



# Parting Thoughts on Leadership

And a heartfelt thank you

**BY JAKE FARRELL, SR/WA**

This is an emotional piece for me — my last Presidential Outlook column. This has been an amazing year! Full of ups and downs, challenges and successes, opportunities and achievements. Through it all, I believe this Association is better and more prepared for the future.

In 2018, IRWA was in need of a change. Our members and upcoming leaders were pushing for accountability and transparency. For as long as I can remember, I've always had something inside of me that refuses to settle for "average." It is a drive that pushes me to challenge myself and others to be better than they were yesterday. When I first became International President, I knew I could not settle for IRWA's current state. What I did not expect was that in executing the change required to improve IRWA for long-term sustainability, the process profoundly transformed me as well. I never planned to be here, but I have cherished being a leader of this Association for the past four years.

I have tried to live with the simple principle that at the end of my life, when I meet God, I want to hear him say, "Good job, my son." I also believe that He will introduce me to the person I was capable of becoming at my fullest potential. So when I stand there, face-to-face with the person I was created to be, was destined to be and who He made me to be, I hope that I am able to recognize that person — I am chasing him every day, professionally and personally.

This principle transcends beyond my personal life. If you take this point of view professionally and organizationally, it forms a higher purpose to what you are trying to accomplish. As members and leaders of this great Association, we need to think past the here and now. Every decision we make must be for the purpose that this Association was built upon when it was created almost 90 years ago. I thought about this before every decision I made on the IEC.



If we look at our rich history and the evolution of leadership over the years, there have been peaks and valleys in leadership effectiveness. This recurring evolution of leadership at IRWA reminds me of a conversation I once heard. This individual was asked, “How do you see your kid’s future?” They responded, “My grandfather walked 10 miles to work every day, my father walked five. I am driving a Cadillac, my son is driving a Mercedes. My grandson will be in a Ferrari. My great-grandson will be walking again.” When asked why, they quoted G. Michael Hopf, “Hard times create strong men, strong men create good times, good times create weak men and weak men create hard times.” We, as an Association, need to be constantly mindful of who we allow representing our voices. Long-term strategic objective are critical to the sustainability and growth of IRWA.

I cannot say this enough: I love this Association and its members. You are my people; I am comfortable around all of you. I am grateful for so many individuals who walked this journey with me. I cannot possibly name all of you but to want to acknowledge a few.

To all those who served on the IEC and IGC with me, it is amazing for me to look back and think of the relationships I have formed with so many of you. Our discussions, negotiations and debates over the years have taught me so much. Our collective decisions have made the Association better. Thanks for having the duty of loyalty and care during our service of leadership. I also want to acknowledge those who supported my family and me during an unspeakable tragedy that forever changed my life. I cannot put into words how much your support did for me; I am indebted to you forever.

I would also like to give a special thanks to a couple of IEC peers who have gone above and beyond to support me — Judy Jones, SR/WA and Fred Easton, SR/WA. Judy and Fred, you have been with me since the beginning. I am grateful we have been able to work together towards fundamentally preparing the Association for ongoing success. I cannot think of better people to have gone through this experience with than you both. Thank you for your guidance, collaboration and conversations through the years. I know IRWA will continue evolving under your direction. I will always be here to support and listen, just as you both have done for me. I am so pleased to have you both in my life.

I want to thank Faith Roland, SR/WA, and Pat Petitto, SR/WA. Faith, I think you have shown the next generation of leaders what it means to advise and support. You have lent an ear to so many of us as we tried to understand why things were done in the past. Pat, you have a quiet leadership about you that is powerful and infectious. Thank you for being the bridge between the current and past leadership of this Association. You set the bar high for future Advisory Council liaisons.

To Dave Arnold, SR/WA, I truly enjoyed having you by my side this year. Thank you for the nudges, debates and discussions we had. I feel you always have the Association’s and my best interests in mind every time we talk. We have so many common interests, and you feel like family.

Tim Drennan, CAE, Jade Meador, CMP, and Rakhshan Mazarei, what can I say? It has been a few long, challenging years for staff. We needed to go through all of that to get to where we are today. I feel confident in your leadership and that IRWA’s future is bright. Thank you for all you have done for IRWA and for me. I have enjoyed watching you flourish and become the pillars of leadership at headquarters. I am so proud of each of you and grateful for what you bring to our Association.

To Vivian Nguyen, thank you for always making me sound better than I should. You are amazing. I am so excited to see the improvements you are bringing to IRWA.

Region 3 and Chapter 78, you will always hold a special place in my heart. I am looking forward to getting back to my roots more often and spending more time with you all. I would like to recognize Carrol McCracken, SR/WA, for his kind words and support during my IEC election runs.

To Carol Croft, SR/WA, your support and belief in me pushed me to always improve and evolve. You are an amazing leader — so many of us are grateful for what you have done for us individually and as an organization. Thank you.

I also want to express a great appreciation to Omaha Public Power District for your support as I spent a great amount of time supporting IRWA’s needs. To all my coworkers and employees who helped keep the work moving in my absence — many thanks.

Lastly, and most importantly, thank you to my wife, daughters and family. For those of you who know me, you know that I hold family as the most essential thing in life. My wife and daughters endured a lot for me to fulfill this obligation to IRWA. I know that it was not always easy and created challenges while I was away. I am forever grateful for your love and support during this journey. I love you all beyond words, and I hope that I made you proud!

Thank you again for your trust in me to lead this great Association. I will continue to support IRWA and its brand. These past few years have been the most challenging and most rewarding years of my life. I truly hope that you are all pleased with what we have accomplished during my time in leadership. Until we meet again... God bless all of you. 🙏