAD

Man, I'm already sharing a desk with Emilio. We get any more students in my math class and we'll have to be standing along the wall and write with our notebooks on top of the radiators that don't work.

LEO

Just not any money. Economy is bad. State is 6 billion in debt. Two wars still going on.

ASAD

What about the stimulus money, Mr. C?

LEO

Finger in the dike, Asad. We don't get funding like other things.

ASAD

But we just spent trillions on bailouts. Why not bail out schools? I thought Barack was going to change all this.

LEO

President's got bigger issues on the plate. Money is going to war and bailouts.

ASAD

Man, I read that a billion was spent rebuilding three Iraqi schools after they were bombed. Too bad we couldn't get some of that money.

LEO

Odd, isn't it. If our school was in Iraq and we were in a war, we'd have a new school.

ASAD

I heard we could get a new school. No more leaky roofs. Heat that actually works. Some SMART boards. I'd love a new school.

LEO

Why do I have a feeling that someone told you something that isn't quite official yet. What have you heard?

ASAD

Well, I heard some rich oil baron is going to give us money for a new school if we name it after him.

LEO

New school? Really?

ASAD

Yeah. \$25 million. We just have to name it after Al-Farrack Osama.

LEO

Well, I guess confidential information really travels fast.

ASAD

It's rather funny because just last week I talked to Superintendent Waffler and told him my idea for raising money – that we could bid for naming rights – like get \$100,000 from Target to call our school Target High. Superintendent Waffler mentioned General Mills might give us money for painting our school lockers with Lucky Charms logos. And how some kids were willing to get corporate tattoos to raise money for a new school.

LEO

Naming rights? Tattoos? That's really thinking out of the box.

ASAD

Superintendent Waffler thought of the tattoo idea.

LEO

Really? Actually, I think your school naming idea could happen.

ASAD

Yeah. This is exciting. All the students are psyched. Aren't you excited? This is like a dream come true. Don't you feel great?

LEO

Asad, I've never felt better.

[Lights out]

ACT I, SCENE III – GETTING THE BOARD ON BOARD

[Board meeting room with LEO, HENRY, SHEILA, MARY and GREGORY.]

SHEILA

I don't feel comfortable meeting like this. Is this even legal?

HENRY

Of course it's legal. That's why I'm only meeting with three board members at a time. That way there's no quorum. And I'm not talking board business; just a proposal for a school name change.

LEO

Technically, Henry, it is a public meeting. We really should..

HENRY

Technically, we're just here to talk about a school name change. That's not board business.

GREGORY

A name change? We can't rename a school. That causes too much controversy. Especially if it's the rumors I've been hearing about.

HENRY

Of course. Of course. Well, as many of you know, our visit from the Minnesota Department of Occupational Safety and Health Administration has resulted in many irregularities within the structural overview of our current physical plant.

GREGORY

Good God, Henry. Just let Leo tell us.

LEO

OK. Short story: We found a donor who is willing to give us \$25 million to build a new school.

GREGORY

So it's true?

MARY

That's wonderful!

LEO

We simply have to name the school after the donor.

MARY

Big deal. No problem.

GREGORY

And that's the problem.

LEO
Al-Farrack Osama.

MARY
Al-Farrack High School?

LEO
No. Try Osama High.

GREGORY
No way!

SHEILA
It's crazy!

LEO
It's not crazy. We simply say that the Islamic Association of Minnesota has offered to donate money to fix our school because the state can't. In exchange, we're going to rename the school to the Osama High School. We make sure to say it will be Al-Farrack Osama High School.

HENRY
Of course, we won't need to change the name because this is just the thing that will get people to pass a building bond for a new school.

GREGORY
Is that true? I've never heard of an offer. I've never heard of the Islamic whatever Association.

HENRY
It's true. I personally know the head of the group. He's willing to leave one member's personal estate of \$25 million for a new Red Apple High School if we rename it to Osama High.

MARY
Who is he?

SHEILA
Who cares. We can't be taking money from some Islamic terrorist.

LEO
He's not a terrorist. And YOU wouldn't rename it.

SHEILA
Well then who would? We're the board. We rename schools.

LEO
No. The Site Council names schools. You simply approve the recommendation of the Site Council.

SHEILA

The Site Council is NOT going to approve something like this.

LEO

They could, but Henry asked them to take it to a vote of the parents. If the parents approve it, they'll recommend approval. You'd simply be approving a recommendation made by parents. You'd be listening to your constituents. It comes to you on a silver platter.

MARY

And we'd get millions of dollars for school renovations.

LEO

Yes.

HENRY

But they'll pass a bond vote first because nobody will want to name the school Osama High.

GREGORY

Well, I'm not renaming the school to Osama High. Every right-wing birther will be after us to get us off the board. I have my reputation to uphold.

SHEILA

Oh, Gregory, please. You mean your future run for state representative.

GREGORY

Yes. What's wrong with that? What's wrong with representing our citizens at a state level?

SHEILA

Nothing. Just call it what it is.

GREGORY

And I suppose you're fine with this?

SHEILA

No. This sounds completely crazy. There's got to be better ways to get some money for repairs. Henry, what about our reserves?

HENRY

Our latest budget forecast shows we're going to use up our reserves by the end of the school year. We'll be running a budget into Statutory Operating Debt next year unless we get a funding increase from the state.

GREGORY

The state has to come through next year. We've gone without an increase for four years. They've got to find something for us.

LEO

Mr. Randall, you know as well as I do that Minnesota is facing a \$5.7 billion debt next year. We'll be lucky not to have to take a billion dollar cut next year. We aren't getting money from the state.

SHEILA

So we try for a building bond again.

HENRY

A perfect idea!

LEO

We've tried a bond referendum for six years in a row. Last time around, we lost by 59 percent of the voters.

GREGORY

But this time we tell them it's really serious.

HENRY

I agree. If people know that it's either approve the levy or name the school Osama High, I think we can really pass it this time.

LEO

But if we don't, does everyone agree that we have to do something drastic.

SHEILA

I didn't say that

GREGORY

Certainly not

MARY

Yes. I guess we do.

SHEILA

You'd vote for this? Mary, this is crazy.

MARY

I used to be on the PTO. And I'm sick of running referendum campaigns. Let's take the \$25 million and get a new school.

GREGORY

Well, I can't, and I won't, call our school Osama High. If this does hit the papers, we'll have every nutcase in the nation after us or trying to burn down the school or something.

HENRY

That's why a levy is best.

LEO

But if it doesn't pass, we need a backup. We'll be very clear that we'd only accept the money if the levy fails and because the state won't fund education to fix up our buildings. And until the state gives us funds to fix the school, we'll have to name it Osama High.

SHEILA

We'll be crucified for taking dirty money to name a school after a terrorist.

MARY

And what's your solution, Sheila? Let our schools fall apart? My daughter's classroom is one of four with a leaky roof. When it rains, we have to set out pails to catch the water and rearrange the room so the leaks don't fall on our kids' heads. You would give up \$25 million dollars?

SHEILA

Why is this donor so intent on naming it Osama? Why not Mohammed? Or Al-Farrack? Maybe we could meet with him and...

HENRY

He will not meet with us. He has already told us his reasons: He has heard from way too many Somalis in town that the reason our building referendum fails is because the white people in this town don't want to spend money to educate "those kids." So the community for "those kids" stepped up and want to make sure that if we take the money, everyone knows exactly who paid for that new school.

GREGORY

This is nuts. What did the other three members of the board say?

LEO

We can't discuss possible votes. That would be board business.

HENRY

Let's just say that it looks like I only need one of you to approve the Site Council recommendation.

SHEILA

Unbelievable

GREGORY

What are they thinking?

HENRY

They're thinking of the kids, Mr. Randall. That's why we're here. We are here to give our kids the best possible education we can. And we can't do that with a theater stage that has been condemned and a gymnasium that is close to being condemned. And roofs that are leaking all over the place with asbestos tiles falling down in the library when it rains.

GREGORY

But if we do this, every political opponent is going to say how I was on the board that voted to name a school after the biggest, most evil terrorist in the world. I'd be committing political suicide.

LEO

Al-Farrack Osama is not a terrorist. And you aren't renaming it. You put it to the vote of the parents. If the parents approve it, the Site Council recommends it. You simply approve the Site Council's recommendations and the vote of the people. How more democratic can that get – approving the vote of the public?

SHEILA

And if the parents don't approve the name change?

LEO

We're done. No name change, no money. No need for the board to approve the recommendation.

HENRY

Once we pass the referendum, all this talk goes away, anyway. Parents won't approve the name change. You board members just have to say you would approve it if the bond doesn't pass. We simply use this as fuel to get the bond passed and keep Red Apple schools the name. We're not going to waste a lot of time on this.

LEO

Not waste any time? I'm thinking we should just accept the free money and avoid all the time we spend on a bond campaign. Not only do we get our school fixed, but the state is embarrassed into helping to fund ALL schools across the state. If we get a state platform because of this, think of all the attention we can draw to the lack of state funding for education. We can say a complete stranger who follows Islam cares more about our kids than our own state government.

HENRY

Let's not get carried away. Our first option is to try the referendum again. With this offer, people are going to approve the vote and the Osama nonsense goes away. If the bond fails, I'll recommend against accepting the money. I mean, naming it Osama High would put our kids in danger. We just want people to THINK there is board support for taking the money. That way, they'll vote for the bond.

LEO

What do you mean you'd recommend against accepting the money? It's free money. And the guy is NOT a terrorist. It's just a weird coincidence that his last name is Osama.

GREGORY

I've heard enough. This is just crazy. I can't believe you are thinking of doing this. I can't believe the other three on the board are doing this. You know that if it goes down with a

vote along the lines you say, it will be the Somalis on the board that vote for it and the rest of us who don't.

MARY

I'm voting for it.

GREGORY

What's wrong with you?

SHEILA

Mary, come on!

HENRY

That's nuts!

MARY

Nothing is wrong with me. Your kids are out of school. Mine are still there. We are giving them a crappy education. We're doing the best we can, but we're failing them. Every other school has SMART boards and a decent computer lab. We have chalkboards and 20-year-old donated PCs and half don't work. Our class sizes are getting so big that kids are sharing desks. Putting our kids in a situation like this is wrong. Not taking money from someone who wants to help; that's wrong. Caring more about political aspirations than our kids' education is wrong.

GREGORY

I take offense at that.

HENRY

Realistically, the levy passes and everything goes back to normal. Parents won't pass it. And even if they do, I don't think the board should approve it. It's 100 percent safe.

GREGORY

People don't look at individual votes. If the board votes for this, they're going to say I was on the board that did this. You think this is funny? You think this is all a big stunt? Well, let me tell you that when the Tea Partiers and military officers and VFW hear about this, all hell will break loose. You do this, and this school will break apart before any building falls down. And it will take the community with it.

HENRY

Then let the community vote on it. We offer them one last chance to approve a \$25 million building bond. We still have a week to plan for a November vote. We just have to get the resolution by August 26th. Two months later, either the people approve the bond and we go on, or if they turn it down again, we turn down the \$25 million from Al-Farrack Osama and things go back to normal.

GREGORY

Well, I guess I could support putting the building bond to voters one more time.

LEO

But if it fails, we have to be ready to vote for taking the money.

GREGORY

Then count me out. I'll be on the side fighting against this. And I'll be one of four votes that eventually fires you, Mr. Carstens. You may get your fellow Somali board members to agree with you. But you won't get my vote. Good day.

[GREGORY walks out]

SHEILA

He's such an arrogant, political hack. He's just mad that you got some Somalis to run for the board and they got on.

LEO

So you're willing to consider this?

SHEILA

Hell no. I'm not even running for higher office, but if you've got four votes, no need to stick my neck out. You sure about your vote, Mary?

MARY

If the people of this community don't do the right thing this time, I'm going to vote to accept the money.

HENRY

Of course, we're just SAYING that you would. If the bond fails, we really need to turn the money down. I mean, voting to name the school Osama High – that could cost you your board seat.

MARY

Do you think I care? I got on the board to help improve education. But all I've done since I've been on the board is cut programs, lay off teachers and participate in six failed bond and levy campaigns. And if state cuts to education come through next year, do I really even WANT to be on the board?

HENRY

Remember, we only do this if the ...

SHEILA

Referendum fails. Is there ANY flexibility on the name? Al-Farrack High?

LEO

No. It's Osama High or nothing.

SHEILA

Well, at least we killed him. I hope you know what you're doing, Leo. And Henry, just don't have the vote on September 11th.

[Lights out. END OF ACT I]

ACT II, SCENE I -- TERRORIST TRAINING

[Parent Meeting room in district office. Three chairs are in front of the audience with LEO, AMINA and ASAD sitting. TERESA is at the table with LEO.]

TERESA

Mr. Carstens, I just want you to know that staff will have to be paid time and a half for all their work getting you all this information. Also, for whatever facilitation you want them to do.

LEO

Teresa, everyone is going to be paid cash. Time and a half. Don't worry.

TERESA

Board will never approve that kind of money.

LEO

Don't have to. I'm paying for it.

TERESA

Right. You don't have that kind of money.

LEO

Sure do. Teachers may not make much, but principals do. I just heard that from one of our informed citizens a few nights ago. Don't worry. All the teachers will be paid.

TERESA

Well. I'm just saying that we did our part, but we're not getting in the middle of this. We gave you the data. We're off.

LEO

That's fine. I really appreciate everyone's work. And it's good that nobody gets too involved. If there's any trouble, just blame it on me.

TERESA

Already have. See you later.

[TERESA leaves. HENRY walks in.]

LEO

Just in time, Henry. OK, Amina, Asad, it's just us. Let's go over your talking points. You all have heard about our proposed budget cuts. We're going to have to cut 12 teachers. And if the state cuts education this funding year, possible 25 teachers. And let's brainstorm ideas to people's objections to the name change. All the staff wrote some down. Here's the first one: She says: "This is crazy. You can't change the name of the

school from Red Apple to Osama bin Laden. I had a son die in Iraq. I don't know if I can go naming a school after Osama bin Laden."

HENRY

That's when I say we just have to pass the referendum!

LEO

Actually, I was thinking of having Amina answer that. Since her husband died in the war and all.

HENRY

Yes. I guess that makes sense. She can say how she's against accepting the money and urges people to vote Yes on the referendum.

AMINA

Actually, my answer is that we're naming it after Al-Farrack Osama, not Osama bin Laden. Al-Farrack is NOT a terrorist. My husband died in Afghanistan. I know what you're going through. I hate Osama more than I thought I could ever hate a person. But I have no control over what our federal government does. I have control here. I think we should take the money and do something drastic. Seems like people only listen when there is something outrageous or when something is mentioned about the war. If naming this school after Osama helps bring attention to education funding, I'm sure Jonah would smile and have a good laugh about it. I know he'd sign the petition.

LEO

Good, Amina. Now don't forget to bridge to benefits.

HENRY

Oh, that's just horrible! We never mentioned the referendum!

LEO

Henry, we don't want to sound like a broken record. There are other reasons for accepting the money.

HENRY

I'm not a broken record. That's the only alternative. Maybe a broken record is what people need. They say people need to hear something six times before it sinks in. Maybe a broken record... YES! That's brilliant. A record! I could do a rap song and put in some lyrics about voting yes. Assad, give me a little rap background. You know, the boot-o-puhhh, boot-o-puuh, ee-ore, eeore, eechie.

[HENRY stands up and repeats his rap noise sound]

Just play along with me. Start me out, Assad.

ASSAD

Boot-o-puh, boot-o-puh, boot-o-puh, eechie, eechie, eechie. (Assad continues to make made up rap sounds while HENRY sings.)

HENRY

Yo, we need a little help cuz our hood is fallin'
Yeah our hood is fallin', our hood is fallin'
Be true to your school and vote yes on the ballot
Vote yes on the ballot, vote yes on the ballot

If you don't help the 'hood
Our 'hood goes Osama
Yeah, our hood goes Osama
And if you don't wanna

Be true to your school and vote yes on the ballot
Vote yes on the ballot
Uh-huh, uh-huh

Now, just throw in some of those dance moves.

[HENRY does some strange dance moves]

I saw these moves on those Nike Just Do ads with that older guy dancing. Seen those?

[ASSAD stops. Everyone stares while HENRY dances.]

HENRY

You know. Encouraging people to work out. Whew! This is really tiring. Got anything to drink? A little whiskey or something?

AMINA

We have some mango juice.

HENRY

Oooh. That would go good with a little rum.

LEO

I don't have rum in the house.

HENRY

That's OK. Brought my own. You just continue on. Make sure to incorporate this Hip-Hop dance. We need to reach the youth,. Right, Assad? I'll just be in the kitchen.

[HENRY exits]

LEO

(pause) OK, then. Let's get back at it. The next question is going to be someone who tells us we should live within our means and not pass the levy. So here's our answer. I would say: "Tell me: If you lose your job, do you still have three meals a day on the table for your kids? Do you still make sure they have shoes and clothes. Do you still try your best to give them a home? Education is in those priorities. In tough times, kids need a good education more than ever. We can't be cutting it." This could be one that you answer, Asad. Up for it?

ASAD

No problem. Do you really want me answering a bunch of these. You're probably better at this.

LEO

You are going to be the best at this. Administrative officials are going to be seen as having an agenda. I have to support the huge salary I get from the school. You have no agenda. You just want an education. Answer as many as you can. We're going to spend the next hour coming up with questions people may ask and concerns they'll have. We'll get a big list and spend the second hour coming up with answers and scenarios and information for those questions.

AMINA

That could take all night.

LEO

I've got nothing better to do. Asad can cut out at 10 p.m. You have to make sure to get some sleep.

ASAD

Like you don't?

LEO

I've got plenty of time for sleeping once this passes.

ASAD

So tell me about this donor. What's he like?

LEO

I told you, I don't know anything about the donor. He simply wants relatives from his clan to go to a nice school.

ASAD

Kids at school are saying that you're Muslim.

AMINA

Asad, that's nonsense.

ASAD

I know. I told them it's bull, but they say you must be if you know Islamic Arabs with tons of oil money to give away to schools.

LEO

I'm not Muslim, but so what if I am? You don't have to defend me. Let them believe what they may.

ASAD

They're trying to drag your name through the sewer, though. They just can't go spreading lies about you.

LEO

Doesn't matter, Asad. I don't want you getting in the middle of anything with me. If they have a problem or a question, my door is always open. They can ask me. I'll tell them exactly what I told you.

ASAD

Still, it's not fair.

AMINA

Some people are just ignorant. I mean, just because someone helps out people from a different religion doesn't make them a Muslim.

LEO

And so what if I am? Does my being Muslim make me a terrorist?

ASAD

No. (pause) So ARE you Muslim?

AMINA

Asad!

LEO

It's fine, Amina. No, Asad, I can tell you right now that I am not Muslim and I am woefully ignorant of the religion. It's probably something I should study up on. Understanding other religions can only help us all get along. A good strategy, don't you think?

AMINA

Speaking of strategy, are you sure you want Henry speaking? Or doing a rap dance? He's not the...he's so...it's just that he uses so many statistics, and he's not very....

ASAD

Charismatic or interesting? He speaks in a monotone and just rambles on. He's like a Nyquil commercial.

AMINA

Asad, that's not what I meant. He just needs to be a little more dynamic.

LEO

Henry will do fine. No, he won't be dancing, but he's exactly the person we need to speak. Shows unity. Shows staff, students and board are all together. Shows...

ASAD

White and Somali are together.

LEO

Not everything is about race, Asad.

ASAD

Then why not have Mom speak? She's better than Mr. Waffler.

LEO

Because, well. Yes, Amina may be better, but...it's important...it's...we need...Henry is the leader for the school. He may not be the best speaker, but he... he brings...

ASAD

The white businessman and farmer vote.

LEO

No, that's not why. That's (pause) OK, so it is. Nothing wrong with that, though. Goodness, no wonder I never beat you at debate. It's strategy, Asad. It's all strategy. That's also why I have the most articulate student up there, too.

AMINA

He's got enough practice with me.

ASAD

But all your debates end with: "Because I'm your mother, that's why."

LEO

As they should. Your mother is one of the most intelligent people I know. Look at all the research she pulled together. If we get the money from the name change, I'm owing most of this to her.

[HENRY enters with a drink]

HENRY

Just had a great idea. We'll get a whole bunch of Vote Yes buttons and stickers. Kids can put YES henna tattoos on everyone.

LEO

Henry, a school can't promote a Yes vote. The Attorney General's ruling...

HENRY

We wouldn't. We'll let the kids give out the buttons and tattoos.

LEO

They can't say Vote Yes if the district pays for them.

HENRY

How about like a fill in the blank. We have something like Vote Y, then a couple dashes, then "For Kids."

LEO

Everyone knows the dashes are for yes.

HENRY

But we're not saying it.

LEO

Henry, look. You wanted me to take care of the backup issue in case the levy fails.

HENRY

And really, you don't have to worry about it until after the vote. We need to all work on the levy first. I just meant for you to do that afterward.

LEO

But we have to be prepared in case...

HENRY

It won't fail. So thank you for everyone coming tonight. I really appreciate your ideas. And Asad, I'll let you find the right students for this hip-hop performance. Remember, high energy.

ASAD

Sure.

HENRY

So have a good night everyone. Get some sleep and I'll see you tomorrow.

LEO

Henry, you're at MY place, remember? Are you leaving, too? Should I drive you home?

[AMINA and ASAD grab their folders and coats.]

AMINA

Maybe we SHOULD all be going. We'll meet a little later. Thank you, Principal Carstens.

ASAD

Thanks, Mister C.

[AMINA and ASAD exit]

HENRY

I know that sour look, Leo. And I know why. I should have given you some ownership in the hip-hop song. Here. I'll do the background, and you come up with a verse.

[HENRY starts doing the boot-o-puh background]

LEO

Man, this is going to be a long night.

[Lights out]

ACT II, SCENE II – STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE

[HENRY'S room with desk and two chairs. LEO and SHEILA are at his desk.]

LEO

So what's the quick meeting for? Want me to run through your part for the press conference again?

HENRY

Well, uh, Leo. I just wanted to. I think this is just great and all.

LEO

Good. That's good. So what's the deal?

HENRY

First off, I just wanted to commend you on your work with all this. I really think this will grab some attention to our funding problems, everyone's problems, but...

LEO

Henry, (pause) you can't back out. Not now. You can't.

HENRY

Leo, I'm not backing out. You are.

LEO

What? I thought we were all going to make our case – you for the referendum. We hit the school name change.

HENRY

We don't need to worry about the name change. People will pass the levy. We just need to hit the levy. Scare them with the name change.

LEO

Henry, I know they might pass the bond this time. But we have to be prepared if they don't. We have to show some support to rename the school so we can get the \$25 million.

HENRY

First steps first. Levy first.

LEO

But what if it doesn't...

HENRY

It will.

LEO

But we did all this work. I mean, people might simply vote it down to get the free money.

HENRY

That's what we don't want. That's why we need to stress the levy. We only use the Osama angle to sway them to vote Yes.

LEO

But what does it matter? Either way, we have a new school, right?

HENRY

[Looking down at his desk]

If we pass a levy, we have a new school. We won't have to worry about a name change.

LEO

Worry? Don't worry? In case you don't remember, our levy lost SIX TIMES! I think we might want to be prepared for a seventh.

HENRY

There won't be a seventh. It will pass.

LEO

How can you be so sure?

[HENRY pulls open his desk drawer and takes out some whiskey.]

HENRY

Want a drink?

LEO

What? Henry, you can't drink on school grounds? What if someone comes in? Put that away!

HENRY

I'll take that as a no. But I'll just have a little sip. Takes the nerves off before I speak.

[HENRY takes a gulp out of the bottle and puts it back in his desk.]

HENRY

There's no donor.

LEO

What? What happened? Did they renig? Did something go wrong?

HENRY

I just thought it was a good way to get the levy passed.

LEO

(pause as words sink in) You mean – you made this whole thing up so people would pass the levy?

HENRY

Hamid is an actor. He works at the Guthrie. I paid him \$100 to come down to the budget meeting and make the offer.

LEO

An actor? An actor! So there is no Al-Farrack Osama?

HENRY

No.

LEO

No \$25 million?

HENRY

No money. I just thought that if people had to choose between passing the bond levy and naming the school Osama High, they'd support it this time.

LEO

Henry. Good God, Henry. I can't believe you did this. I can't believe you would do this.

HENRY

It will work. I know the people in this town. They will support a \$25 million levy, rather than name the school Osama High. I know it. Deep down, the white people in this town are scared of the Somalis. They're different. They don't look like us. They'd like nothing better than to come out in force and vote for the referendum and turn down a \$25 million gift from the Somalis.

LEO

Henry, there IS no gift! You're crazy. You've really gone off the deep end.

HENRY

Leo, it's the one thing I've thought of that really makes sense.

LEO

But what if the vote is turned down? What if we end up accepting the \$25 million?

HENRY

We'll just say they backed out.

LEO

Henry, people are going to find out that Hamid is an actor.

HENRY

Did anyone get his name? Did they ask where he lived? There was nobody at the meeting when he came forward.

LEO

Sheila saw him.

HENRY

But she doesn't know anything about him. Not even his last name.

LEO

I saw him, Henry. I saw him!

HENRY

But you're going to help pull this off. Just tone down the whole "take the money" campaign and push the levy. Just say that if people pass the levy, the whole Osama thing goes away.

LEO

But Henry, every single Somali family out there is going to vote down the levy because they want a Somali school with an Islamic name, paid for by Somali people. That's half the town.

HENRY

I hate to say this, but many of the Somalis don't vote. And the Somalis who do will support the levy first.

LEO

Henry, with this offer, why would they? This Osama school will be a source of pride in their community. Why would they want to pay for a white school when the money is already there for a Somali-built school?

HENRY

But there are still more white people than Somali in the community.

LEO

Half of those white people ALWAYS vote down levies. They'll take the Somali money because they don't have kids in the school and they don't care where it comes from as long as it's not from their wallet!

HENRY

Well, I still think the Osama thing will make them vote yes.

LEO

Henry. I can't believe you. This is totally unethical. I can't be a part of this.

HENRY

Yes, you can, Leo. Because if you tell people this is just a set-up, not only will the white people crush the levy vote, you'll lose the Somali vote, too. The levy will go down in flames, we'll both be out of a job and the kids will go another 10 years without a new school. That's a best-case scenario. If you tell people, you are hurting the very kids you say you want to help.

LEO

I still can't do this. We at least have to say that the offer was not approved.

HENRY

Then, the levy fails.

LEO

I'd rather be honest than...

HENRY

Let the kids have a new school? Let them get the same education that all the wealthier districts can provide? Let them have textbooks that talk about the Challenger instead of possibly going into space some day?

LEO

Henry. I just can't.

HENRY

Think it over. I have a different speech prepared. I'll simply talk about the pros of our levy and then go into a special welcome message to the Somali delegation. You see, I'll bring up the Osama bin Laden High school.

LEO

It's Al-Farrack..

HENRY

No. I'll call it Osama bin Laden. And that will get the people all worked up and they'll see how they need to support the levy.

LEO

You're going to speak Somali?

HENRY

I've listened to enough. And I ran my short speech through one of those Internet translators.

LEO

You need to use a real translator.

HENRY

Translators cost money, Leo. We're saving the taxpayer dollars, thanks to the Internet. Here – I'll read you a couple of the welcome lines.

[LEO grabs the papers and looks at them]

LEO

It says: "Wishes of good. We thank horses and rice. Many offerings. School baking nice walls." This is gibberish!

HENRY

I guess you can't trust that Internet after all.

[AMINA bursts in the room.]

AMINA

What's the problem? We're ready to start the press conference. Everyone is waiting!

LEO

Change of plans, Amina. We're not part of the press conference. Henry is doing it.

AMINA

What?

HENRY

No worries. I have a prepared speech.

LEO

Something about baking walls and horses.

AMINA

Are you guys crazy? What do you mean we're not part of the press conference?

LEO

It's Henry's show now, right Henry?

HENRY

It will be as exciting as my 98-slide powerpoint on budgeting expenditure needs. Now if you excuse me, I have some people to get riled up for a bond vote.

ACT II SCENE III – THE OPPOSITION PARTY

[Stage is set with a “Vote No on the Levi” sign on stage. HARRIET, HERBERT, DARRYL and three others are meeting with HIGHTOWER.]

HIGHTOWER

Thank you all for coming to the first meeting of Red Apple Tax Sanity. We are here to say NO to the school district’s blackmail.

[HARRIET raises her hand]

HARRIET

Mr. Hightower. Maybe we should rethink our name.

HIGHTOWER

Name? What’s wrong with Red Apple Tax Sanity?

HARRIET

Acronym. RATS.

HIGHTOWER

Uh. Oh. I see. OK, then. How about (pause) Keep Red Apple (pause) Patriotic?

HARRIET

Uh --- same thing. KRAP.

HIGHTOWER

Well, the hell with the name. We’ll figure that out later.

HARRIET

And the sign?

HIGHTOWER

What’s wrong with the sign?

HARRIET

It says “Vote No on the Levi.” Like the jeans. It should actually be L-E-V-Y, not L-E-V-I.

HIGHTOWER

Damn English majors. Darryl! Darryl! Fix the stupid sign!

[DARRYL gets up and grabs the sign and turns the “I” to a “y”.]

HIGHTOWER

Now, as I was saying. The district is using this terrorist gift as a way to make us vote to approve this levy. Well, we're gonna tell them that we don't respond to blackmail. We don't respond to terrorism.

GROUP

YEAH!

HIGHTOWER

We're gonna vote this levy down.

GROUP

YEAH!

HIGHTOWER

Then, we're gonna tell those terrorists we're not renaming our school to Osama bin Laden High.

GROUP

YEAH!

HIGHTOWER

And we're gonna tell them to keep their \$25 million dollars!

GROUP

(less enthusiastically) One says YEAH. Others say "Really?" "25 Million?"

HIGHTOWER

Cause if we take the \$25 million, we have to change the name to Osama bin Laden High School!

GROUP

YEAH!

HARRIET

Actually, it would be Osama High School, after Al-Farrack Osama. Not Osama bin Laden.

HIGHTOWER

Harriet, would you just shut your nitpicky little trap. Whether it's Osama bin Laden or Osama Farrack, it's still going to be called Osama High School. We'll be the laughing stock of the state!

GROUP

YEAH!

HIGHTOWER
Of the nation!

GROUP
YEAH!

HIGHTOWER
So are we gonna let those school officials do that to us?

GROUP
YEAH! (then murmuring) NO! NO!

HIGHTOWER
We'll now have our public relations volunteer Herbert tell us what he's found out about Al-Farrack Osama.

[HERBERT comes up to the podium with a bundle of papers.]

HERBERT
Well, after a several days of poring through Facebook and Twitter sites, I have found the background of a so-called Al-Farrack Osama. And let me tell you that this man lives in a terrorist country.

GROUP
Terrorist country?

HERBERT
Yes. Yemen. He lives in Yemen.

DARRYL
Where's Yemen?

HERBERT
Right next to Iraq – the terrorist headquarters of the world.

HARRIET
I thought Afghanistan was the---

HERBERT
Silence! I've also found that this Al-Farrack has three wives!

GROUP
Wow! That's disgraceful! How can he do that!

HERBERT

Yes. He has fornicated with three different women and is raising 11 little terrorists-to-be.

HARRIET

Actually, it's not unusual for Muslim men to..

HERBERT

Silence! There's more. He also may have an uncle who is related to Osama bin Laden himself!

GROUP

My goodness! He's a terrorist! How dreadful!

HERBERT

Yes! He has terrorist links, and I think the good people in the Red Apple school district have a right to know that they are accepting money from a terrorist who probably helped kill 3,000 Americans during 9-11.

GROUP

That's shocking! How can we take money from him!

HARRIET

Are you sure you have the right Al-Farrack Osama. There's probably hundreds of...

HERBERT

Silence! It was a grand scheme to have all the Muslim world named Mohammed and Osama so that nobody could know for sure just who is who and which Osama is really the Osama you're looking for.

HARRIET

Actually, it's more of a religious –

HERBERT

Silence! It's a conspiracy. This terrorist is building a school that will take your kids and turn them into Muslims. First they'll start saying it's OK to be gay in school...

HARRIET

Actually, the Muslim religion doesn't accept...

HERBERT

Silence! Then they'll be saying it's wrong to own guns and that there won't be a Christmas party at school anymore.

HARRIET

But there already isn't a..

HERBERT

Silence! Next they'll be handing out condoms under the guise of safe sex.

HARRIET

Actually, the Muslim religion doesn't approve of...

HERBERT

Silence! Darryl, can you remove Harriet from the room!

HARRIET

But wait! I'm on your side, guys. I just want to make sure we have our facts straight.

HERBERT

If there's anything that Sarah Palin and Michelle Bachmann have taught us, it's that you don't need to get all nitpicky about every last little detail. This guy. This Al-Farrack Osama I found on Facebook? He's related to terrorists.

GROUP

YEAH!

HERBERT

We need to let people know that accepting his terrorist money is like slapping the face of every American soldier who fought for our country.

GROUP

YEAH!

HERBERT

So, do we want to take money from a known terrorist who has killed our own soldiers?

GROUP

YEAH! (quick mumbling) NO! NO!

[HIGHTOWER comes to the podium]

HIGHTOWER

We're trying to raise money for our Save Our School campaign. I know that each one of you is a good, proper business owner in this town who cares about your country and about patriotism. I'm asking each one of you for \$2,000.

HARRIET

Actually, acronyms again. SOS?

HIGHTOWER

Darryl? I thought you were gonna...

DARRYL

But she said she'd give some money.

HIGHTOWER

OK. OK, then. Just no more interruptions. We need to make sure our kids get a good education from a traditional patriotic setting. That's why we need to get people to vote down a new school and turn down \$25 million from those terrorists. So put your checks in the hat. Let's save our school.

HARRIET

Actually, part of the school, the cafeteria, is condemned. We'll have to fix it somehow.

HIGHTOWER

Again with the interruptions! Darryl? It's time you drug her out of here.

[DARRYL comes over and drags HARRIET offstage.]

HARRIET

Bad tense! It's dragged! It's dragged, not drug! Tense is important!

HIGHTOWER

Now, where was I? Oh yes! We must vote NO to save our school.

GROUP

YEAH!

HIGHTOWER

We have to say NO to terrorists building a new school!

GROUP

YEAH!

HIGHTOWER

We want to keep our school the same way it always has been. If it was good enough for us, it's good enough for those other kids.

GROUP

YEAH!

HIGHTOWER

So now we just need to pick a name. Who's got an idea?

DARRYL

How about Parents Opposed to (pause) Other People?

GROUP

Uh! What does that spell? Poop? Don't Think So.

HIGHTOWER

Well, forget the name. Just repeat after me: "Just vote NO!" Just Vote NO! Just Vote NO!

GROUP

Just VOTE NO! Just VOTE NO!

[Group gets louder as lights go out]

ACT III, SCENE I – THE VISITOR

[Sounds of a thunder storm roar. People have umbrellas and enter stage wet. LEO and AMINA are sitting in the front of the stage. SHEILA brings AL-FARRACK over to meet LEO.]

SHEILA

And Mister Osama, I'd like you to meet our principal, Leo, and our PTO president, Amina.

AL-FARRACK

Pleased to meet you. You are the principal? You are the one very kind to Somali people.

LEO

Thank you. Thank you for your comments. (to SHEILA) Is Henry around?

SHEILA

He's in the back room rehearsing for his speech. With the Save Our Schools group just making up lies about Mister Al-Farrack Osama, I talked him into getting Mister Osama to come and meet people tonight and tell them that he is not a terrorist and doesn't live in Yemen and all those other lies.

LEO

Really. Henry suddenly got on the phone with a rich oil baron and had him come to Saint Woebegon for an operating levy meeting.

SHEILA

It was the only way. That No group of Mister Hightower's was spreading lies about him. They were saying we just made up this donor and he wasn't real. We had to bring him here to show everyone he is real.

AL-FARRACK

Lies. Many lies told. I am not a terrorist. I love the United States. I love hotdish food.

LEO

I'm sure you do. Maybe after the meeting, I can show you some of the better entertainment venues in Minnesota. Maybe our Saint Woebegon pie shop. Or better yet, taking in a play at the Guthrie Theater?

SHEILA

I'm sure he doesn't have time for plays. He has a private jet and just came to make sure everyone knew of his \$25 million offer and that he wasn't a terrorist.

LEO

Excuse me. I have to see Henry.

[LEO gets up and crosses the stage. Lights up on far stage left.
HENRY is at a table, looking at his lines.]

LEO
Henry. What the hell are you doing?

HENRY
I'm rehearsing my lines. Getting ready for my powerpoint presentation.

LEO
You know what I mean. Al-Farrack? Flying in from the Guthrie?

HENRY
Brilliant, isn't it. Once I prove that Al-Farrack is real and isn't a terrorist, those SOS people will go running home with their tail between their legs and be telling others that it isn't some trick and they'd better vote Yes to the levy.

LEO
But he's NOT real!

HENRY
Oh, I think Hamid has his character down pat. He's really an excellent actor. Even speaks some Somali.

LEO
But he's not Al-Farrack!

HENRY
Look, Leo, if Hightower can just make up lies about Al-Farrack, so can we. Fight fire with fire.

LEO
Henry, that's crazy. What if they start asking him where he's from? Where he works? The press is here. They'll track all that information down. They'll find out who he really is!

[HENRY stands up by his desk and wobbles a little.]

HENRY
Nonsense. Hamid and I went over some very vague descriptions of where he lives and what he does. You see, he has helped leak important information to the United States that helped capture Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. So he's under U.S. protection and can't reveal his whereabouts.

LEO
He tipped off the U.S. about Osama? Henry, are you drunk?

HENRY

Not really. Just calming my nerves before my speech.

LEO

Henry, you can't be drinking in the school. You're going to get yourself fired. You need to get into treatment.

HENRY

Already had treatment. Last year. When you were on sabbatical. Didn't do any good.

LEO

Well, we'll try a different treatment center.

HENRY

Went to the best. The Mayo. Can't do anything.

LEO

You went to the Mayo for alcohol treatment?

HENRY

Actually, brain tumor. Treatment didn't work.

LEO

Henry! My God! Why didn't you tell anyone? You could have told me.

HENRY

Symptoms of brain cancer are erratic behavior. Do you think I'm being a little erratic?

LEO

A little? This is crazy. I mean, you even have Hamid telling people he helped capture Osama bin Laden.

HENRY

Yeah. How much more patriotic can you get? I even hired a guy to play a U.S. Marshal to say he's under government protection.

LEO

You WHAT?

HENRY

I got it all covered. When we're done tonight, everyone is going to know that Al-Farrack is real. That he's a true patriot, and that he's willing to give \$25 million to the district unless the referendum passes.

LEO

But he's a FAKE! Henry, this is WRONG! Just because the Vote No group makes up lies doesn't give you the right to...

HENRY

Leo, my lies help kids graduate. My lies give kids a new school, a fighting chance to succeed in this world. Their lies sentence kids to a purgatory of low expectations, crime and jail.

LEO

A noble lie is still a lie.

HENRY

The ends are more important than the means. That's what my board tells me for policy governance.

LEO

Henry, I know your heart is in the right place. But this is crazy. This has got to stop. If you don't...

[THUNDER booms. Lights flicker.]

LEO

If you don't tell people that this whole Al-Farrack thing is a fake, I will.

HENRY

You are sentencing your kids to a horrid, substandard education if you do. Asad will be ashamed and angry that you let him down.

LEO

He has a right to be ashamed. I should have told people sooner. This is too much. It's gone too far.

HENRY

You'll lose your job. You need to blame it on me. Tell them I coerced you into this. Lied to you. Because, well, really, I guess I did.

LEO

I don't care. My job is to educate these kids. But it's also to teach them right from wrong. If you don't come clean during your presentation, I will.

HENRY

Leo, that's naïve. Look at the real world, Leo. If Arnold Schwarzenegger would have told Maria right away that he had affairs with his nanny, he would be divorced, never would have made it as governor and never got another movie contract. Instead, he lied about it for eight years and when he was done being governor and tired of his marriage, then he

told her. Look at the Weiner guy. Think he told his wife he was sending pictures of himself to teenybopper girls?

LEO

So after our new school is built, you intend to tell everyone about your lies?

HENRY

When my contract is up, the new school is built and people see how great it is, they won't care how we got the money to build it. They'll just be happy we did it.

[LEO pulls his keys out of his pocket and puts them on the table.]

LEO

I will not go along with this. I am resigning as of right now. And after your presentation – if you don't tell everyone the truth – I will tell. And you know me from poker – I don't bluff.

HENRY

I'm not asking you to lie for me. I'm just asking you – for the kids' sake – to keep this between you and me until the vote. I need you, Leo! This will work. I only have about six months left. It's given me a lot of time to think. And I've never thought more clearly that this is the right thing to do. This can be my legacy to all our kids.

LEO

Henry. I can't. I just can't do it.

HENRY

(frowning, long look at LEO and sighs) Well, it was a grand idea. But maybe you're right. I guess I'll have to redo a little of my speech. I shouldn't have gotten you into this.

LEO

It's the right thing to do, Henry.

HENRY

Yeah. Right thing.

[LEO walks back to chairs near podium. AL-FARRACK is shaking people's hands in the audience, saying he is not a terrorist and that he loves hotdish.]

AMINA

So is Henry all set to take on the Hightower group?

LEO

I think so. I hope he is.

AMINA

Well, that was really fortunate that he was able to convince Al-Farrack to come all the way from Dubai to meet with us.

LEO

Yeah. It is amazing, isn't it.

AMINA

He is a very special man. To make such a gesture shows the greatness in his vision. He is from a different class and has no need to care about us here, yet he does. It is if he is part of our family.

LEO

In a very familiar way, don't you think? I mean, he could pass as Hamid's brother.

AMINA

Hamid? Hamid who?

LEO

Hamid! The man at our budget committee meeting who said Al-Farack would give us the money.

AMINA

I never met him, remember? And who's being racist now?

LEO

Racist? ME?

AMINA

Yeah. Just because he's black and wears a turban, all those Somalis just look alike.

LEO

It's not like that.

AMINA

He's a nice man. He's a noble man. It's very courageous of him to come out and support us when we need the votes to pass our levy. He's a very futuristic thinker. He says he is always putting our children before any decision he makes. Isn't that a great philosophy?

LEO

Wonderful. It's just...

[THUNDER claps and lights flicker again.]

Wow! Maybe I should check on what the weather is doing. Sounds like it's getting nasty outside.

[HENRY enters to applause. He motions to AL-FARRACK to join him.]

HENRY

Thank you for coming out here tonight. I know the weather isn't the greatest, but I want to let you know how important passing this levy really is. And I also want to address some horrible rumors floating around in the community that people should vote down the levy because our wonderful benefactor has been falsely accused of being a terrorist. In the words of our Somali friends. Tack-a Hazmin a Shrad a bilkty.

[Mumbling goes through the audience, then laughter.]

AL-FARRACK

I think what Henry meant to say is that truth shall set us all free, not that teeth are a wise investment.

HENRY

Of course, of course. Thank you, Al-Farrack. My Somali language skills aren't quite up to par. But I'm working on it. Just like your children are working on English language skills in our schools.

[THUNDER claps, and lights flicker again.]

I guess that's a sign that we need to move on. Don't want to get caught in a storm. Now, our friends in the Vote No group want you to believe that we're blackmailing you into voting for a new school just so we don't have to name it Osama High. That couldn't be further from the truth. The reason we're meeting in the gym today is that our cafeteria is condemned. I expect that our oldest wing of the school will also soon be listed as condemned and we will have to bring in portable trailers for our students. Simply put, we need a new school. That's not blackmail. That's a choice. We can either pay for a new one, or accept Mister Osama's generous offer to build a new one. There have also been lies that this whole story of Al-Farrack was made up – that he doesn't even exist. Well, I will now let you meet Mister Al-Farrack Osama.

[Light applause]

AL-FARRACK

Thank you. Thank you citizens of Red Apple school district. I think most of you know by now that I am indeed a real person, not a made-up threat so you pass a building bond. I am a United States patriot. That I helped give information to find Osama bin Laden. I am not a terrorist. I can understand that you may not like the name Osama. And I, if from this town, would probably be the first to cast a vote in favor of a levy so the school can remain Red Apple High. Actually, that would save me a lot of money.

[Thunder claps. Lights flicker]

Some have asked why I can't name the school Mohammed or Al-Farrack. My answer is simple: If the Red Apple community pitches in a tiny bit each year to build a new school, they will have it carry the Red Apple name. If the community doesn't want a school and the Somali community builds the school, it will carry my Somali name. It is only fair exchange for \$25 million?

HIGHTOWER

That's blackmail!

AL-FARRACK

Blackmail is when you have no choice. Everyone here HAS a choice. You can vote Yes on the bond or you can accept my offer. That is YOUR choice.

HIGHTOWER

I want MY turn to speak.

HENRY

Uh, this is a meeting to address untruths about Mister Osama. You have your own meeting.

HIGHTOWER

I pay taxes to this school. I have a right to speak. Or are you not a PUBLIC school?

AL-FARRACK

You may come to speak, my friend.

[HIGHTOWER comes out of the audience to the podium]

HIGHTOWER

I want everyone to know that just because Mister Al-Farrack is here doesn't mean he doesn't have any ties to terrorism. We have proof that he has ties to Osama bin Laden.

HENRY

He certainly does not. You have the wrong Al-Farrack. Besides, I'm told you found a Facebook profile with no photo in the wrong country. He's not even from Yemen!

HIGHTOWER

I guess I can be interrupted and not given the courtesy to speak?

[Thunder claps. Lights go out, then back on.]

HIGHTOWER

What I'm saying is that we don't know anything about him. He may be fine, but he may be a terrorist. We don't know. Now, the school district forces us to either pay for a new school or name it after a terrorist. That's not a choice. We're in a tough economy. We can't afford to...

[SIREN wails. HIGHTOWER and HENRY and AL-FARRACK look at each other.]

LEO

I checked the weather. There's tornadoes nearby. We should head to the newer section with the fallout shelter hallway. Let's go! Let's go! Go! Go!

[EVERYONE runs offstage, except for HENRY and AL-FARRACK.]

HENRY

Remember to Vote Yes! Vote YES!

ACT III, SCENE II – AFTER THE STORM

[Parts of plaster and garbage are strewn around the room.
HENRY brings out the people from stage right. HENRY is carrying part of a turban.]

HENRY

He just didn't know about tornadoes. He was so adamant about making sure everyone was safe that he ran out to get a puppy that was tied outside to a leash. I tried to tell him that it wasn't safe. I grabbed his turban, but he ran out. I held onto this gym support beam and saw him just fly away into the sky with the tornado. Poor Al-Farrack!

LEO

A puppy?

HENRY

Yes. He was a big animal lover. Told me of how one time he saved a camel from quicksand.

LEO

Quicksand? In Dubai?

HENRY

He had a large heart. A large heart. I hope we'll be able to find him.

[LEO looks out stage left]

LEO

Somehow I don't think we will.

HENRY

Wow! Look at the school! The tornado must have triggered the sprinkler system in the old section. Everything is ruined.

LEO

How would a tornado trigger...

HENRY

Luckily we have insurance on the building. The state can help us rebuild. I guess we have a new school after all. Don't need a levy OR \$25 million from poor Al-Farrack.

[HIGHTOWER steps out from the group.]

HIGHTOWER

I just want to tell everyone that I have a huge apology to give. In remembrance of our friend, Al-Farrack Osama, who urged us to take cover and risked his own life to save a

poor puppy in the storm, I admit that I said horrible, horrible lies about him. Henry was right – we just found someone with the same name and made up connections to terrorism so people would turn down the money and turn down the levy. What I did was wrong and selfish. Instead of thinking about kids – our future – whether black or white or Muslim or ...normal religion, we need to think about the future.

HENRY

And in memory of Mister Al-Farrack, I make a motion that we name our new gymnasium the Al-Farrack gymnasium. Do I have a second?

LEO

You're not a voting member of the board. You can't make a motion.

GROUP

SECOND!

HENRY

All those in favor, say aye.

LEO

This isn't even a board meeting.

GROUP

AYE!

HENRY

Let's get out there and see what we need to do. Make sure everyone is safe.

LEO

There doesn't look to be much damage at all. Maybe a few tree limbs...

HENRY

Go check your houses. Make sure your kids are safe. Leo says trees are down everywhere, so let's pray that God protects our Saint Woebegone. Leo and I will stay back and get the sprinklers shut off and clean up the gym.

[CROWD files out. HENRY, LEO, AMINA and ASAD remain.]

ASAD

Maybe there's still hope. Maybe Al-Farack found shelter.

HENRY

Believe me, Mister Al-Farrack is long gone. But he really brought us all together. Our whole town. Between the tornado and his bravery, we're going to rebuild Saint Woebegone and it's going to be better than it ever was.

LEO

Actually, it looks like the town is fine.

AMINA

He was just such a gentle person. I can't believe we'll never see him again.

[LEO puts his arm around AMINA]

LEO

I don't know, Amina. Some day, maybe a year from now. Maybe while we're traveling to the Twin Cities. Maybe during intermission at a Guthrie play, we'll think about Al-Farrack and he'll seem like he's still with us. And how he'll be with us for the rest of our lives.

ASAD

We should hang his turban over the gym.

HENRY

A fitting tribute.

[HENRY places the turban scarf across a table.]

AMINA

I'm not a very religious woman, but maybe Mohammed answered my prayer. I prayed that we'd have a new school. I prayed that we would learn to work together as a community. I prayed that we would all be safe. I think Mohammed has answered our prayers. And though the new school may be called Red Apple High, (choked up) I will always call it Osama High in my heart.

HENRY

(bowing) Here's to Osama High.

LEO

(nudging him and whispering loudly) Henry, bow to the East! The East!

HENRY

Yes, of course. And as you Somalis say: "Tak-a Zenduck Coo-luck dah!"

AMINA

Henry, you just told us to "swim ancestors to praise water."

HENRY

Right. To Al-Farrack, his ancestors, all our children, and the future of Osama High!

[They all bow. Lights down. End of play]