

# ...AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

**T**hese are remarkable times we're living in.

I don't think anyone could deny that today's politically charged atmosphere is unprecedented, having no rival except maybe the 1960s, when turmoil over Vietnam, racial unrest and Richard Nixon prevailed. For those reasons and basic personal policy, you'll notice I have always stayed away from political viewpoints in this column. I will continue to do so, but instead offer my observations – however modest – on the dangers of what should be an increasingly pressing concern: the seeping of political poison into the hallowed principles of our oath and our duty to protect and serve. If you're looking for words here that will bring comfort to your "side," or expressions which lean towards or against MAGA and other emotional points of dispute, you'll be disappointed.

Why write this at all? Because I think we all need reminders of how dangerous it is to allow our political beliefs to direct our actions on the job. In some respects, it can't be helped; we are products of our upbringing – what we were taught or not taught in our homes and churches and our experiences growing up. Spoiler alert: *Growing up* is an important phrase which shouldn't be forgotten, as I happen to believe that we should never stop learning – not so much from books, but from others.

The profession of policing is unlike any other. We have a brotherhood which is undeniable. I was explaining this to a friend at a party the other night. When I was on the job, I could travel to Chicago and talk to dozens of strangers: cab drivers, hotel employees, the guy I sat next to on the plane, but if I met a Chicago police officer and he (or she) learned I was in law enforcement, there would be an instant familiarity, an undeniable understanding – indeed, a fraternal closeness – which is not found in any other profession. We recognize each other's triumphs, failures, stresses, and frustrations because they are the same, whether serving in Des Moines, Iowa, or Tampa, Florida. For those simple reasons, we "stick together" in so many



## The Badge Is NOT a Political Tool

**RAMESH NYBERG**

unspoken ways. Politics, however, has a potent way of pushing people apart. It creates disdain; dislike; and, worst of all, mistrust. There were cops I worked with on the street who I had no real interest in being friends with outside the job and I'm sure there were many who didn't like me, for whatever reasons. But, I can't remember mistrusting any of them. When we called for backup, we didn't care who came, as long as they were wearing the same uniform. Is that all changing now? I'm convinced that it is, but to what degree? And, how do we minimize those changes? How do we make sure that we never have to worry about which body in uniform is coming (or, God forbid, *not* coming) to get us out of a jam?

With 19 years behind me since leaving the job, my perspective on life in a uniformed squad or a team of homicide cops may no longer be as sharp. I spent a combined 27 years doing both. Today, working in a high school, I see that same caution reflected in how faculty and administrators carefully measure what they say. There are enclaves of teachers who share their political views, but it's done behind closed doors. Having said that, think about being a cop: You're on the street, encountering citizens who are emotional; intoxicated; and, these days, might be carrying signs or chanting slogans which get you angry because they

are contrary to what you believe. How do you deal with *that*? It can't be easy, but what part about policing is? I was a sworn police officer from 1979 to 2006 and, while there are always some political upheavals in every generation, I don't ever recall living through anything like the emotions of today's political tinderbox. I likewise cannot even recall having discussions or arguments about politics with other cops; there was just too much going on in our work life. High crime rates, riots and a nation leading murder rate kept our heads focused on doing our jobs and staying alive. When we got together for "choir practice," we talked about what all cops talk about when they unwind: the chase we got into; the arrest of a particularly violent subject which caused one of us to injure his finger during handcuffing; the asshole sergeant no one likes. Politics really didn't matter; getting home with a clean uniform did.

Today, the problem of political influence – particularly in the upper ranks of leadership – is present enough for retired police Chief Tom Weitzel to write:

"One of the most corrosive trends in modern policing is the appointment of law enforcement leaders based on political loyalty rather than experience or merit...it erodes public trust...police leaders must reclaim their voice. They must insist on operational independence and resist

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being used as props in political theater. The badge is not a campaign tool – it's a public trust." (*Police1.com, October 2025*)

I must agree with the Chief. We are already engaged in a fierce battle to win and keep the public trust, one like never before. Battling each other will be our undoing.

Policing will never be perfect because it is carried out by human beings and we are imperfect. We need to strive, however, to value the public trust, because we are, as Sir Robert Peel said, part of the public. We can't afford to be swayed by political loyalty, whether that's at the leadership level or on the street in patrol. Our very institution depends on it. Peel went on to say many other important things when he wrote his principles of policing. One of those core principles, written in 1829 when he established the Metropolitan Police Act in London, resonates loudly today and supports the words of Chief Weitzel:

"To seek and preserve public favor, not by pandering to public opinion, but by constantly demonstrating absolute impartial service to law, in complete independence of policy, and without regard to the justice or injustice of the substance of individual laws, by ready offering of individual service and friendship to all members of the public without regard to their wealth or social standing, by ready exercise of courtesy and friendly good humor, and by ready offering of individual sacrifice in protecting and preserving life." (Sir Robert Peel, 1829)

As we prepare to enter 2026, this is a good time to look at ourselves in the mirror and ask ourselves, both institutionally

and personally, some critical questions. Are we working to seek and preserve public favor and doing so without pandering to public opinion? Are we making sure that our badge reflects public trust and not political loyalty? I have always said that the way to gain and keep the public trust is to work to better ourselves professionally. Spouting off our beliefs, even Peel's principles, on social media or at parties to try and convince our non-police acquaintances of how noble and professional we are accomplishes nothing. The only things which capture people's attention are our actions. We have to be careful which actions we take and why we are taking them because we can't take them back. And, when our actions are wrong, we need to be openly accountable, swiftly and with clarity.

This is a young country and professional law enforcement in the USA is even younger; we're still growing up and let's hope we never stop doing so.

Happy New Year to us all. **P&SN**

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