



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on March 28, 2011

Neighbors SWAT Team, Steven Seagal, and a Tank Rescue Chickens

Show business and militarized law enforcement combined to produce an expensive, frightening spectacle in Laveen, Arizona: the use of a SWAT team, a bomb robot, and even a tank to prevent — wait for it — cruelty to chickens.

On March 21, the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office (MCSO), led by Sheriff Joe Arpaio, arrested Jesus Llovera on suspicion of cockfighting. But they didn't do it simply by showing up at his door with a couple of cops and a warrant. Instead, despite the fact that Llovera was unarmed and, [according to Phoenix's KPHO TV](#), "has no history of owning weapons," they conducted a military-style assault on his home, causing "thousands of dollars in damages" and scaring the neighbors out of their wits. "Neighbor Debra Ross was so worried she called 911," reported the TV station, "and went outside where ... [it] was crawling with dozens of SWAT members in full gear, armored vehicles and a bomb robot."



In the tank that demolished the gates around Llovera's house: actor Steven Seagal, star of the A&E Network reality series *Steven Seagal: Lawman*, who has a contract with the sheriff's department that "gives Seagal carte blanche to go along with the sheriff as he arrests people," KPHO reports. [AZFamily.com notes](#) that the "cameras [were] rolling" at the time. "Officers in riot gear," the report adds, "broke windows and the front door."

Besides the arrest of Llovera, who offered no resistance, the end result of this errand of mercy for barnyard fowl was the euthanizing of 115 chickens.

"I think taxpayers should be shocked," Robert Campus, Llovera's attorney, told KPHO, estimating that the operation cost "tens of thousands of dollars" and "was basically a stage to help" Seagal's show. "I've been a prosecutor nine years, and there was more force used in this than I've seen in some big drug busts," he added.

The sheriff's office, naturally, disagrees. Arpaio said the operation was "already planned for that day. It had nothing to do with Steven Seagal, other than he happened to be working with the SWAT team at the time." Arpaio also stated that the department "had good intel that this guy could be armed."

Still, many find it hard to shake the feeling that Arpaio is staging certain operations to benefit Seagal's show. On March 11 his office [announced](#) to the press that the sheriff would be "conducting a large scale



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shakedown operation within all county jails” that afternoon, complete with “one of his better known Posseman [sic], Actor Steven Seagal.” (Seagal, by the way, [says](#) he doesn’t “really know about the [posse.](#)”)

Both Arpaio and Seagal are repeat offenders when it comes to the reality show game. Back in 2008 Arpaio participated in a short-lived Fox Reality Channel show called *Smile ... You’re Under Arrest!*, in which nonviolent, low-level offenders were lured into various phony setups (movie set, fashion shoot, spa) where they were arrested by deputies. Seagal’s current show was formerly filmed in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana. After Seagal’s former personal assistant sued him for sexual harassment and alleged that he was involved in sex trafficking (the suit was ultimately dropped), the Jefferson Parish sheriff’s office terminated its relationship with the show, which explains why Seagal is now working out of Arizona. Seagal termed it being “on loan from Louisiana.”

Seagal is an actor looking to juice his ratings, which is perfectly understandable. Less understandable is the fact that Arpaio, who has expended much effort building his reputation as “[America’s Toughest Sheriff,](#)” is abetting Seagal and other Hollywood types in their quest for lowest-common-denominator entertainment. Arpaio does seem to enjoy the limelight, however — perhaps to the detriment of the people he is supposed to be serving. A 2008 Goldwater Institute [report](#) noted:

Although MCSO is adept at self-promotion and is an unquestionably “tough” law-enforcement agency, under its watch violent crime rates recently have soared, both in absolute terms and relative to other jurisdictions. It has diverted resources away from basic law-enforcement functions to highly publicized immigration sweeps, which are ineffective in policing illegal immigration and in reducing crime generally, and to extensive trips by MCSO officials to Honduras for purposes that are nebulous at best. Profligate spending on those diversions helped produce a financial crisis in late 2007 that forced MCSO to curtail or reduce important law-enforcement functions.

In terms of support services, MCSO has allowed a huge backlog of outstanding warrants to accumulate, and has seriously disadvantaged local police departments by closing satellite booking facilities. MCSO’s detention facilities are subject to costly lawsuits for excessive use of force and inadequate medical services. Compounding the substantive problems are chronically poor record-keeping and reporting of statistics, coupled with resistance to public disclosure.

Many Arizonans believe Arpaio would be wise to send Seagal packing, junk the tank (why does a county sheriff need a tank anyway?), and get back to the difficult, unsung task of locating and arresting criminals using the appropriate amount of force. In short, instead of spending his time and taxpayers’ money mugging for the cameras, they believe Arpaio ought to do the job he was elected to do.

Photo: Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, right, talks with actor Steven Seagal, who was visiting the sheriff, after holding a news conference announcing his latest crime suppression illegal immigration operation sweep at the Maricopa County Sheriff’s Training Academy, Jan. 27, 2011, in Phoenix.: AP Images



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