



102nd NAACP Annual Convention Military Awards Dinner

★ ★ ★ ★
Tuesday, 26 July 2011
General Norty Schwartz

As Prepared
for Delivery
~18 min.
Page 1 of 6

Introduction

Thank you for that kind introduction. Mr. Shelton, thank you very much for your determined leadership and for the opportunity to speak tonight. Dr. Taylor, thank you for your steady leadership of our Air Force diversity efforts. And, to the award winners who will be recognized in a few moments, I offer hearty congratulations for very noteworthy achievements.

It is a tremendous honor to be here with members of this distinguished organization, the NAACP—especially tonight: the 63rd anniversary of the signing of Executive Order 9981. On this day in 1948, President Truman took a historic step toward transforming the American military, which then had recently saved the world from tyranny, and delivered a measure of relief and hope to weary and waiting people everywhere. But, it was a military—however formidable—that was still shackled by exclusionary policies, and subject to the stranglehold of segregation.

Although it would be several more years until the last of America's all-Black military units would be abolished, the enlightened spirit of Executive Order 9981 established fundamental equality of treatment and opportunity in the Armed Services, and ended segregation policies that were divisive and had weakening effects. In essence, it put America's military on the path toward developing a stronger, more unified force.

And today, from an even more forward-looking perspective on the value of meaningful diversity in strengthening our military, the Air Force—as well as the rest of the Department of Defense—has embarked on a path toward enabling a more structured, more robust, and more effective diversity program to help build the Air Force and the Armed Services of tomorrow. On this memorable night, I am very pleased to be able to share some thoughts on this maturing effort.



Diversity as a Military Necessity

I begin by noting the U.S. Armed Force's history of removing barriers to opportunity—at times, even leading the way for changes that became the new norm for many segments of our civil society. My longtime friend, Alan Gropman, at the National Defense University, posited in his 1975 Ph.D. dissertation that “the Air Force integrated itself when its senior leaders came to the conclusion that *segregation had wrecked Air Force efficiency and hindered effectiveness.*” I would say that, as a general proposition, Dr. Gropman's assertion certainly still rings true.

I would further argue that, in the intervening years, we have turned the corner to positively recognize that *inclusion has increased Air Force efficiency and strengthened effectiveness*—a subtle turn of the phrase with enormous implications. Through early initiatives toward broader representation and integration, the military establishment can take pride today in serving as a standard—however incomplete—of inclusion and performance-based advancement; and ultimately, as a Nation, we are benefitting from having recognized the value of meaningful diversity.

But, where earlier equal opportunity programs necessarily focused on race and gender, the current movement to increase meaningful diversity progresses beyond these essential demographic considerations, to cover qualities and characteristics that are more subtle and therefore more difficult to measure. These include factors such as individual perspectives, skills, and aptitudes— aspects of our personnel that heretofore, we have not tracked closely, or for which we may not yet have even developed suitable metrics for tracking. Contemporary, cutting-edge diversity strategies focus attention on factors such as these—and they must. We know that our strength is drawn from diverse perspectives that develop from different backgrounds—to name a few: socioeconomic, educational, geographic, philosophical, and spiritual. As long as we continue to demand and maintain working environments that are conducive to equal opportunity— environments that favor fostering and maintaining diversity of perspectives among



our workforce—then, I think, we will remain on the right track toward an even more equitable and diverse force, with enhanced performance and effectiveness.

But, our next challenge will be to identify more clearly how this is done, and how we can measure our progress.

Managing Diversity—Our Challenge Today

Accordingly, the Air Force recently formed the Air Force Diversity Committee, a senior-level working group that is specifically chartered to find meaningful ways in which we can leverage diversity, toward greater overall effectiveness. This new endeavor—co-chaired by an Air Force assistant secretary and one of my deputy chiefs of staff—is an essential one, because, as we discovered in our sincere attempts to diversify our force, diversity is *necessary*—but in itself, not *sufficient*—to enhance the performance of the team.

That is to say, diversity should not be an end unto itself, but rather one of the means toward our broader desired state of enhanced effectiveness as an Air Force. In the academic literature, managing diversity—a more comprehensive objective for the Department of Defense—has been defined as “the systematic and planned commitment on the part of organizations to recruit and retain employees from diverse demographic backgrounds.” Note the open-ended sense of the phrase, “diverse demographic backgrounds,” which suggests that it is possible for any number of people, even of the same gender and race, to still have widely differing demographic backgrounds. Therefore “managing diversity” also implies—perhaps more so than important considerations of race, gender, and ethnicity alone—a more active recognition and appreciation of the increasingly *multicultural* nature of contemporary organizations. Beyond new policies, there are immediate and difficult questions that we must answer—most notably: how to measure and register our progress. Are there objective criteria for assessing the kinds of diversity that we need to measure—for example: a candidate’s socioeconomic, educational, geographic, philosophical, and spiritual background? If so, what are these criteria? We must devise objective standards if we are to measure our progress toward a more meaningfully diverse workforce, at both the individual and group levels.



In facing these challenges, the Air Force is not alone. The diversity literature documents significant difficulties in gauging outcomes of managing diversity. For instance, more than a few attempts to increase equity and opportunity have yielded end states that are, as characterized by one study, “neither concrete nor easily measurable.” It should come as no surprise, then, that organizations that are seeking to increase diversity might experience difficulty in evaluating the effectiveness of their diversity programs and ultimately in determining their contribution to overall mission performance.

Because of this, we have charged the Air Force Diversity Committee and other senior Air Force leaders to seek ways to measure effectiveness in relation to the Air Force’s overall mission, not just in terms of the outcomes of the diversity programs themselves. The Air Force’s Diversity Strategic Roadmap and Policy Directive 36-70, as well as the final report of the DoD Military Leadership Diversity Commission, has already begun to address fundamental questions, such as, “How do we define ‘diversity’?” and, “What are our goals, targets, and strategies?” Also, the Air Force roadmap lays out our objectives to institutionalize diversity throughout the Air Force, allowing us to attract, recruit, develop, and retain a highly-qualified, talented Total Force. As we approach this challenge, we will consider ways in which we can engage every Airman (officer, enlisted, and civilian) across the Total Force (active, Guard, and Reserve) as participants in this process, and encourage them to share in the responsibility for ensuring that the talents and capabilities of each individual are mutually respected and valued, and applied toward enhancing mission accomplishment.

Again, for this daring project, already underway for some time, success means more than simply re-vamping our recruiting efforts. It will rely on the extent to which our work on professional development and personnel retention bears fruit. And, for that, commanders and supervisors at all levels will be taking a lead role in advancing our priorities, deepening lines of communication throughout the force, and taking a personal interest in orchestrating the individual success of others whose potential to serve we so value.



Conclusion

Your Air Force embraces the fundamental value of a diverse workforce whose individual members, while possessing different backgrounds and perspectives, are singularly bound in common cause, lending their creativity, energy, and dedication to the betterment of our mission and our Nation's security. I stand before you tonight, proudly representing the men and women who make up the most formidable, most respected air force in the world today. Getting to this point required considerable determination, leadership, and an instinct to constantly sharpen our cutting edge and continuously improve. While Airmen often note their history of technological innovation, they are also proud of pushing boundaries other than technological or physical. So, while we look to the exploits of air and space pioneers like Billy Mitchell, Jimmy Doolittle, Hap Arnold, and Bennie Schriever as mainstays, we also honor the very noteworthy achievements of legends such as Benjamin Davis, Jr., Daniel "Chappie" James, Lee Archer, and Jeanne Holm. They, and others, are among the elite group of Air Force legends who eliminated barriers that kept us from the richness of diversity, which today continues to prove itself as an invaluable source of our collective vitality.

As we move forward into a future full of challenges and uncertainty—but also of opportunity and hope—we must strive to do more, for the challenges are formidable, the competition for talent is fierce, and the very viability of our Nation's all-volunteer force depends on it. We know that this plentiful talent—and the commitment, aptitude, and skill of America's finest—can be found everywhere across this great land of ours. Your Armed Forces will be vying for this precious talent, and fully committed to ensuring equality of treatment and opportunity while attracting the very best.

And for this, we would be most grateful for your continued stalwart support—to champion the nobility of public service, in or out of uniform, and to encourage parents and influencers to emphasize the virtues of service to others. I extend heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity to be here with the NAACP on this historic anniversary—63 years after President Truman affirmed the right of all qualified people of all races to serve in the military, and less than a week after another



Commander-in-Chief certified the right of all qualified people, regardless of their sexual orientation, to serve in our Armed Forces.

I have a full appreciation for the enormity of the work that we are about to undertake—and for the gravity of the outcomes. But, I am heartened by faith that we, as a Nation, with candor and determination to tackle the tough challenges directly, can achieve outcomes of great consequence together. I praise the NAACP for its heritage of able leadership—the sort of necessary leadership of which I spoke earlier: active, aware, and bold. And, I thank the NAACP for the awards that, in very short order, you will bestow upon proud members of our military family.

To all: Suzie and I and your Air Force wish you the very, very best. Thank you.