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INTELLIGENCE AGENCY TOUTS DIVERSITY AS BOON TO SECURITY NSA Reaches Out to Gays and Lesbians

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SANTA BARBARA, CA, August 19, 2008 – The National Security Agency (NSA) recently hosted a corporate diversity trainer well-known for his work with Fortune 500 companies that want to appeal to gay and lesbian workers and consumers. Brian McNaught, an author, speaker and trainer, was the invited guest of Deputy Director John C. Inglis, the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity, and the agency’s gay employee network, GLOBE. McNaught addressed over 600 managers and employees of the NSA in an effort to help the agency create a welcoming work climate that values diversity as both an end in itself and as a tool to optimize workplace productivity and effectiveness.

While uniformed personnel are subject to the military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy barring gays and lesbians from disclosing their sexual identity, civilians in intelligence organizations are not, allowing them the freedom to discuss their experiences, concerns, and the progress that has been made from the days of hostility to gays and lesbians in intelligence. And the agencies are now joining their competitors in corporate America in their efforts to attract and retain the best talent available.

“I was very impressed with the commitment of senior managers to create a productive work environment for gay and transgender employees,” said McNaught, who received two standing ovations at the agency, “and by the response of managers and all employees to the messages I conveyed. Had there not been people in military uniform, I could have thought I was speaking to any of my global corporate clients.”

Aaron Belkin, director of the Palm Center, a think tank that studies gay service at University of California, Santa Barbara, said McNaught’s appearance and warm reception reflects an understanding at intelligence agencies that sexual diversity and transparency are strengths, not weaknesses. “The agencies now understand that the way to have the best workforce possible is to hire based on merit and to recruit from all sectors of society rather than to make arbitrary distinctions that cut the workforce off from the strongest candidates,” said Belkin.

Consistent with research on the topic, McNaught said the NSA had realized that perpetuating the closet



for gays and lesbians was counterproductive and could actually create the security risk it was supposed to mitigate. “People made it very clear to me that you can be gay at the NSA but they don’t want you to be in the closet,” said McNaught. “If you just tell them anything that might be used against you, no one will be able to use it against you.” He added that those who are out often feel most positive about the climate, and enjoy honest relationships with their colleagues.

Although the military maintains a ban on openly gay service by uniformed personnel, military and intelligence operations have blended so thoroughly in the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that intelligence officers often find themselves involved in combat or combat support. After the terrorist attacks of 2001, the New York Times reported that “never before have the traditionally independent military and law enforcement organizations worked so much in concert.” Indeed, many of the highly specialized agents who began conducting logistical, training and intelligence support in Afghanistan after 9/11 were not uniformed soldiers. The most highly publicized of these was Johnny Michael Spann, a 32-year-old CIA officer who became the first American casualty since the U.S. began its bombing campaign of Afghanistan in 2001.

McNaught, who is the author of the recently published *Are You Guys Brothers?* (available at www.brian-mcnaught.com), said that in some ways the military is a better candidate for switching to a policy of equal treatment than intelligence agencies were. “Civilians don’t necessarily follow orders as readily, and can need more convincing. In the military,” he said, “they follow orders.”

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