

Sharp Gives Keynote at LGBT Pride Month Summit

FROM THE OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Rear Admiral Robert Sharp jumped at the opportunity to speak at this year's Sixth Annual IC Pride Summit held at FBI Headquarters.

Diversity and inclusion are so important to the Office of Naval Intelligence commander, he also agreed to host next year's Pride event at ONI headquarters.

"I'm passionate about this topic," he said at the 15 June event. "I'm passionate not only about IC Pride and inclusion of the LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender] community in all we do, I'm also passionate about diversity and inclusion across the force in general."

He said his commitment comes from the important role diversity and inclusion play in building a strong Navy. Not only as the right thing to do, he said, but also as a warfighting readiness imperative.

"We must welcome diverse experience and backgrounds," he said. "Doing so opens our doors and pulls people in who make us strong."

Nowhere is that more important than in the intelligence community, he said.

"It's our job to go out there and understand adversaries. We need to be looking at threats from every different angle, and if we can't bring in diversity of experience, diversity of expertise, diversity of thought, we will not be as good as we need to be for our nation."

Sharp gave his three primary reasons for embracing the LGBT community and enhancing diversity and inclusion across the IC.

"It makes the best use of our talent, strengthens the team, and ensures we identify, assess and recruit the nation's best and brightest," he said.

"It's the right thing to do as leaders to make sure we are taking advantage of our most valued commodity, which is you," he said. "This really is about celebrating who we are as a group, celebrating our inclusivity and then also talking about how we continue to get better as an organization."

Sharp recalled his early experiences in the Navy before women deployed on combatants. The Navy was "not as inclusive, course corrected, and became better for the effort."

He recalled his first deployments on the USS *Ranger*, joking with the audience that if they did an Internet search for the ship's name, "it wasn't the wooden ship with sails; it was the aircraft carrier "and there were no women on board.



RADM Robert Sharp gave the keynote address at IC Pride held at FBI headquarters.



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“Fast forward to Lieutenant Sharp, deploying on the USS *Constellation*,” he said. “This was when we first started deploying women on combatants. We had women assigned to the ship and as members of the air wing to include an intelligence officer.”

Leading up to that deployment, he said, there was apprehension about what might happen.

“People wondered if the world might stop revolving in the right direction,” he said. “They fretted over the wide range of troubles we might have. What we found by the end of deployment was that we were much better by having women on board the ship.”

Prior to deploying with women, he said, the Navy had been setting sail with some of its most capable officers and technicians left ashore.

“What’s the opposite of inclusion? It’s exclusion,” he said. “And as soon as you exclude, you miss talent and you miss opportunity. So I’m passionate about diversity and inclusion. To me, it just makes sense. “

Sharp said that embracing the LGBT community is important to the overall strength of the Navy team.

“The Navy just came out last year with a Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority which has four lines of effort. I was really excited by the fact that one of the four lines of effort was all about strengthening the Navy team and that we define the Navy team as our uniformed sailors (officer, enlisted, active and reserve), our non-uniformed sailors (the tremendous talent we have across our civilian corps), and our families,” he said. “Our families are an important part of everything we do.”

Sharp said families strengthen the team and that he has never been to a retirement where family members were not recognized and applauded for their contributions and sacrifices.

“It was not long ago that gay, lesbian, and transgender military members had to hide who they were,” he said. “Not only did they have to hide who they were themselves, but they were also not allowed to bring their family members to family events and they were sub-optimized.”

Following the 2011 repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” gays and lesbians were allowed to serve openly.

“Now when I walk around in my spaces, I’m proud of the fact that gay men are comfortable and happy to tell me that their husband is so and so, and we can talk about when they met and how long they’ve been together,” Sharp said. “They’re proud to bring them to our events, and we are just a much healthier team by the inclusion of all of our families. “

He shared the story of Alexandra Chandler who transitioned to a woman while working at ONI. He told the audience that they could hear her story in a YouTube video as part of the “It Gets Better” project.

“When Alex determined that she needed to transition to be true to who she was as a person and live authentically, she thought it would cost her job,” he said.



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“However, when she approached her commanding officer at that time, the courageous leader just said ‘This is going to be OK, you are going to be OK, and I’m going to stand with you.’ And he did. And her co-workers did,” Sharp said.

Sharp said those were life changing moments and life changing decisions. The command supported Chandler as she transitioned.

“Alexandra continued to work at ONI, and blossomed into one of our top analysts and rose to supervisory ranks,” Sharp said, “And she continues to thrive and excel.”

Sharp said if leadership and co-workers had not supported Chandler, she could have left the command which then would have been “deprived of her tremendous talents.”

Sharp closed by announcing that he looked forward to ONI hosting next year’s Pride Event.

“You all have my personal invitation to join us next June at ONI for IC Pride,” he said. “I look forward to seeing you next year, and hearing about all the things we’ve done to make ourselves better. It’s going to be spectacular.”

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