



**Admiral James M. Loy
Diversity Summit
Coast Guard Academy
April 9, 2002**

Amenities:

I am delighted to be here with you this morning. I want to thank RADM Ames and his staff, and especially CAPT Curt Odom, for coordinating this very important Summit. And thanks to RADM Olsen and the Coast Guard Academy for hosting it.

This is yet another validation of our decision to establish our Leadership Center of Excellence here at the Coast Guard Academy.

The events of the next three days will be important to our future as an organization. So, I'm very glad for the opportunity to participate with you.

I'm also delighted that VADM Collins will join you to close the Summit. His public support for all we've begun has all of a sudden become very important. It will be a great chance for him to go on record!

Introduction:

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I want to invite each of you to think for a moment about your hometown.

No matter where you come from, it's a good bet that your hometown has one thing very much in common with the hometown of the person sitting next to you.

Elm Street.

Almost every town and city in America has one. New London has an Elm Street. So does my hometown of Altoona, Pennsylvania.

The streets were named for the trees that once shaded them.

In fact, the sight of stately elm trees lining a shady avenue with their broad, leafy branches was once very common, especially prior to 1940. Under the arches of those great trees, everything seemed serene and secure—almost reverent, like being in an outdoor cathedral.

Then something happened. The trees began to die. Between 1940 and 1970, almost 77 million American Elm trees died throughout the United States.

By 1976, two hundred years after the founding of our nation, most of the elm tree population in America was gone. The trees had suffered a terrible blight that left them weak and susceptible to decay and the ravages of wind and weather. Our formerly tree-lined streets were left barren.

Some have survived. There are just two remaining on the campus of the Coast Guard Academy. We lost one last year to disease and decay. It used to be right outside the southern end of McAllister Hall.

In Washington, DC, some 600 American Elms line the Mall between the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial. The special treatments and watchful care required to keep them healthy are very expensive, however—so expensive that most towns can no longer afford to continue treating them.

Why have I come to this, our second Diversity Summit, to talk about elm trees? Quite simply—and bluntly—I want to make sure that the history of the Coast Guard does not follow the history of the elm tree.

You see, one of the reasons that so many elm trees died with the advent of Dutch Elm Disease was the lack of diversity among them.

The disease, which is peculiar to these trees, is easily transmitted from tree to tree through the root systems. When the trees were planted in ranks so close together, with no other species of trees among them, their immunity to disease was weakened, because their roots intertwined. Their weakness was their sameness.

Diversity is a good thing. As it is with the elm tree, diversity is essential to our continued health as an organization.

The Coming of Change

The changes in demographics are increasing ever more rapidly in the United States and in the world. For example, the 2000 census in the United States showed that in California, one of the most populous states, white persons, not of Hispanic or Latino origin, now comprise only 46.7 per cent—less than half—of the total population. Nationwide, the majority white population has decreased to 69.1 per cent, much lower than previous decades.

It will not be long, ladies and gentlemen, before the ethnic and racial demographics of this country will illustrate in diverse, living color the democratic ideals upon which it was founded. I welcome that change and the bright, strong future that it promises.

The winds of change are strengthening. Greater changes are coming. What should we then do? The wise mariner anticipates and adjusts to the changes in forces of nature, rather than sitting and talking about a spell of weather.

For the past year or so, I have spoken at length about the necessary transformation of the Coast Guard from today's effective service into tomorrow's even more effective service. I was not talking merely about hulls and hardware.

Our Coast Guard transformation means many things. It means...

To transform our old offshore capability into the Integrated Deepwater System. . .

to transform our old workforce paradigms into Future Force 21 . . .

to transform our old support system into a modern one focused on the best technology and integrated information exchange . . .

to transform our old mission inventory and priorities into the maritime expertise described by the Interagency Task Force's Report on the Roles and Missions of the Coast Guard of the 21st century . . .

Most of all, it means we will need a workforce that represents the full spectrum of the very best people that America has to offer.

Incremental progress and hard work have sustained us through today. But they will not suffice to solve our overall long-term readiness dilemma. Incremental progress and hard work will not relieve us of the burden of shortfalls in our trained workforce.

Workforce and demographic changes ensure that incremental approaches that rely on our old assumptions about personnel management will not serve our recruiting, retention, quality of life, and training needs in the coming years.

We will be growing this year and for the next three years. As we do, it will be absolutely essential to our growth that we seek diversity by recruiting from a wide variety of sources.

Our human resources system needs the same level of transformation as our equipment. We must remain sincerely committed to that transformation.

Diversity is very important to that transformation. I am not talking merely about racial representation within our ranks, however.

Effective diversity management involves both recognizing the strength of differences—so that everybody can make the best contribution—and subordinating those differences so that they serve our larger purposes.

We're trying to reach that point of equilibrium at which the individuals attach a priority to the organization's development and the organization puts a priority on the individual's development. It's not an easy job.

Our diversity policy statement embraces the full range of human diversity, not just the outwardly visible factors of race, sex, and ethnicity. To focus exclusively on

these factors would lend credence to stereotypes, would ignore other differences, and would distract us from the things we have in common as a foundation for mutual values.

It pertains to every dimension of Team Coast Guard: active duty, reserve, civilian, and Auxiliary.

Sustained Personal Commitment.

I want to talk to the leadership among you for a moment. If you are not in a position of leadership now, I want to talk to future and past leaders, as well. Have I left anyone out? I didn't think so.

Is there anyone here who doubts they're in a leadership position? The simple fact that you are here tells me that you have accepted a leadership challenge.

Ladies and Gentlemen, diversity management is a leadership issue. It is not somebody else's program. It is your program and mine. It is a function of your leadership and mine.

Sincerity in leadership can be established only through consistency and attentiveness. And sincerity cannot be delegated. When it comes to convincing your organization that you are serious about diversity, there is simply no substitute for keeping the issue on your personal front burner and regularly scooping big helpings of it onto the plates of your people.

To some, it may not appear very appetizing. But it's good for them. And it's our personal responsibility to help them understand that.

It was important for me to feature diversity in the speech I gave when I assumed command of the Coast Guard.

It was important for me to include it in my "Commandant's Direction," a pamphlet in which I outlined my personal priorities for the service.

It is important to include it as a regular agenda issue at my semi-annual conferences of flag and SES officers.

It was important to take the initiative to help shape the Department of Transportation's approach to diversity management along the same conceptual lines as the Coast Guard's.

It is important to look for opportunities to promote the issue when it isn't expected.

It should be just as important to you.

This sustained personal involvement should not be perceived as a sacrifice or an inconvenience.

If we really think we need a highly competent, diverse workforce ...

If we really believe that it's important to create a positive environment based on our core values . . .

If we're really serious about removing barriers that hinder progress . . .

If we really want all of our people to reach their full potential to contribute to Coast Guard missions . . .

If we really think these things are important to the long-term value and effectiveness of the Coast Guard . . .

then it is our obligation—each of us—to immerse ourselves in activities that are conducive to effecting the improvements we seek.

We must routinely renew our commitment to diversity in the Coast Guard.

Allowing for Unpredictability

One aspect of my commitment to promoting diversity may be counter-intuitive, however, and it may even appear to contradict the idea of my sustained direct involvement, but I am convinced that it is essential. It is this: We must be willing to give up some control. We must allow some unpredictability to enter into our diversity management. It is, after all, like a force of nature.

Here's why. The more our members perceive diversity management to be a pre-packaged, top-down program, the less relevant it will appear to their careers. And the less seriously they will take it.

On the other hand, if you create opportunities for your workforce to steer the program in directions that you might not have taken it, you will demonstrate your belief that diversity includes even the diversity of pay grade.

In the Coast Guard, we began to accomplish this by commissioning an outside organization to conduct a Workforce Cultural Audit—an extensive survey of the attitudes and perceptions of our workforce.

We knew at the time that we were taking a risk and that we were probably spending perfectly good money to receive documented proof that the Coast Guard was not what we wished it to be. But we did it anyway, and that cultural audit yielded two powerful benefits.

First, the product we paid for gave us a wealth of data—data that we used to devise about a dozen important interventions and data that we will use down the road when we take subsequent audits, compare results, and hopefully document progress.

But the second and perhaps more significant benefit was that our people saw the commitment of resources and the willingness to act on their aggregate perceptions as convincing evidence that the diversity program was more than a policy statement stuck on the wall by the coffee pot.

By the way, if you haven't participated in the new online Organizational Assessment Survey, I urge you to do so as soon as you get back to your units. You can find the survey on the Coast Guard internet website. This is your opportunity to affect the course of change in our service. It's the first real follow-up to the WCA.

I am sure that some of you were here when we convened our first Diversity Summit and asked 350 employees of all grades to grapple frankly with the direction of our diversity program. Again, their answers weren't necessarily my answers, but their involvement gave vitality and credibility to the program.

Currently, I meet with my Diversity Council twice each time they come to town -- once upon arrival, when I go over their intended agenda, and once upon departure, when I hear their counsel and observations. I hope such involvement has become an organizational standard.

Today we begin our Second Diversity Summit. It represents a continuing need to promote healthy diversity in our Coast Guard.

These will be good days. The real value, though, depends on what we do when we leave.

I can't tell you how pleased I am that we are here today. You must look far and wide in the public and private sectors of our great nation to find a few scarce organizations that have taken the time to meet like this to encourage a continuous dialogue about the importance of diversity—and to talk about real solutions to real problems. I am very proud that we are one of those organizations.

Insisting on Long-Term Solutions.

In our zeal to improve diversity within our ranks, it is possible to force immediate results that don't serve the long-term interests of any organization—and we need to resist the temptation to settle for those short-term solutions.

Our initiative on minority women officer retention gives a good example of what I mean.

The Coast Guard officer corps gets about 35% its new officers each year from our Academy and about 35% from Officer Candidate School; the remainder comes from a variety of direct commission programs. That's probably a healthy mix.

Most of our minority women officers get their commissions from sources other than the Academy. Why is this important? It's a problem because of what it implies about the people who will lead the Coast Guard 30 and 40 years from now.

At each rung of the officer career ladder, the proportion of Academy graduates increases, right up until you reach the flag level where Academy graduates make up about 90% of the population.

Now, this circumstance results from a number of factors, one of which I'm sure is that there's some degree of "ring-knocking" and cloning going on that we need to resist, also in the interest of diversity.

The Board that selected Captain Steve Rochon to the Coast Guard Flag corps, by the way, selected three non-Academy graduates among the five nominees. The absolute pleasure I take from that observation bears no anti-Academy sentiment. Rather, it stems from my desire to promote further diversity at our Flag and Senior Executive Service table.

VADM Tom Barrett will be the new Vice Commandant. He's an OCS graduate. That's terrific! Our ranks of SES members are swelling with a variety of voices at our executive table that we've never had before. We're enriched by them.

When I consider the issue of retaining minority women officers, however, I try to remember in one corner of my mind that I probably cannot change wholesale the fact that most Coast Guard admirals a generation from now will still be Academy graduates.

And so, bearing this fact in mind, I need to realize that any interventions aimed at improving minority women officer retention won't address their under-representation among senior officers unless they include an increase in the number of Academy graduates who are minority women.

The same is true, of course, in relation to other minority groups represented in the Coast Guard officer corps.

We must seek long-term solutions, not be content with short-term successes.

It should be noted that we are holding our own in the Coast Guard. The numbers of minority officers, male and female, have modestly, but steadily increased in the past several years. But that's not good enough. And we have not been as successful in recruiting and retaining minorities among our enlisted ranks.

We still lag significantly behind in recruiting to the level of the target labor pools in almost every category. That means we haven't yet reached through the barriers in convincing fashion to attract the men and women of color and high caliber we want in our service.

It also means we are in a stiff competition with other services for scarce resources.

It's not for the lack of trying. We have made incremental changes in our recruiting programs, and we do make an effort to retain and nurture the fine people who have joined our ranks, as I mentioned earlier.

Many of the initiatives that we've tried in past years have been very successful, including the Coast Guard Recruiting Initiative for the Twenty-First Century (CGRIT), the Minority Introduction to Engineering Program (MITE), and the College Student Pre-Commissioning Initiative (CSPI), to name a few.

Two years ago, to address a significant decline in minority enlistments, we started a pilot program in Atlanta called a Focused Accession Source Team (FAST), modeled on a DoD effort to recruit more directly among the minority communities. The program has worked very well, and we hope to continue expanding it to other cities this year. This program will be extremely important in meeting the needs of our impending future growth.

It's not enough. We need to do more. And with your dedication and perseverance—and your participation both here at this Summit and back at your units, we will.

Conclusion:

Ladies and gentlemen, some elm trees that took root several hundred years ago are still alive today. That's good news.

In fact, one elm tree that was planted in the mid-1700s at the intersection of the two main streets of a small town called Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, still stands today. That tree was planted by a young surveyor...named George Washington.

As I said earlier, we have two remaining elms on this campus. One stands behind Satterlee Hall and the other is near the sidewalk leading to Dimick. I have no idea as to their ages, but my guess is they've been here at least as long as the Academy itself.

I am told that Scott Springer, the groundskeeper here, has plans to plant new elm trees that are more resistant to disease. But it will take a long time for them to grow to their full splendor.

Some of the elements of diversity that we are looking for—as well as its benefits—may take some time to grow, too. We must be patient, as we watch with anticipation...but we must also be committed to the hard work necessary to change.

If you have the opportunity in the next few days—or as spring arrives, for those of you who live and work here—go and stand underneath one of these great trees. Look up and enjoy the broad, sturdy branches. Feel the roughness of the aging bark.

Then look around and realize that they are here today mainly because they were not planted too close to each other—so close that other types of trees could not grow with them...and among them. They are now only two of 670 trees of many diverse kinds and shapes and sizes on the Academy grounds.

We can learn a great deal from the natural world. That is a good thing.

May God bless and guide our efforts to create a truly diverse Coast Guard.

