

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE
WASHINGTON, DC 20511

The following Op-Ed by Ronald Sanders, Associate Director of National Intelligence and Chief Human Capital Officer, and Patricia Taylor, Chief of the Intelligence Community Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity Office at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, was published by the Federal Times on Monday, August 17, 2009:

Growing diversity

1st-generation Americans give intelligence an edge

By Ronald Sanders and Patricia T. Taylor – Op-Ed – The Federal Times

Diversity is a mission-critical imperative for the intelligence community (IC), and our definition goes beyond race and national origin, gender and disability. The IC's mission depends on a workforce diverse in many dimensions, requiring a wide range of expertise and deep knowledge of other cultures, languages, perspectives and ideas. We not only need a workforce that reflects the rich diversity of America, but one that also reflects, understands and can engage all of the countries and cultures of the world — oftentimes clandestinely.

This is where our nation's heritage Americans come in. These first- and second-generation citizens can offer us the advanced language skills and unrivaled cultural expertise that are as vital to security as they are rare in our general population. They also bring a unique appreciation for the freedoms and opportunities that so many of us take for granted. That's why the director of National Intelligence has made the recruitment and retention of first- and second-generation citizens a top human capital priority.

However, while we've progressed, it's clear that we have much more work to do if IC is going to be able to successfully attract and retain this largely untapped source of talent.

That's where our IC Heritage Community Liaison Council comes in. Established last year, the council consists of 17 external organizations representing interests of various ethnic populations, such as the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and the Organization of Chinese Americans. Modeled after a similar effort pioneered by FBI Director Robert Mueller, the council coordinates outreach and recruiting activities and serves as a forum for improving communications, transparency and trust.

With the council's help, IC agencies have become more active and visible in their collaborative heritage community outreach efforts, with the FBI, National Security Agency and CIA out front. For example, CIA sponsored a "Spy Tent" at an Arab-American festival in Michigan last spring; hundreds visited the tent to learn more about the agency and the IC. This year, we participated in more than 45 similar events nationwide.

We've also expanded our innovative Centers for Academic Excellence, which awards curriculum development grants to universities to meet our future hiring needs and includes schools that have large heritage American student populations. Coupled with student scholarships, these grants are the foundation for an ROTC-like Intelligence Officer Training Corps now included in legislation sponsored by the administration. We're also implementing significant changes to our security

clearance rules, eliminating barriers to clearances for heritage Americans who hold dual citizenship, or who have non-U.S. citizen relatives.

Our efforts can't stop at recruiting, however. We also want to make sure that employees of all backgrounds feel they are welcome in our workplace and have an equal opportunity to advance and make a difference. To support this, we've recently established an IC-wide Affinity Network of 10 employee resource groups. Best-in-class organizations use these affinity groups to help recruit, retain, develop and mentor their top diversity talent. For example, we've sponsored a first-ever affinity group for IC employees of Middle Eastern and North African descent to provide these recruits and employees with a support system to help them navigate their careers as IC professionals.

Finally, we monitor closely our annual IC Employee Climate Survey. While the Partnership for Public Service recently named the IC one of the top five Best Places to Work in Government, we know we must continuously measure progress. In that regard, we have developed a form to collect more detailed ethnicity, national-origin and cultural-origin data from heritage applicants and employees; the voluntary form recently cleared the public notice period required by the Paperwork Reduction Act, and we hope to use it soon.

Above all, the success of these initiatives requires strong leadership commitment and robust collaborative partnerships — with heritage American communities and employees, equal employment opportunity, diversity and human capital professionals, and IC mission partners. By working together, we can and will make the IC an employer of choice, particularly for first- and second-generation Americans. As we confront an increasingly complex and chaotic world, our nation's security will depend on it.

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