

President's Message

Winter 2018



I set out on my one-year term as OSSA president with a goal of visiting as many Oregon sheriffs in their respective counties as I could. I looked forward to seeing large parts of our state, some areas I had spent little or no time in during my life. I made it to just over half of our state's 36 sheriff's offices. The experience will be the most memorable thing I did as the association president, and I feel as though I'm better because of it. As expected, there is vast diversity among our counties and the sheriffs that hold the longest-standing county office in the United States. A few offices were struggling to do right by their constituents with very, very little. Many benefited from county governments that valued public safety at a high level and ensured services were funded at or near the levels their constituents deserved.

My travels were personally and professionally impactful to the point that it's difficult to capture in words. Some may wonder, why is this guy so moved by visiting those law enforcement offices. It wasn't about the visits per se; it was about the dedicated men and women around this state that occupy those spaces and the sheriffs that lead them. I saw and discussed a myriad of programs, outside of the box thinking, wonderful facilities, difficult situations, planning for the future. In every office, I saw sheriffs who were proud of their organizations, proud of their team members and dedicated to their counties and those they served.

I met with incredible people doing incredible work for their communities. Offices are representing the public safety wants and needs of their constituents and ensuring safety in their communities. Whether it was an office that had a team that numbered in single digits or triple digits, I saw far more similarities than differences.

With the recent midterm elections and the political tornado that surrounded them, much was made by some media outlets that the sheriffs were divided. One of my discussion points from the outset had been asking sheriffs if they felt we were unified or divided and if they sensed divisions amongst our ranks due to East/West geography and politics. I spoke with sheriffs early in the year before the elections, and I spoke with sheriffs late in the year, following the November vote. The answer was the same. No one sensed a lack of unity in our ranks, nor did they think we were divided by politics or where we lived.

I am ever grateful that the elected office I hold is non-partisan. Not all states are non-partisan, but I'm thankful that Oregon is. Sheriffs fight to keep partisan politics out of their offices. We aren't forced to take a certain party's line, and we can operate with a broader view, doing what's right and just, not what's driven by an agenda. It's a struggle at times. I have weighed many issues and requests to take positions in the last six years. Many times, I have chosen not to take any public position and instead, defer to the will of the voter. I have been very careful to not use the Office of Sheriff for purposes of political grandstanding. In my opinion, there is a risk of eroding the sanctity of the office and our goal of representing the needs of all.

Sheriffs will always have varying opinions on specific issues. We will always try to represent the majority of the constituents that we serve. Most importantly, we will all remain united in our mission to keep our counties, residents and those that visit safe.

During my travels, sheriffs told me that despite differing opinions on specific issues, every one of them knew that if they needed help, they could call any of Oregon's sheriffs and they would respond; in turn, they would reciprocate if the need was reversed.

Although I failed to complete my lofty mission in my year as president, I am indebted to the sheriffs whom I did see, for the opportunity to visit and learn. My belief in the unity of Oregon's sheriff's and the office that we hold has never been stronger. I am so thankful that my peers gave me the opportunity to serve OSSA as president in 2018. ★

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. English', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sheriff Matt English
President, OSSA