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Amenities:

Good morning.

I have noted with interest the theme of this year's conference: Building Strength Through Collaboration and Partnership. Since this is my last conference with you as an active duty officer, let me say in the spirit of that theme that it has been my honor as a charter member to be in partnership with you for a very long time.

Whatever strength and resolve I've had to address the full spectrum of diversity management issues in the Coast Guard derives in part from my long association with the NNOA. You are particularly good at mentoring our young minority officers. You tell it straight, and challenge us to match behavior to rhetoric; that's the only way we will continue to make progress.

I assure you that I will continue to take an active interest in your activities in the coming years as you march on smartly to achieve our common goals.

A Story of Strength Through Collaboration and Partnership:

The Coast Guard Cutter Sherman just returned from a lengthy out-of-hemisphere deployment to the Persian Gulf, where she was active and, I might add, very successful in Maritime Intercept Operations designed to enforce international sanctions against illegal shipping. Sherman's collaboration among the other units of the naval task force, especially as she demonstrated her unique talents in interdiction and boarding, helped to ensure the overall success of the operation.

As she made her transit home to San Francisco from Bahrain, Sherman put in to several ports that are somewhat exotic for a Coast Guard Cutter. It is not every day that the Coast Guard visits such remote parts of the world as the Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, and South Africa.

To be sure, our notion of a "remote" part of the world depends a good deal on its geographic location relative to the United States. Perspective is everything, isn't it? Nevertheless, Sherman has returned from that remote region with a seabag full of tall tales and sea stories.

Allow me the whim, if you will, to tell you a brief story that comes from the ancient oral traditions in the same remote and very diverse part of the world that Sherman visited. It is the story of the Wind and the Tiger.

Once upon a time, many years ago, there was a terrible drought that hit the land. The rains had not come that year, and the crops were doing very badly. Without much food and water, all of the animals were very hot, very thirsty, and very hungry.

It so happened that there was a field near the edge of the forest. And in the middle of this field was one large pear tree, full of the juiciest pears you ever did see. They were big, and yellow, and just waiting to be picked. Unfortunately, at the base of this tree was a very mean tiger.

Tiger was greedy and selfish and refused to let anyone near the tree. He would sit all day in the shade of the pear tree and growl at anyone who came too close, warning them to keep their distance from the tree. Whenever one of the other animals would approach, hoping to pick a ripe pear, Tiger would snarl, "Not today."

The other animals were very hungry, having nothing much else to eat. They held council in the protection of the woods to talk about Tiger and the tree. Eventually, Rabbit happened by and heard what was going on.

Rabbit thought about this situation, and being such a clever animal, he immediately devised a plan. "Come close, come close. Listen to me and I will tell you what we'll do," he coaxed.

The next morning all of the animals secretly gathered again in the forest near the field where Tiger was sleeping. The animals who lived on the ground, like Turtle, Elephant, Ox, and Donkey, all stood near big hollow logs. All of the monkeys and birds who lived in the trees quietly sat in the branches and waited for Rabbit to arrive.

Soon Rabbit did show up, carrying a large, thick rope made of the strongest vines. He ran across the field, looking up into the sky, and made a lot of noise. "Oh, my! Oh, my!" he shouted.

Tiger sleepily opened an eye and growled, "Why are you making so much noise, Rabbit? Can't you see I am sleeping?"

"Tiger! You must run! A big wind is coming that will blow everyone off the earth!" Rabbit warned. Just at that moment, the animals hidden in the forest began to make a great noise.

Eagle and Stork and Owl and all the rest of the birds flapped their wings, causing the leaves to shake and twist. Elephant and Ox and Otter and Crocodile and all of the animals on the ground beat on the hollow logs and smacked the trees. They scurried around in the brush and altogether set the entire forest to swinging and swaying like it was the end of the world!

Tiger was terrified! "What do I do?! What do I do?!" he screamed, as he paced to and fro.

"You must run," Rabbit said. "I cannot help you now. I have to go tie the other animals down with this rope so that they do not fly off of the earth!"

"You must tie me down!" Tiger demanded.

Rabbit shook his head, "But I must go help the other animals or they will all blow away! You are big and strong, you have a very good chance of escaping alive!"

"No!" Tiger roared. "You must tie me down now!"

"Very well," Rabbit sighed. "I will tie you down now."

And so he tied Tiger to a tree on the edge of the field. He tied the rope tight, but Tiger kept shouting, "Tighter, tighter! I don't want to be blown off of the earth!"

When he was done, Rabbit stepped back and called for the other animals to come out of the forest.

"Look here," he said out loud. "Look here at the one who tried to keep all of the juicy pears to himself instead of sharing them."

"I will make you very sorry, Rabbit," howled Tiger, baring his sharp teeth.

"Not today," replied Rabbit.

The wisdom of the ages teaches strength through collaboration and partnership. We would do well to heed the adjuration of this simple folktale.

I have not come, like Rabbit, to announce the false coming of a great wind. But I would like to draw your notice for a moment to a shift in the wind, a change in direction and strength that I am almost certain you have already seen.

A good sailor always takes note of the wind. Even the most inexperienced mariner quickly learns that he or she must take into account and adjust to forces of nature, even the most benign forces, and especially those unseen.

The demographics of this world can be thought of as being like a force of nature. As with the natural forces, we have learned to make predictions of demographic trends, based on market conditions or the current political climate in a given region. But controlling the movement, migration, and location of people in the modern world is a bit like trying to change the course of a river -- we are often reminded of the disastrous results of doing so, every time we have prolonged rainfall in the mid-west!

The changes in the winds of demographics are increasing ever more rapidly in the United States. 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 population has decreased to 69.1 per cent.

It will not be long, ladies and gentlemen, before the ethnic and racial demographics of this country finally 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.

The wise mariner seeks to learn among others as much as can be learned about the coming changes; the wise mariner partners and collaborates with others who can help meet the changes with the necessary adjustments to the rigging.

A little while ago, I spoke at length about the 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. 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 modern ones focused on the best technology and integrated information exchange . . . to transform our old mission inventory and priorities into the growing demand for our maritime expertise described by the Interagency Task Force's Report on the Roles and Missions of the Coast Guard of the 21st century . . . to do all these things, 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, either in the Coast Guard, or the other naval services. Incremental progress and hard work will not relieve us of the burden of pushing an ever-growing bow wake 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. Our human resources system needs the same level of transformation as our equipment. We must remain sincerely committed to that transformation, even though the cost is high.

Sustained Personal Commitment.

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 front burner and regularly scooping big dollops of it onto the plates of your direct reports.

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.

This sustained personal involvement should not be perceived as a sacrifice or an inconvenience. If I really think we need a highly competent, diverse workforce ... If I really believe that it's important to create a positive environment based on our core values ... If I'm really serious about removing barriers that hinder progress ... If I really want all of our people to reach their full potential to contribute to Coast Guard missions ... If I really think these things are important to the long-term value and effectiveness of the Coast Guard ... and I do ... then it is my obligation to immerse myself 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 for some unpredictability to enter into our diversity management. It is like a force of nature, after all.

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 a second audit, compare results, and hopefully document progress. But the second and perhaps more significant benefit was that our employees 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.

Later, we convened a 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.

Insisting on Long-Term Solutions.

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 improvements.

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. This circumstance results from a number of factors, of which the biggest is the simple fact that more Academy graduates begin their commissioned service when they are still young enough to serve long enough to become senior officers.

Now, I'm sure there is also 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 diversity at our Flag and Senior Executive Service table.

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 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.

Taming the Tiger

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 to attract the men and women of high caliber we want in our service. It also means we have a tough tiger to tame in our 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. NNOA is the very best example of that.

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.

Last year, 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 worked very well, and we hope to expand it to other cities this year.

It's not enough. We need to do more.

Partnership can help us. We've learned the value of partnership through the years. That's why our relationships with NNOA and other organizations have proven so important. Recently, we signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the NAACP and the National Urban League to collaborate on creative ways to reach out to the tremendous

talent that is available among the African American and other minority communities. We need your help, too.

I need you to get out and make some noise to help renew our commitment to diversity. It will take a noise almost big enough to make a sleeping tiger think the world is coming to an end. But it's the best way to defeat the beast of complacency that keeps us away from our common goal. We can do this if we collaborate and partner in an effort to do what is right for our respective services and for the nation.

If we do, perhaps someday very soon we'll be able to see our goal of managing diversity getting closer; and on that day we'll look the tiger in the eye that would keep us from our goal, and say . . .

“Not today.”

Semper Paratus

