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**Opinion on Hispanic Americans in the Senior Ranks of the Armed Forces**

by

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The continuing focus on Diversity and Inclusion has become more of a "Race issue" and a "Gender issue" than an "Ethnicity issue". The Hispanic American population has grown to be the largest minority group in this country, and yet, comparatively speaking, our Armed Forces still do not reflect "the face of the nation" with regard to the Hispanic American population. This is particularly true in the Flag and General Officer, senior officer and senior enlisted ranks. This is NOT Diversity and Inclusion! As you will remember, forty-five years ago the emphasis to increase the number of African Americans in key colleges, universities and other educational and business institutions was through Affirmative Action and Quota Control. This program which was deemed as successful had its flaws. It had very little, if any, regard for any ethnic community, and there was little concern for meritocracy. Of note, however, the program eventually produced a significant number of African American Flag and General Officers. These senior officers then served as examples and potential mentors to those who came behind them. Similar to what was done for the African Americans over forty-five years ago, there should be a renewed emphasis and focus on the ethnic communities, specifically, the Hispanic American Community. Furthermore, there should be an in-depth analysis of the demographics of Hispanic Americans in the Armed Forces and specifically in its senior ranks, and the DoD and the Services should take an approach towards tracking and mentoring of Hispanic Americans in order to advocate for them, ensure they are fully qualified for promotion into the senior ranks of the Armed Forces, and are given a fair and objective opportunity for promotion without prejudice or discrimination.

There have been a number of diversity reports and articles published throughout the years, and those reports have been nothing but a current statistical and demographic update of Hispanic Americans in the Armed Forces. Furthermore, those reports have fallen on "deaf ears". Moreover, the resulting diversity and inclusion policies generated within the Department of Defense from those reports and articles have become nothing more than "shelfware" with very little action taken based on those policies. This insanity has been going on for four decades now, and the demographic data proves my point.

The issues concerning prejudice, discrimination, diversity and inclusion will probably not go away in our life time. However, the issue concerning the extremely low number of Hispanic Americans in the senior ranks is the result of a total lack of leadership awareness within our Armed Forces. If we look towards the leadership within the Armed Forces for closer mentoring of Hispanic Americans, strive for the highest meritocracy and push for positions of the highest visibility for Hispanic Americans, then we might make some well-founded headway. We need to examine who is coming up in the ranks; we need to examine who is in zone for O-6, O-7 and O-8; and we need to strongly advocate for them. DoD and the respective Services should analyze the reasons why highly qualified Hispanic Americans were not promoted, understand

why others were promoted, including possible bias, prejudice and discrimination, and then present those facts to the "powers that be". I am sure that this can be done given the confidentiality of the deliberations of the promotion boards.

I find it difficult to believe that of all the highly qualified Hispanic Americans who are serving at the O-6 level in our Armed Forces, that very few, if any, "meet the requirements" of the precepts for the Flag and General Officer promotion boards and are not promoted to Flag or General Officer. There are a number of O-6s whose records and performance in tough leadership positions show that they are "head and shoulders" above their peers, that they meet the requirements of the promotion board precepts, and yet, they are not selected for Flag or General Officer. There is no question that the importance of meritocracy, i.e. becoming the best qualified candidate for promotion and for selection to higher positions of leadership, rather than the importance of any racial, ethnic or diversity label, is understood in most organizations. However, when it is time to be looked at for promotion, they are not promoted. Is it an issue of subjectivity, or objectivity, on the particular promotion board? Are we seeing unconscious discrimination and bias at the more senior promotion boards?

Lastly, the retention concerns of senior Hispanic American officers and enlisted, and why the promotion zone pools contain a small number, if any, of Hispanic Americans should be analyzed and brought to the fore front. Within the Sea Services, we are seeing more and more Hispanic American officers and enlisted taking advantage of retirement at their first opportunity. When I was President of ANSO (2011-2019), I saw many Hispanic American officers within the Sea Services at the O-4 and O-5 ranks and many enlisted at the E-6 and above ranks, retire at the 20-year mark. I discovered that this was the time when their children were graduating from high school; that they were tired of longer deployments that were straining the family nucleus; that they did not want to contend with the stress of budget issues that they saw those in higher ranks having to deal with on a daily basis; and that they were being offered lucrative opportunities in the private sector. This dilemma is reducing the pool of qualified Hispanic American officers and enlisted who could possibly be promoted into the higher ranks and therefore help the Sea Services in particular reflect the "leadership face of the nation" in the senior officer and enlisted ranks. We must work on retaining our best qualified Hispanic Americans past their 20-year point.

I believe that the Armed Forces recognize that the recruitment of Hispanic American men and women is no longer a matter of equity, but rather a significant necessity given the rapid growth of this segment of the population. I firmly believe as do many of our senior officer and enlisted leaders that we will be better served by continuing to eliminate the racial, ethnic and diversity labels. With that said, diversity and inclusion has been proven to be important and a factor in the strength of any organization. Nevertheless, we must continue to exhibit the inherent leadership qualities in continuing to promote the importance of diversity and inclusion; eliminating prejudice; focusing on eliminating the ethnic, racial and gender gaps; promoting mentoring, career management and advocacy in order to be the best qualified candidate for selection to command and promotion to the next higher grade; advocating those qualified Hispanic American officers for the "right" jobs; promoting Hispanic Americans to Flag and General Officer without prejudice; supporting recruiting the best qualified candidate for the Armed Forces; and supporting increased education of our local youth. Further, HVLA and other Hispanic-oriented professional groups must continue to be leadership role models for their subordinates, their peers and their seniors alike.