IF Long Island were to become the nation's 51st state, would the piping plover be the state bird? Or would it be the Long Island duckling?

Imagine the vigorous debate as environmentalists and farmers mounted their defenses and argued for their respective birds.

This is but one of many tough questions that would have to be answered if Nassau and Suffolk Counties joined forces and decided to secede from New York State -- a notion that was proposed recently, albeit with tongue firmly in cheek, by the planning guru Lee E. Koppelman.

"It's an idea that's only serious in the sense of what the benefit would be to Long Island," he said in an interview. "It's not serious as to whether or not it could occur. It would never happen because the rest of the State of New York would lose too much."

Which is precisely why Dr. Koppelman, who is the executive director of the Long Island Regional Planning Board and the director of the Center for Regional Policy Studies at Stony Brook University, wrote the article with Seth Forman, titled "The State of Long Island?" It appears in the latest issue of The Long Island Historical Journal.

At the heart of this lighthearted call for secession, he said, is the "kernel of hard truth" that Long Islanders annually send much more to Albany in taxes than they get back in state resources -- an average of $2.931 billion more in the last several years. Even after making up services now provided by New York State, like a licensing board and a public service commission, a state of Long Island could easily reduce and perhaps even eliminate property taxes, the article said.

"We're not trying to start a crusade for secession, but we wanted to draw attention to the fact that
affluent areas like Long Island are always going to have a payment deficit with New York State government," said Mr. Forman, the other author and an associate professor at the Center for Regional Policy Studies.

"New York City has an enormous amount of power at the state legislative level, and many of the policies that are adopted to appease New York City are harmful to suburban counties," he added. "So we just wanted to put a flourish on it and give it a little scholarly imprimatur."

One need only look at the commuter tax -- which was imposed on suburbanites for decades and which was repealed only in 1999 -- as a prime example of city-centric lawmaking, Mr. Forman said.

The idea of breaking off from New York State and the arguments for it are not new, he said.

In 1919, officials from New York City and the eight surrounding counties, including Nassau and Suffolk, proposed secession to end the classic urban-rural rift between downstate and upstate communities. The line of reasoning even then was that downstate counties paid much more in state taxes than they received in state services. The balance of power, however, was reversed, with downstate officials fearing that the state was unfairly dominated by rural interests.

Secession fever also ran high in the 1990's. Staten Island was on the verge of seceding from New York City, and the five East End towns on Long Island flirted with breaking off from Suffolk County and creating a Peconic County. In both cases, politicians from the East End and Staten Island were convinced that the larger municipalities were ignoring the interests of their home areas.

The State Legislature and city officials ultimately put a halt to Staten Island's effort, and calls for a Peconic County also fell dormant.

Today's Long Island, Dr. Koppelman's article asserts, could easily hold its own as a separate state because it has the population and the wealth to sustain itself. With 2.8 million residents, Long Island has a population larger than that of 19 states. In terms of median household income, Nassau County ranks 5th and Suffolk County 12th out of more than 3,100 counties in the United States.

Becoming a state could streamline government for Long Island, the article contends, because instead of having two county executives and two county governments, there would only be need for one governor and one state government.

But as friendly as Steve Levy, the Suffolk county executive, and Thomas R. Suozzi, the Nassau county executive, may be, neither is likely to cede his county to the other.

"I guess that would have to be a coin toss," Mr. Levy said genially. "But while becoming the 51st state would certainly enhance our stature and give us the recognition we deserve, I'm not holding my breath."

Mr. Suozzi used the idea of secession to reiterate his mantra against unfinanced mandates forced
on counties by state officials. He has often complained that he can scarcely balance his county's budget because of skyrocketing costs from state Medicaid programs. "I've been saying for years that we send too much money to the state and that we're essentially subsidizing the rest of the state," he said.

When asked if he would consider running for governor of a state of Long Island, Mr. Suozzi gave the same answer he gives when asked about his all-but-announced plans to run for governor of New York: "Right now I'm focused on being Nassau County executive and getting re-elected."

But when pressed on the prospect of a Long Island governorship, he said, "I have no plans to make plans."

At the V.F.W. Hall in Albertson, where knock rummy is the favored card game and politics and high taxes are frequent topics of discussion, reaction was mixed on the idea of statehood for Long Island.

"I don't think it would be a good idea," said Thomas P. Duignan, of North Merrick. "I like being part of New York, there's no place like New York City, I don't care what anybody says."

But Ben Ferrara, of Roslyn Heights, thought it was a great idea. "I was always hoping Nassau and Suffolk would be one," he said. "We could do business better and there'd be less government. What would we be, the 53rd state?"

When his friends reminded him that Alaska and Hawaii had long since been granted statehood, he smiled sheepishly and said, "I went ahead of myself."

Mitchell Pally, vice president of the Long Island Association, the Island's largest business organization, said that while the idea of statehood might be funny, the negative balance of payments to New York State is not.

"But you know what?" he said. "You could either cry about it or laugh about it, so we might as well laugh about it."