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INTELLIGENCE

Hearing on "Building Capabilities: The Intelligence Community's
National Security Requirements for Diversity of Languages, Skills,
and Ethnic and Cultural Understanding."

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify this morning on the need for greater diversity in the intelligence community. The case for diversity is clear. Let me lay out some basic arguments in support of it.

First, we should encourage diversity within the intelligence community because it is the right thing to do. The U.S. intelligence community, like the government as a whole, should reflect America. The intelligence community's personnel should reflect all the variations, cultural diversity, and coloration that have made our country great. It demeans us as a nation to have such a wide discrepancy between the proportion of the population who are minority and their representation in the intelligence community. Closing that gap should be a national goal.

Inclusion is a political imperative. Minorities have earned their seat at the table where foreign policy is made. We have been on the front lines - literally -- in carrying out policy in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and more recently Iraq and we have too much at stake to remain marginalized within the decision making process. I am glad to see that our minority leadership in Congress is paying attention to the subject of foreign policy, and I encourage them to persevere.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, we should pursue diversity within the intelligence services because it is the smart thing to do. In order for the foreign policy establishment, and the intelligence community in particular, to have the support of the American people, it must look like the American people. Historically, that has not been the case, both in the upper echelons of policymaking and in the bureaucracies. There is no denying that substantial progress has been made with the appointments of Collin Powell and Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State and National Security Advisor. But down in the ranks of the State Department and the CIA, there is still a long way to go before we can say that these institutions truly reflect America.

We need to take advantage of the fact that in this country we have a globalized society, unlike any other country in the world, to beef up our intelligence capability. Minorities have much to offer in the way of language capability, social skills, and cultural sensibilities that have

been sorely lacking in the past. Because of the variety of our national origins we look like the rest of the world, an important attribute in the intelligence business.

It is a fallacy to say that diversity has to come at the expense of merit. Intelligence agencies must demand excellence and require that all employees meet the highest standards of performance. Our nation can afford nothing less. But while doing that, we can and we must give minorities a better environment in which to compete and succeed. In some circumstances, this may require proactive affirmative steps.

Why we need to include more minorities may be self-evident, how to go about recruiting more minorities into the intelligence service, retaining them, and promoting them is less clear. I understand that there has been some progress in all three areas, but the fact that you are holding this hearing suggests there is much more to do. Retention and promotion of minorities seems particularly exigent.

Based on my three years working as an analyst in the Directorate of Intelligence nearly a decade ago, I can offer some reflections on the subject. I hope that they prove relevant to the task at hand.

On the subject of recruitment, I see multiple challenges. One is the need to overcome the reservations potential recruits may feel about working for the intelligence services. Many minorities hail from parts of the world where the CIA has - to put it bluntly -- a bad name. First generation Hispanics, like myself, had to contend with the negative legacy the CIA had in Latin America, for example. I suspect the same applies to Arab Americans, Asian Americans, and others who have come from the developing world. Accusations surfaced a few years back in some quarters that the CIA was complicit in bringing drugs into the country. The fact that such absurd accusations resonated with some minority groups attests to the inevitable resistance the agency confronts in recruitment.

Another challenge that the intelligence community faces is knowing where to recruit. Historically, the agency had a reputation for recruiting only from the Ivy leagues. There are indeed minorities at Harvard, Columbia, and Yale, but the odds are greater of recruiting

qualified minorities (Hispanics at least) in schools such as the University of Miami, University of Texas, or University of Southern California. I could also suggest there are publications better capable of putting recruitment ads in front of minority readers than the Economist or the New York Times.

I also wonder whether the intelligence community can make better use of the minority personnel it already has to reach out to the minority community. In my case, I did not come across a single minority person during my entire recruiting and interview process. I would contend that there is no more powerful way to court a minority than being engaged by somebody who looks like you, talks like you, or comes from a part of the world that you come from.

Let me now move ahead to the question of retention, where my own experience at the agency is relevant. Joining the agency is daunting to everyone coming in, although I suspect it may be more so for minorities. At the agency, we are even more of a minority than we are in the outside world. The culture of secrecy, further exacerbates this isolation. Some have to contend with those who saw us as "tokens." I confess that at times I felt distrusted, as if I was not "American" enough to be there. When you don't fit the bill of what a CIA man or woman looks like, this treatment could be very disconcerting.

Undeniably, there was great pressure on the few of us to blend in. It seems to me the time has come in America that we can rejoice in our differences. The reaction of many of us was to try to bend over backwards to prove that we belonged: that we were as American and worthy of trust as everyone else. At times, some of us fell to the temptation of overcompensating, and in the course of doing so, lost our sense of perspective, a dangerous mistake when your very "business" is making sound judgments. The pressure to blend in was not only cultural, but also applied to how you carried out your work. Based on my experiences, the following are some suggestions you might consider.

1. Make more of an effort to make the minorities who join the agency feel more welcome. I believe that message of welcome should be delivered by none other than the CIA Director, both in a private and public manner. The agency could also encourage the

creation of a network of minority support groups to receive and mentor minority newcomers from the very start of their careers there. At the very least new recruits should have the opportunity to take advantage of such a support network. This support may now be available, but was not when I was there ten years ago.

2. I would also urge that the agency better treasure the few minorities it has been able to attract by entrusting them to seasoned managers, managers who have a track record of successfully developing minority professionals.

3. The institution could also be patient and open-minded in handling our adaptation to the ways of the agency. A little bit more time and guidance could be provided to overcome the historical difficulties minorities have had in adopting the DI writing style, a major stumbling block for minorities in the past. Bear in mind, that many of us come from bilingual backgrounds and have a wider communications gap that we need to bridge than recruits for whom English is the first language.

Finally, let me share my thoughts on why there may be a dearth of minorities in the upper ranks of the intelligence community and what can be done to rectify the situation. One obvious explanation comes to mind. If there is not a big enough pool of minorities to promote, not many minorities will be promoted. Suspecting the politics may be more of a factor in competition for more coveted jobs, I would also recommend that more effective monitoring be marshaled to assure that no discrimination takes place. A commission of CIA minority alumni can be called upon to play this role.

Let me conclude by making a particular case for Hispanic inclusion in the intelligence services. I believe that Latin America will pose a greater intelligence challenge in the years to come. Terrorism is no stranger to the region and its spread is easier now than ever before. Our economic interests have also never been more intertwined. Undoubtedly, having a cadre of Latino intelligence analyst who speak the language and have a special sensitivity to the region could be very valuable.

Again, I salute you in this initiative to raise the profile of the issue of minority inclusion in intelligence and I hope my remarks have proven of value in thinking through how to make further progress on this front. I look forward to trying to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.