

Remarks by Donald C. Winter
Secretary of the Navy
National Naval Officers Association
26th Annual Training Conference
Portsmouth Renaissance Hotel
Portsmouth, VA
Friday, July 25, 2008

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to speak to you this evening, and to spend this afternoon dealing with people instead of shipbuilding.

It is important for me to be here, and I think that the representation at the highest levels of the Navy and Marine Corps this week is an indicator of how strong the support for diversity is across the Department of the Navy.

Finding talented people and developing our people is a top priority in the Navy and Marine Corps, and, from a personal point of view it is one I have made a priority throughout my tenure as Secretary.

I understand, appreciate, and support what the National Naval Officers Association is doing, and I can assure you that I am your partner in working on ways to improve the Naval services.

My focus today is on how we can accomplish our mutual goals together.

We all want to make the Naval services better by finding and developing people who can make a great contribution.

Diversity is an important element that underpins and supports our new Maritime Strategy.

It is a key to our success, fostering creativity and new ideas.

Diversity in our workforce can help us meet our need to develop cultural understanding and effective engagement abroad.

Your conference theme of developing future leaders to enhance mission readiness and cultural awareness is very apt—developing future leaders is critical to our success.

Our promotions are based on performance, and we are necessarily focused on meeting Navy requirements—especially when it comes to the skills, knowledge, and expertise of our warfighters.

I approach this issue from the perspective of one who worked in industry for more than three decades, and I see a common element between what was our focus on people there, and our focus on people in the Navy and Marine Corps.

In industry, the key competitive differentiator is often the quality and talent of a firm's personnel, particularly in the high tech sector where I worked.

Therefore, expanding the pool of potential applicants was critical, for the success of our business depended on finding the best talent.

This was particularly important to my company, which had a very strong international component.

We needed people who were effective in operating in different environments and different cultures.

One example of how we translated our focus on diversity into action was our outreach to the Hispanic community in Los Angeles.

I was not from Los Angeles; I was not Hispanic; I was much older than the generation of candidates we were recruiting; I did not know the area well enough to know where to target our efforts.

However, with the help of just a few talented Hispanic engineers in the company, we were able to go to Los Angeles, visit the right schools, talk to the people who could best help us, and tap into the best Hispanic talent in the area.

This diversity outreach had concrete results, and we were able to significantly improve our hiring rates of Hispanic engineers.

It also brought home that impact that individuals can have in supporting diversity.

At the end of the day, it takes individuals willing to make the time and effort—to be recruiters or mentors—to achieve outstanding results.

I had seen support for diversity work in industry when I came to my current job as Secretary, and I made a personal commitment to support it in the Secretariat.

Our approach applies to all the outstanding people we have asked to serve on our team—from the military members on my personal staff, to our assistant secretaries and deputy assistant secretaries.

This sends a strong signal to others that we value diversity, and that every member within the organization can aspire to the highest leadership positions.

I believe in diversity from the top—setting the example that will engender support for diversity throughout the organization.

The Navy and Marine Corps have been strongly supportive of diversity, and we are making energetic efforts to increase minority representation throughout the services.

We are committed to diversity and we are proud of our record of specific efforts to reach out to under-represented minority groups, offering opportunities to all, and developing minority servicemembers for leadership positions.

The Department of the Navy is addressing the concerns that are frequently raised about minority representation in the flag and Senior Executive Service ranks, and in the jobs that lead to senior leadership positions.

It is also worth noting that our Department's "Diversity Storefront Recruiting Project" is based on Lean Six Sigma principles.

By insisting on a formal, results-oriented process, we incorporate diversity into the way we do business.

We do not treat it as a separate, unrelated activity.

We have made great strides in how we operate, and we have greatly raised awareness of the value of diversity to our mission.

That said, we are not satisfied with where we are in terms of numbers, and we recognize that we must do better if we are to attract the talent we need from all communities across America.

This is especially important in view of the changing demographics of the American workforce.

Currently, blacks and Hispanics comprise approximately 27 percent of the workforce.

That number is projected to rise to 38 percent by 2050.

We want the Navy and Marine Corps to reflect that change, and we must increase our efforts to recruit and retain the best talent in all communities.

Minority representation in the enlisted ranks of the Navy and Marine Corps is very high, although it falls far short of where we would like it to be in a number of occupational specialties and communities within the services.

On the other hand, we are still struggling to increase minority representation in

the officer ranks.

The challenge is to find qualified minority applicants for accessions to the Naval Academy, Naval ROTC, and Officer Candidate School.

Serious efforts to improve the pool of minority talent in the officer ranks must start in the schools.

We must take the long view in addressing this issue.

Our 2012 accessions will comprise the pool of officers eligible for promotion to flag rank in 2037.

Our leadership today is becoming more reflective of our Nation's diversity, and we continue to reap great benefits from this progress—especially when you look at where we started.

In fact, tomorrow will mark the 60th anniversary of President Truman's executive order integrating the armed services.

Efforts to achieve greater diversity over the past few decades are paying off.

Top performers are demonstrating everyday that minorities can succeed and rise to the highest levels.

We seek the best talent that America has to offer to serve in the Navy and Marine Corps.

Relying on those in designated recruiting billets is not enough, and we need to take advantage of every opportunity to reach young people at the high school age and earlier, and tell them about the opportunities that exist in the Naval services.

Each individual in this audience has a great story to tell about his or her life in the service.

We need you to visit elementary schools and high schools and to share your experiences.

Industry has learned that our nation's youth make fateful choices early in life.

Corporations now sponsor schools as early as elementary school.

We share with industry a need to communicate earlier with young people.

We are different from industry in that we have additional constraints on whom we can recruit.

The pool of applicants that we can draw from has steadily decreased.

Currently, 72 percent of the Nation's 17-24 year-olds are not eligible to serve in the Navy because of medical conditions, failure to meet academic standards, or legal and conduct reasons.

These challenges means recruiting is not just for recruiters.

Your visibility in a school, your connecting with a child, will make those you meet aware of the exciting choices they can have in the Navy and Marine Corps.

You, as individuals, will make a difference.

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As important as the challenge of finding minority candidates for officer training is, the need to nurture and develop the officers we have for future leadership positions is equally important.

Retaining our top performing Sailors and Marines is essential to our success.

There are many reasons why people decide to leave the service, but one key factor in countering all of them is mentorship.

We need successful officers like you to show the way for others, to encourage those who might be struggling, and to seek out for future development those with high potential.

Think back to your own experiences.

How important was it to have mentors who helped you on your journey—or what difference would it have made if someone had been there to encourage you early in your career to make good choices and remain motivated to perform your best?

You are proof positive of what can be accomplished.

I believe that the visibility you provide as examples to others is an extremely important aspect of diversity.

Young Sailors and Marines are greatly influenced by mentors and role models, and if they can see your success, they will know that they too can aspire to great heights.

I urge you to pass on the gift of mentorship you were shown and be the mentor to others that you benefited from—or be the mentor you never had but always wanted.

As the Marines might say, we're looking for a few good mentors.

We need your help.

Help us identify the stumbling blocks and barriers to progress.

Help us to fix the things that need fixing—we are willing to make changes and do the right thing to further our diversity efforts.

Help us in every aspect of our outreach efforts.

You know the markets and communities we need to reach.

You know where we can be more successful.

With your help, we can double our numbers.

We should all be asking ourselves, how many new people have I brought to the table? Can I do better?

Strengthening diversity in the Naval services is an essential part of our goals and mission.

How do we gain more officers, and stop losing the ones we have?

What people and institutions should we be reaching out to, and who are the most effective ambassadors?

What would have helped in your own careers?

Active, Reserve, retired, and former Sailors are all encouraged to interact within their communities and tell their stories.

I encourage all of you to be recruiters.

I urge you to make the commitment to be a mentor.

All of you serve in a noble profession.

The Nation needs patriots willing to serve and sacrifice in defense of our liberties and of our way of life.

I commend you for your work as part of the National Naval Officers Association.

You do great honor to the proud heritage of the Sea Services.

I challenge you to build upon this strong foundation, and to continue working to maintain the high standards expected of those who serve in the armed services.

Thank you, and may God continue to bless America.