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U. S. COAST GUARD

STATEMENT OF

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ON

DIVERSITY IN THE COAST GUARD

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARINE TRANSPORTATION

U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 10, 2008

Good morning Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee. It is a pleasure to appear before you today to discuss diversity within the Coast Guard. I am Rear Admiral Jody Breckenridge, the Coast Guard's Assistant Commandant for Human Resources.

As a military, maritime, and multi-mission Service - one of the Nation's five Armed Services—our mission is to protect the public, the environment, and America's economic interests in the Nation's ports and waterways, along our coasts, on international waters and the high seas, and in any other maritime region as required to support our Nation's vital interests. To execute this mission requires an energetic, well-educated and highly capable workforce of active, reserve, civilian and Auxiliary volunteers. The Coast Guard is committed to building and sustaining an organizational climate where people of diverse backgrounds, cultures, races, religions, and ethnicities are valued and respected. We are working hard to create access and opportunity within our total workforce regardless of age, gender, physical ability, race, nationality, or religion.

Diversity is not a program or policy; it's really a state of being. Our Service readiness to fulfill our worldwide missions effectively requires a heterogeneous workforce; however, our progress has been slow and inconsistent. We have set a fresh course for ourselves and I assure you, Mr. Chairman, that we are committed. Our trackline for recruiting, retention, and promotion has tangible steps to build upon across our workforce.

The topic of diversity has been intertwined with American history since the beginning of our nation. The points of intersection between diversity and our national history are most vibrant and reflect the immense power of the American spirit, when viewed through the American Armed Forces.

On March 5th, 1770, Crispus Attucks, an African-American, became the "first martyr of the American Revolution" for standing up against British tyranny during the Boston Massacre. One author noted Attuck's importance by calling him "one of the most significant figures in African-American history…he is a reminder that the African-American heritage is not only African, but American."

African Americans fought valiantly in the Revolutionary War battles of Bunker Hill, Lexington and Concord, and on American ships at sea. Settlers from the Canary Islands living in what is now southeast Louisiana fought the British in that region. During the Civil War, the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment demonstrated what they could do with access and opportunity on their path to "Glory". Thousands of Mexican-Americans joined the Union Army and fought to abolish slavery and preserve the nation. Side by side with white soldiers and sailors…neither caring about the other's accent or skin color during battle but rather only if that person had the courage to shoot straight.

As you know, the life saving service was a predecessor to the U. S. Coast Guard. During a terrifying storm off the North Carolina coast in 1896, the Pea Island Life Saving Station executed a daring rescue that history has noted as heroic on the beached merchant vessel E. S. NEWMAN. As Captain Etheridge and his African-American crew fought through the breaking surf on 10 separate occasions to rescue people, neither the rescuers nor those saved cared what the other's skin color was – only that all survived the nightmarish ordeal. They did. Today, at commemorations of this historic rescue, descendants of E.S. NEWMAN's crew note they would

not be here today were it not for the courage and commitment of the Pea Island Lifesaving Station crew.

Women have also served heroically in nearly every conflict this nation has engaged in – often behind the scenes, without much fanfare, or even masquerading as men. Clara Barton essentially founded the American Red Cross on the bloody killing fields of Antietam. The Coast Guard SPARS, Navy WAVES, and Army WACS of World War II paved the way for following generations in each of our Armed Services, who serve with distinction today in many roles and missions only previously dreamed about. The Coast Guard Academy stands out among the Service Academies in its ability to attract women - today, 25% of the Cadets at the Coast Guard Academy are female. Thirty years ago, that number was zero.

Today, the Coast Guard remains the only Service where talented women may serve across all spectrums of missions and operations. In 1977, the Coast Guard opened the last remaining career field, the afloat community, to women. During Desert Storm/Desert Shield, the Coast Guard deployed units as part of our Nation's engagement in the Middle East. Our Service was asked to remove the women from these units, to which we responded, "No." Women were and are an integral part of crews that plan and train together. To remove them would limit the best and brightest talent for accomplishing our mission.

Recently our Nation celebrated the 60th anniversary of President Truman signing Executive Order 9981 ending the segregation of the armed forces and requiring that "there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. Based on his own military experience, President Truman valued the courage and contributions of African Americans who served their Nation in WWII. That view led to the Executive Order nearly 20 years before President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, which outlawed segregation in schools, public places, and employment.

All of these examples beg the question of why minorities joined the military in the first place. For a good portion of our history, minorities were fighting to protect freedoms they weren't allowed to enjoy when they removed their uniform. So why?

WHY DIVERSITY IS IMPORTANT:

As General Colin Powell noted in his autobiography, minorities chose the military to "join the most democratic institution in America, where they could rise or fall on merit." He viewed the military as a virtual melting pot. Whether it's a Marine patrol attacking a hostile outpost, a Navy cruiser's combat information center team directing air defense operations in a combat zone, or a Coast Guard boarding team going over the gunwale to secure a non-compliant vessel – the military forge an environment that places character, commitment, and courage above all else.

General Powell identified that the military, by the very nature of its work, has the innate ability to break down preconceived biases and replace them with a spirit of teamwork. Unlike the private sector, in the military we live, work, fight, and sacrifice together. Chairman Cummings, our Commandant, Admiral Thad Allen shares that commitment to equal access and opportunity as evidenced in the results of his involvement in increasing diversity of our flag and senior executive service corps. This commitment is the underpinning of all that we do to improve diversity in the Coast Guard.

In our Service, we have long viewed diversity as an opportunity to create an environment where each person, regardless of their heritage, ethnicity, or gender, can be an effective contributor. We strive for an organizational and leadership culture of inclusion, equity, and respect. We need to maximize the potential of our workforce to effectively accomplish our vast maritime safety, security, and stewardship missions. We've made strides to increase diversity within our ranks, but we know more needs to be done.

Admiral Allen is guiding our Service to modernize and re-orient into a change-centric organization – one that is nimble enough to recognize subtle indicators and make appropriate course changes. Modernization involves the workforce as well as our capital assets. Our diversity initiatives are deeply embedded in this effort as we look at new assets, competency requirements, and different programs to attract and retain our already talented workforce. Our renewed diversity efforts will help the Coast Guard reflect the ever-changing face of America and the global maritime community we interact with on a daily basis.

The Coast Guard faces an incredibly complicated world of work – from national security, to environmental regulations, to search and rescue – which includes multiple players at different levels of the public and private sectors, a dizzying array of domestic and international laws, all in an environment requiring risk analysis and prioritization. Our missions are conducted in a "zero tolerance for failure" atmosphere driven by a relentless 24-hour news cycle. We need new ways of thinking to manage the tyranny of the present and position the organization for future success.

Numerous social scientists have highlighted diversity as a key to innovative thinking and enhanced problem solving within organizations. The simple reality is that heterogeneity offers ways to look at and solve problems that homogeneity does not. Within the Coast Guard, we require members to live, train, stand duty together, and if necessary, fight together. Every time we send a crew out, they are dependent on each other to get the mission done and get back safely. We think of each other as family members and comrades – this attitude helps break down some of the barriers in society at large. And a loss, like the helicopter crew we lost in Hawaii last week, is a deep and personal loss felt by each of us.

The Coast Guard is an agent of change, a long-time champion of the continual improvement mantra – this occurs every day at Coast Guard units. Innovation, creative thinking, and adaptiveness are the pistons within a change-centric organization's engine. Diversity can provide some of the lube oil to increase performance.

The Coast Guard, and the Armed Services in general, have internalized and upheld core values. In the Coast Guard, once we put on the uniform, regardless of our personal backgrounds, we all coalesce around Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty. The Coast Guard's Guardian Ethos of protecting, defending, and saving the American public continues to guide us today. We are all Guardians and we honor our core values.

Our men and women are amazing at viewing the maritime public through that well defined Guardian lens; now Admiral Allen is asking all members of the Coast Guard to turn that lens around and focus it on the people we work with every day. Think about protecting, defending and saving our shipmates - by respecting and embracing their differences - with the same level of commitment we provide to the American public.

IMPROVING DIVERSITY IN THE COAST GUARD:

The Coast Guard is committed to the respectful treatment of all personnel and to providing each person with the tools they need to succeed. All levels of leadership, top down and bottom up have clutched-in ahead to make a difference. I have told you why diversity is important, and now I'm going to tell you some of things we are doing to make further progress on our diversity journey.

We chartered a Diversity Strategy Group and Diversity Advisory Council to identify areas for immediate improvement. These forums provided many action items that Admiral Allen endorsed and communicated internally and externally on his personal commitment to diversity and the trackline these initiatives provide. Mr. Chairman, there is a new level of energy we are generating within the Service that we believe will lead to innovation and new programs not being thought about today. We have stepped out smartly to take decisive action. Here are a few of those actions:

- To encourage diversity awareness:
  Admiral Allen directed all units to enhance their local relationships with affinity groups, which we have already embraced at the organizational level including the National Naval Officers Association, the Association of Naval Service Officers, Coast Guard Women's Leadership Association, and Blacks in Government.

  Every Flag Officer/Senior Executive Service member will actively participate in at least one affinity group national conference annually.

  All Commanding Officers, O-4 and above, will attend at least one affinity group national conference during their tour.

- To increase Coast Guard awareness at institutions of higher learning, flags and SES will reach out to offer personal and direct involvement with a minority serving institution. These senior officers will maintain an ongoing relationship with the institution as partners as we work together toward mutual goals. We will also link a mid-grade and junior officer with the senior for connectivity into the student body.

- To increase diversity within our officer corps, we are revising the application requirements of our College Student Pre-commissioning Program (CSPI). The current program, which requires colleges and universities to have a minority enrollment of 25 percent to qualify as a participating institution, is not producing the desired results.

- We are moving forward with a program at the Maritime Industries Academy in Baltimore. Through our existing Partnership in Education (PIE) Program, we will work with the Academy to identify their needs and how we can help students reach their potential. Partnership in Education has a history of mentoring, tutoring, supporting scholastic achievement, and enrichment programs such as boarding Coast Guard cutters, or exploring Coast Guard aircraft. With the proximity of local Coast Guard units in Curtis Bay, we will explore educational and skill development opportunities with the school.

- For our civilian workforce, we benchmarked successful hiring practices of other federal agencies and are applying lessons learned to our Service to bring in more college graduates, marine industry personnel, and to increase our diversity.

CONCLUSION

Chairman Cummings, the Coast Guard is committed to improving the diversity of our Service. We are taking action—tactical and strategic. We are making changes now and charting the course along our trackline for sustainability into the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.