

VANGUARD

SUMMER 2019 EDITION I



Oyango A. Snell

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With so many issues facing the petroleum industry, particularly in California, Snell looks for experienced, sound legal guidance from various outside law firm representatives. One of those trusted advisers is Shannon S. Broome, managing partner of the San Francisco office of Hunton Andrews Kurth and well-versed in such matters involving environmental compliance, emergency response to accidental releases and climate change.

“Law firms like Hunton are always a top contender because you don’t just get a legal memo in response to a legal inquiry, but rather a partner in exploring and developing legal, legislative and regulatory solutions coupled with advocacy strategies and a defined scope of successful pathways,” he says. “With Hunton, you get a winning team-based approach that is highly respected.”

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Meanwhile in Nevada, Snell hopes efforts to ban hydraulic fracturing will fail, as they did in 2017. The state produces just a modest amount of natural gas, relying mostly on out-of-state supplies.

In Oregon, WSPA would rather see a cap-and-trade solution instead of the so-called Clean Fuels Program that requires fuel providers to meet gradually declining carbon-intensity targets, the consequences of which include restrictions on out-of-state fuels and thus higher prices for consumers.

And in Washington State, WSPA deems the Clean Air Rule, which requires such industries as refineries and fuel distributors to cap carbon emissions, tantamount to regulatory overreach because it was mandated by the state Department of Ecology rather than the state Legislature. Furthermore, WSPA maintains that Washington's air quality is clean enough and doesn't require draconian measures.

So there'll continue to be much to keep Snell's eyes open and ears to the ground. Even when you win legislatively, you must still keep an eye on the ensuing enforcement and regulations, he reminds. It's a process that never really ends.

But this is still the kind of law the married father of two boys prefers to practice, though at one time it seemed improbable.

Lessons learned

Today, Snell can laugh about how he might have been incorrigible as a junior-high school student in Chicago, but how things changed for the better when, instead of sending him to the principal's office, a teacher sent the then sixth-grader to the library. There the library teacher, Ora Chamberlain, handed him W.E.B. Du Bois' African-American classic, "The Souls of Black Folk," as well as works by Booker T. Washington and Jamaican-born political leader and author Marcus Garvey Jr.

After a review of these literary works, Snell was assigned to lead the sixth-grade debate team. That created a spark in the precocious youngster, producing an interest in law and politics. He found further inspiration from his community-minded mother as well as Harold Washington, who would become the Windy City's first African-American mayor.

As much diplomat as legal boss, Oyango A. Snell seeks common ground with policymakers in his role with the Western States Petroleum Association.





As a Central State University political science major at a time when the historically black school in Wilberforce, Ohio, nearly closed, Snell put his burgeoning advocacy skills to use. He organized fellow students who lobbied the state's lawmakers for sufficient funding. He'd go on to earn an MBA at Franklin University in 2001 and a juris doctorate from The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law in 2005.

Snell's interest in politics only intensifying, he'd cut his legal teeth as legislative counsel at one of Ohio's most prominent firms, Bricker & Eckler, from 2005 to 2008. He'd direct legislative and governmental affairs for the Ohio Consumers' Council for the next year and mount an unsuccessful campaign in 2010 for the state Senate.

Unfazed by a third-place finish in the Democratic primary, he'd serve as elections counsel for the Ohio secretary of state, then hang his own shingle in Columbus with a practice serving small, minority and women-owned businesses from 2009 to 2011.



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He'd spend the next five years in Washington, D.C., providing advocacy services before state legislative and executive branches on behalf of the Property Casualty Insurers Association of America's members in Delaware, Georgia, Maryland and the Carolinas. Snell was contacted by a recruiter and learned of the WSPA opportunity through LinkedIn, and though he had no experience in the energy industry, he reckons he said the right things while being interviewed.

"I told them my goal wasn't just to be the kind of lawyer who would tell them what they could and could not do, but to be a business partner," Snell says. "To understand the industry we operate in, and its impact on the communities served. To help foster a corporate conscience."

After an early interaction between Snell and the Hunton firm, Broome could see that even if he were new to the industry, he fit right in.



Congratulations to **Oyango Snell**,
General Counsel of Western States Petroleum Association,
for this well-deserved honor.

We admire Oyango's
unrelenting determination and
appreciate his friendship so much
that we are willing to overlook his
affinity for Ohio State University.

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“If he hadn’t told you, you’d never have guessed that he was new to the industry,” she says. “He was offering insights and asking questions I’d expect of a seasoned oil and gas attorney.”

And how Snell relishes the challenge of advocating for a critical industry, albeit one that’s often used as a political punching bag. Like it or not, he reminds, the need for oil and natural gas will remain high, and WSPA should be regarded as the constituent it is.

“You can’t just pound the table and say ‘get tough on Big Oil,’” Snell says. “You can’t just put something on the books that’ll put a company out of business. Jobs and the economy are at stake. There’s got to be a collaborative process.” •