



Intelligence Community Comes Out in Austin

NEWS RELEASE

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*IC LGBT Pioneers Share Their Stories of Serving Openly
and How Intel Agencies Outpaced Other Sectors in Some Respects*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ODNI News Release No. 7-16

March 16, 2016

by Timothy Barrett

Austin, Texas - America's Number Two Spy Stephanie O'Sullivan praised LGBT officers from three Intelligence Community agencies in her introductory remarks before a South by Southwest panel discussion here on Monday. Their advocacy, she said, was "not for personal gain but just to be able to serve their country. That is the very definition of selfless patriotism."

Ms. O'Sullivan said, "Without diverse thinking and unique perspectives, we will fail. We need every bit of the diversity of talent, skills and insight of the workforce." She continued, "Not only because it is imperative for our work, but because it is a reflection of who we are."

For the first time in its history, the Intelligence Community—long perceived as an exclusive bastion of a narrow demographic—brought together LGBT officers to share their personal stories of leading change from within. These Secret Agents of Change represent a continuum of progress that confounds expectations, revealing how the Intelligence Community historically has been ahead of the Fortune 500 and broader government in sewing the seeds of equality in the workplace.

When Kris Gill arrived at the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency in 2010, what he found may have surprised his former private sector colleagues. "I was able to come in the door just as I am thanks to those who came before me." Today Kris chairs the Intelligence Community's Transgender Working Group. He also represents NGA within IC Pride, which links LGBT employee groups across the 17 agencies of the Intelligence Community. His work at NGA underpins military navigation systems, so he acknowledged the pun as he said, "I really like charting change."



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When Kris was in elementary school, panelist Tracey Ballard was in her third year as a CIA officer. She faced a pivotal choice: share her sexual orientation at risk of being fired or hide it at risk of betraying herself. She chose to come out. “Those who came before me were typically removed from service and lost their [security] clearance.”

CIA kept Tracey in its ranks as its first openly gay officer—seven years before the Executive Order that barred sexual orientation as a criterion for security clearances.

Tracey said the CIA was trying to let LGBT officers come onboard as new hires—or stay with the Agency—so long as they were honest about it. But nothing official happened until 1995 with the Executive Order, resulting in haphazard efforts.

Tracey’s personal decision had wide-reaching implications in 1996 when she decided to establish CIA’s grassroots LGBT affinity group, Agency Network of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Officer and Allies. “I had a privilege of being out and cleared for seven years [before Executive Order 12968 in August 1995].”

“For me, it’s about being a part of something that is larger than myself. I understand that whatever I’m doing is going to help the person coming after me.”

FBI Supervisory Special Agent Katrina Gossman also recognized how her personal decisions shaped the circumstances of those in her wake. When Massachusetts legalized same-sex marriage in 2004, Katrina seized the fleeting moment. She wed her partner there just days before out-of-state, same-sex couples lost the ability to do so.

Legally married in Massachusetts, Katrina submitted her marriage license to the FBI to extend her benefits to her wife. When the FBI welcomed their marriage, Katrina encouraged other same-sex couples to follow her lead. “In 2004, I became the first FBI employee to marry my [same-sex] partner,” Katrina said.

Two months after receiving spousal benefits, Katrina received a letter from the FBI rescinding them. “The people of the FBI wanted to do the right thing,” she said, pointing to the FBI’s inability to overcome the Defense of Marriage Act.

Suddenly, Katrina said, “I became the most outed employee in the FBI.” Katrina said she just wanted to be free to do her job without worrying about her family. “The most rewarding thing for me is catching the bad guys.”



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Monday's panel cultivated rich discussion at South by Southwest. Panel chair Rita Sampson—who leads inclusion efforts across the Intelligence Community—said, “The power of today's session is to be interactive.”

One audience member shared that she had been an international affairs student in Washington, D.C. in 2004 and was “on track” to pursue a career in the Intelligence Community. But she feared it would not work for her family. She and her wife instead moved away from Washington in pursuit of careers they believed would be a better fit. She expressed appreciation to the panelists for their courage, saying she may have pursued work in the Intelligence Community had she known what progress had already been made by the time she was seeking a career.

The panel explained how their efforts within their individual agencies continue to shape best practices for broader diversity efforts within the Intelligence Community and the wider federal government. After all, Kris said, “Not being able to come to work as your authentic self takes a toll on your energy.”

Tracey agreed, “We are not the organization of our grandfathers. We've gone from a very dark, closed environment to a very welcoming, open environment.”

There is more work to be done on LGBT and overall inclusivity issues. Kris has been involved in the push to drop Office of Personnel Management exclusions for transgender healthcare for federal employees. Today IC Pride is working to continue progress toward inclusive policies related to hiring, security, and human resources for LGBT employees across agencies.

The next LGBTQA—A for Allies—Summit in June is expected to bring together roughly 1000 officers, many of whom will join via video teleconference from posts—and agencies—around the world. Meanwhile, IC Pride continues to unify efforts within intelligence agencies, paralleling the broader cultural shift toward integration throughout the Intelligence Community.

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