DON'T FORGET YOUR SHERIFFS!

The John Birch Society campaign to Support Your Local Police and Keep Them Independent is not limited to just police; it naturally extends to county sheriffs. But there are fundamental differences between police departments and sheriff's offices.

Police chiefs — who run police departments and oversee the operations of their officers — are hired by cities. They answer to mayors, city councils, or both. They can be fired for no reason at all. This means that if they cross swords with the politicians for whom they work, they will be gone and someone else will have their desks.

Conversely, sheriffs, who are the top civilian law-enforcement officials for their jurisdictions, are elected by the people and answer directly to them in each election. This means that there is less room for manipulation by those who hold political office and see law enforcement as a political tool.

It also means that in an area where there is sufficient understanding of both the state and federal constitutions, the people who elect those sheriffs have a greater chance of encouraging them to follow those constitutions. Sheriffs are able to direct their deputies to conduct themselves, their investigations, and their law-enforcement efforts with an eye toward constitutionalism, while ignoring the political maneuvering of mayors, city and county councils, and even governors.

A great example of this can be seen in what happened when, in 2019, the people of Washington State passed — by popular vote — Initiative 1639 (I-1639), banning the sale of certain firearms and greatly restricting the sale or ownership of many others. Washington State, like many states, has a method in place to bypass the state legislature and pass laws by popular vote. Some states call this a referendum; in Washington state, it is known as an initiative. Supported by Democratic Governor Jay Inslee, I-1639 enjoyed favorable media coverage and passed by a 60-percent majority of those who voted on the initiative.

This was pure democracy at work: The rights of the minority 40 percent were considered to have been trumped by the whims of the majority 60 percent. But it wasn't going to be that easy for Inslee and company. Washington state has 39 counties. After the passage of I-1639, 21 sheriffs refused to enforce it in their counties. So while 60 percent of those who voted chose to restrict the rights of their fellow citizens, when it came down to it, more than half of the state never saw the new "law" enforced.

This was because of a combination of constitutional understanding by sheriffs and the knowledge those sheriffs had that a sufficient number of the voters in their counties shared that constitutional understanding. Klickitat County Sheriff Bob Songer perhaps put it best when he told THE NEW AMERICAN at the time that I-1639 violated the constitutions of both Washington State and the United States. "It's a bad law; it's an *illegal* law," he said, adding that this law "illegally amends the Constitution" by setting aside the Second Amendment. In passing I-1639 by popular vote, "They bypassed [the] process [for amending the Constitution] and called it 'democracy,'" Songer said. He asked, "Why would I — as sheriff of Klickitat County — go out and enforce a law that I believe is truly unconstitutional and end up arresting people, seizing their property, and so forth, based on a bad law?"

As stated above, this illustrates the importance of supporting your local sheriff and keeping him independent. While not every sheriff in Washington State stood up against the tyranny of I-1639, more than half did and all could have, if they had had the understanding and had they known they had the support of the people in their counties. For what it is worth, only one chief of police in Washington State, Loren Culp, took the same stand.

Support Your Local Police and Keep Them Independent, but be sure not to forget your local sheriffs. And be sure to include your other city officials, since they hold political sway over chiefs of police. ∎