



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

April 11, 2002

I'd like to thank all of you for participating in this Summit. I've heard a great deal, already, about your active involvement and eager interest in some of the tough issues that we are facing with regard to broadening diversity within the Coast Guard.

As I read through the contents of the Program and the subjects of your sessions, I saw verbs like shattering, preserving, building, harnessing, weaving, and uniting used to describe the good work of managing diversity. These are the verbs of an energetic and creative process—one that is vital to shaping the future of our service.

I am pleased to see that each of the panel participants brought something unique to the table—a certain experience...or special background...or unusual point of view that exemplifies the meaning of the word diversity. And I believe the same is true of each of you here today.

One of our greatest educators and finest citizens, Booker T. Washington, once said: "In the long run, the world is going to have the best, and any difference in race, religion, or previous history will not long keep the world from what it wants."

I hope the experience of this Summit was the best that you could have wanted.

When Admiral Loy spoke to you at the beginning of this Summit, he spoke of the need for diversity as being evident in the natural world. I couldn't agree more. In fact, it seems to me that diversity is a law of nature. That law is in force all around us—even in the heavens, just as it is here on Earth.

The Hubble Space Telescope is a marvel of modern technology, and of the ingenuity of our great country. It was launched into space in 1990, with the purpose of seeing and exploring the farthest reaches of the universe.

For the past decade, our scientists have been able to view and photograph with greater clarity than ever before the dazzling beauty of the universe—even previously unseen galaxies, both old and new.

Though each of these celestial bodies is subject to the same laws of physics, each is remarkably different. If you have seen any of those photos, you will have observed that every galaxy adds something distinctive to the pattern of the universe.

Even within our own solar system, every planet is distinctly different in color, shape, and size, even though they all revolve around the same Sun.

Diversity is a law of nature. And laws of nature compel us to comply. This truth, after all, is the basis of our nation's Declaration of Independence.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

This claim, wrote Thomas Jefferson, was based on the premise of what he called the Laws of Nature. Drafted by Jefferson, the Declaration of Independence is at once the nation's most cherished symbol of liberty and Jefferson's most enduring monument.

There is another monument to Jefferson made of stone in Washington, DC. Inside that monument—at its center—is a towering 19-foot bronze statue of Jefferson. Surrounding the statue on the walls of the monument are some of the other words that he wrote. Among them are these:

“Indeed, I tremble when I consider that God is just, and that His justice cannot sleep forever.”

He wrote these words in reflection on the injustice and inequality of slavery in America.

Many people have noted the irony of that statement, considering that Jefferson himself owned slaves.

But the inescapable laws of nature compelled him to write those words, and the unavoidable logic of them required that he should free his own slaves, even though he did not do so until his death.

Some say that proves him a hypocrite. I think it proves him human.

Jefferson knew when he wrote the words “All men are created equal,” that he had recorded the natural law, and that the law must be obeyed sooner or later.

He did not mean, of course, that all people are the same. He was speaking of their rights among others. He was speaking of their happiness as individuals. He was speaking of their liberties as citizens. He was speaking of their lives as human beings.

And that, indeed, is what you have been talking about for the past several days. Now, it is time to stop talking and start doing.

We know that diversity is necessary to our well-being as an organization.

We know that without the necessary degree of diversity in our organization, we will diminish in strength and effectiveness.

We know that we must commit ourselves to a renewed effort to attain the level of diversity that we need.

Diversity is a law of nature.

Laws of nature compel us to action.

We are now compelled to act.

We must act on two levels: as an organization...and as individuals.

As an organization, we must continually renew our commitment to the plan to build and value our team—our entire team: active duty, reserve, civilian, and Auxiliary. Our plan must be sustainable over time. It must leverage every opportunity and best practice we can find.

We must be willing to devote adequate resources to recruit and retain a diverse workforce that truly reflects the face of America. And we must measure our progress for effectiveness and accountability.

These are the things that our Strategic Plan compels us to do, if we are going to continue to be effective in serving our country into the coming years.

These are the things that the Leadership Council has championed by laying out a Diversity Action Plan and setting up a Diversity Matrix team...strengthening minority officer and enlisted recruiting efforts...increasing training for junior leaders...and giving flag officers discretion on use of waivers to retain those who need a second chance.

These are just a few of the things that Admiral Loy has been so tenaciously committed to for the last four years. I promise you the same level of commitment for the next four.

On the individual level, when you return to your units, I challenge each of you to do three things:

First, if you haven't done so already, complete the online Organization Assessment Survey. This tool is absolutely essential to focusing a clearer image of our organization, so we can see its true diversity in every respect. It is our telescope to see clearly into the farthest reaches of our service, if you will.

Second, tell everyone you meet what you learned here. Continue the dialogue among yourselves, but draw others into the conversation, as well. You have had the benefit of the past few days. They have not. Spread the wealth.

Third, commit yourselves to changing what you can, when you can. We are all human. We are all subject to human frailties and foibles. But as the American Revolution proved, we humans have the capacity and will to act—and those actions can change us as well as the world around us.

We will change. We must. That, too, is a law of nature.

Let me leave you with one final thought. One of the things that the marvelous technology of the Hubble Space Telescope has allowed scientists to do is determine the color of the universe.

They have done this by measuring the light waves from the vast diversity of celestial bodies in the universe. Blended together, they represent the full spectrum of light.

Some of you may recall that astronomers first announced in January that the color of the universe was turquoise.

But they were wrong. You see, they didn't account for the fact that the human eye actually perceives colors differently than they really are.

We see things differently than they really are. I think that's very true sometimes when we look at other people.

The scientists used the wrong shade of white in their computer model. They were forced to recalculate and recant.

As it turns out, when you blend together the light that comes from all the diverse objects of space, the color of the universe actually is...beige—what we in the Coast Guard would call "SPAR."

And you wondered why we use so much of that color of paint!

Let us never mistake the color of our service, however. For, we know that the blended color of our service—despite the ever-increasing diversity that we encourage and welcome—will always be...Coast Guard Blue!

Out of many...one.

Thank you very much.

