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NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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33RD REGULATORY INFORMATION CONFERENCE (RIC)

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SPECIAL PLENARY SESSION

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SEE THE CHANGE, BE THE CHANGE: ENERGIZING

THE NRC WORKFORCE

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THURSDAY,

MARCH 11, 2021

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The RIC session convened via Video Teleconference, at 12:30 p.m. EST, Shivani Mehta and Alexandra Siwy, NRR, presiding.

PRESENT:

SHIVANI MEHTA, Technical Assistant, Division of Risk Assessment, NRR/NRC

ALEXANDRA SIWY, Nuclear Engineer, Advanced Reactor Technical Branch, Division of Advanced Reactors and Non-Power Production and Utilization Facilities, NRR/NRC.

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AMANDA MARSHALL, Emergency Preparedness Specialist,
Reactor Licensing Branch, Division of Preparedness and
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P R O C E E D I N G S

(12:31 p.m.)

MS. MEHTA: Good afternoon. I am Shivani Mehta. I'm here with my co-chair, Alexandra Siwy, to welcome you to "See the Change, Be the Change: Energizing the NRC Workforce," brought to you by the Next Generation of Nuclear Regulators, or NextGen, and the NRC Technical Women's Network, or NTWN, two employee-run resource groups of the NRC.

MS. SIWY: The NRC is taking steps to attract, retain, and develop a skilled, diverse, and equitable workforce that can adapt to a rapidly-changing work environment. Today we will explore the importance of thoughtful inclusion while hiring, motivating, and retaining the next generation of nuclear leaders and how the NRC aims to advance female leadership in our workforce by harnessing all talent.

MS. MEHTA: To kick off our session, we're excited to have Dr. DeRionne Pollard on why radical inclusion is now fundamental.

Please use the Q and A boxes if you have any questions for Dr. Pollard at any time, and we'll address them at the end of her talk.

Dr. Pollard is the President of Montgomery

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College, one of the largest undergraduate institutions in the State of Maryland, where she has served for 10 years. She is deeply connected to her community serving on the American Association of Community Colleges 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges and the Commissioner of Academic, Student, and Community Development. Dr. Pollard is a member of the Equity Advisory Board for Mission Partners and the Center for First Generation Student Success, Advisory Board for the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. Locally, she also serves on the boards of the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, University of Shady Grove, the Capital Area Food Bank, and the Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area.

Dr. Pollard was named one of Washington's 100 most powerful women by Washingtonian magazine. She won a 2017 Academic Leadership Award from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and a Visionary Award from the Washington Area Women's Foundation.

She holds a bachelor's and a master's of arts in English from Iowa State University and a PhD in educational leadership and policy studies in higher education from Loyola University Chicago.

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Please welcome -- please join us in welcoming Dr. Pollard.

DR. POLLARD: Thank you so much. I'm absolutely delighted to be here, and let me extend a deep appreciation to NextGen and NTWN for this invitation. I celebrate this work that you're doing and what you're going to be doing for the broader agency, and I'm honored to be here to talk a little bit today about radical inclusion and why it's so fundamental right now.

I've given a number of speeches over this past year about leading through crisis and certainly, this week marks a year since the college that I am the president of went remote. So I have to ask, is this still a crisis? I think the answer is both no and yes to a certain extent. At a certain time, we all have become acclimated to Zoom meetings and to children in our work spaces. I have a 14-year-old that I'm thoroughly convinced is going to walk in here any minute now to tell me about how his online schooling has been going today, because he likes to sneak up behind me when I'm camera. And I think we've all gotten used to people struggling to share their documents smoothly or failing to remove cat filters or

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even from time-to-time forgetting that they are muted.

We ought to have that as a t-shirt.

Now much of that has become just background noise in a lot of ways. It's actually remarkable how quickly, as humans, we've adapted to this environment. A lot of us are now being encouraged to refocus our agencies' or institutions' mission. How do we get our jobs done within the confines of a public health emergency? To some extent, we're being told push through that background noise. Let's focus on the critical issues.

Well, I want to suggest to you today that we need to be careful one, how we actually define background noise but also what we push into that category of background noise. In fact, we've been encouraged to push some experiences aside for decades, outright discrimination, implicit bias, micro-aggressions, inequity in hiring, and a dearth of career mentors. Most of us live routinely with the signs of profound inequity in our communities: young people of color who start college but then don't finish; middle-aged people who are working two low-wage jobs because they can't live in Montgomery County and pay their bills on one job; older folks who don't

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own a home because they never got the help that is often needed to buy a first home, a second home, and so forth. Many of us have been encouraged to look away from this. We have not, as a society, I think, developed an awareness of how racism and/or sexism have impacted our communities in real terms; wealth inequality, lifetime earnings, health disparities, and educational attainment.

In a few distinct historical moments, these inequities have burst in communal consciousness; in the post-Civil War era, during the Civil Rights movement, during the Vietnam War, and certainly during the second wave of feminism. In each of these moments, a ground swell of communal recognition emerged, because social conditions changed for everyone. Slavery was abolished. Schools were desegregated. A military draft was instituted. Women moved into the workforce. In other words, change impacted everyone.

Now last summer, the intersection of COVID-19 infections and the police violence created another one of those tipping points. The average American, regardless of race, could not ignore the images on the news of police killing people of color

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in their custody. They couldn't ignore the death toll from COVID that was climbing dramatically while also savaging our economy. In the post-election era, we had to add that Americans couldn't ignore images of the Capitol being overrun. And as a nation, we witnessed these events, experienced these events communally.

For some of us, this was not news. It wasn't new for us. The realities of racism and economic inequality have been with us for a long time.

Some of us have never had the luxury of calling them background noise. We live with them daily. In our experiences, racism is a second pandemic. It kills people in our communities consistently and predictably.

And like many people, I live with the fear that my son being pulled over by the police one day. I tell you that he is 14, but he is nearly 6 feet tall. And that scares me.

I live with the knowledge that African Americans who contract COVID-19 are much more likely to die from it than other people. About 30 percent of Marylanders are African American, but they're also 50 percent of the COVID deaths that have taken place to

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date.

And I live with the reality that 47 percent of students at Montgomery College said they were food insecure in the second month of the pandemic. And that's why we run these mobile food markets in partnership with the Capital Area Food Bank.

I'm glad that these realities are now being shared more widely. We are living in a crucible moment, I would offer to you. How we respond to it will shape the experiences and the perspective of the next generation.

Now I'm going to step back for a moment and give you a snapshot about my college. Montgomery College is built on radical inclusion. Seventy-six percent of our students are people of color, so our classrooms are rich laboratories of diversity. We are gloriously diverse. We fight publicly for DACA and for Dreamers.

We teach courses in the Clarksburg Correctional Facility, because we believe that everyone belongs even if they've made mistakes.

We create classrooms that meet students where they are academically with specialized support,

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because their high schools may not have prepared them for college.

And we make financial assistance a part of our learning strategies. Our registration material is in six languages.

We make sure female students have the same STEM opportunities and mentors as male students. And we target the underemployed and the unemployed with training camps, like our recent Bio Boot Camp and our Apple coding program for low income middle schoolers.

These practices are based on research. Community belonging increases academic success. We don't just teach it on our campuses, but we go into neighborhoods and meet students who never saw themselves in college in our community engagement centers. In fact, we partner with local communities which are deeply connected to local needs. This is a photo of a partnership Montgomery College created with the Ethiopian Community Center. We now have all of our website up in Amharic in addition to six other languages. And Ethiopian students are among our top three foreign-born graduates.

We also have offerings for post graduates who need additional training to fit their skills into

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the local market correctly. Our clinical trials management program enrolls students who already have their MDs or PhDs. And we live in our belief that everyone deserves the dignity of working and learning.

Now our faculty acknowledged that different students need different supports, and you won't know what this is needed until you measure achievement. We have a student success score card which disaggregates student achievement by race and gender, and black males is an area of focus for us because we see that they have the lowest-performing outcomes in several measures. That's why we have programs such as our "Boys to Men" program which places faculty mentors with students of the same ethnicity. That's why we host an annual Maryland Male Students of Color summit each year.

If you're not familiar with Chuck D of Public Enemy, I encourage you to check him out. He was one of our keynote speakers last year and offered a powerful message to our students about racial equity and social justice.

Finally, our metrics lead us to create a special presidential scholarship program to increase the success of American-born black male students. We

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looked at the demographics of our emergency funding during COVID-19. Black males were least likely to receive funding because they didn't ask for it. Many were eligible but didn't know who to ask or didn't want to ask. There is some cultural work that we know needs to be done within our organization to help empower this group of students.

We also hold ourselves accountable. This is a distinct call in our mission statement. Organizations that want to move the needle, such as your own, on racial equity and gender equity need to establish some public metrics and hold themselves accountable for that.

At Montgomery College, we know that radical inclusion has to live in the workplace as well as the classroom. If our employees are going to model it, they have to experience that as well. They must work in an environment that promotes fairness, diversity, and inclusiveness.

To that end, I hired a chief equity and inclusion officer in 2017 who leads my President's Advisory Committee on Equity and Inclusion. The committee looks at our culture through surveys and conversations. It creates safe spaces for dialogues.

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It helps shape our working and learning spaces through culturally-engaged pedagogy, and it works with our human resources and compliance programs to ensure that we're recruiting in the right places and interviewing in the right places, probably not unlike the work of your Next Generation group.

You can see the mission of our equity and inclusion office here: We will promote and create a working and learning environment rooted in the basic tenets of fairness, diversity, and inclusiveness. And I also talk about inclusion and equity at the community level wherever I go. I try to take that noise that we have been allowed to tolerate in the background and dare I say I want to turn up the volume.

And my presidential dialogue series on racial justice this year has had three guests; a Police Chief, Marcus Jones, who talked about policing in a diverse community. He also shared what it's like to be a person of color leading a large county department that has come under scrutiny in the last couple of years. That scrutiny is appropriate as are questions about community policing and how we can engage officers as the civil servants that they are.

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Legal scholar, Jeffery Robinson, has also been my guest to talk about sentencing and criminal justice. This is another area where reform is gaining around -- gaining ground and the lenses of racial justice are critical. If you've ever heard him present, Mr. Robinson is an eloquent speaker on the history of race in the United States and has been helping us think through this experience on a national identity. I encourage you to look for his discourse on YouTube. And if you need some education in this area, I guarantee you that you will be changed by his insights.

Now, finally, I was lucky enough to talk with our County Health Officer, Dr. Travis Gayles, in my series. You may have seen him on 60 Minutes just two Sundays ago talking about health inequities in Montgomery County. Again, having a person of color with professional expertise and lived experience has been critical in these conversations. We're able to delve into some nuances that need to be talked about publicly. They need to be drawn out of the background noise and into the public square.

Now another area of radical inclusion which we tap with the college is financial assistance.

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Half of the students who receive Pell Grants at my school come from families earning less than \$25,000 a year. I don't know if many of you can imagine that, because I'm still trying to figure out where that's sustainable in the region in which we live. We all know that COVID-19 has hit those who are most vulnerable already the hardest. And among Montgomery College students, we know that they told us this, that 33 percent of them lost a job and over 40 percent of them lost wages. Now the college knew what this would mean for our students early in, and we knew that this could be a game-changer because the number one barrier to college completion is not promise, it's poverty.

In fact, in the first few weeks of the pandemic, when our buildings were closed, we had students come into our parking lots to use the Wi-Fi.

They had no internet service at home, but they were connecting to their classes on phones in a parking lot. I have a GED class who the whole 26 students worked on their GED on a cell phone. This is something that's very profound, because we make assumptions about what people have right now.

We reallocated our funds for commencement and other spending buckets and combined them with

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private donors, contributions from employee unions, and distributed over \$1 million in emergency aid. These were cash grants for rent, for food, for utilities, for laptops, for hotspots. We didn't know what radical inclusion would look like in the pandemic, but that's what it evolved to.

We also distributed more than \$5 million in federal CARES money to our students, but we are aware that some have been left out and others have been left behind.

Food insecurity has been another critical area. In our partnership with the Capital Area Food Bank, they visit our campuses about 24 times a year on a schedule and distribute food. This is our fourth year and on average, we serve about 12,000 community members, faculty and students with free food each year. I want you to catch that. Not just our students but our employees and the community. I know that students depend on these packages, because they tell us. As someone who once relied on food assistance, such as myself, I know how much this matters. Food is the last thing you buy after paying your rent, after utilities, after car payments, because it's the most flexible which can often mean

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the nutrition is getting shorted. That's another health disparity that came up in my conversation with Dr. Gayles, how food deserts and lack of primary care contribute to inequitable outcomes.

Now one of the assets of being at an institution with radical inclusion at its core before the pandemic is that we didn't have to re-prioritize.

We didn't have to get woke around issues of these types of things. Through all of this crisis, we didn't have to say let's put hiring equity on the background for a few months. That wasn't an option and will not be one as long as I'm the president there. We have a master plan and the gears are already moving. We didn't have to say, "Let's scramble to get some extra support for those students without technology," because that's what our Montgomery College Foundation did even in pre-pandemic conditions. They provide for student need. They didn't have to find book scholarships for students who lost work, because we have a zero cost book program for students through our open educational resources already in place.

But what I'm most proud of though is that we didn't have to say, "Let's start talking about race

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and inequality," because we were already doing that publicly, imperfectly sometimes and sometimes painfully, but we were doing it. And we're never going to build a society that is truly based on opportunity and access if we're not willing to talk about where we are now and where we have come from as a nation.

Now I truly believe that the way we engage around inclusion and diversity are now more fundamental to the technical and cultural progress of our nation. The solutions we need to the political and health insecurities we face require talent from all corners of our community. A report last year said that 45 percent of Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children, companies like Google, eBay, Tesla, PayPal, and LinkedIn. On top of that, there are more than 4 million companies owned by people of color in the United States. In a place like Montgomery County where I live and work, people of color make up 57 percent of the population. The Brookings Institute projects that by 2045, the majority of people in the United States will be people of color.

Now I literally cannot afford to exclude

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anyone from this search. None of us can. If you look at our history, we have limited ourselves to educating only certain kinds of people for highly-skilled jobs.

We've limited recruitment to narrow demographics. We've decided that we don't need to educate everyone at the highest level. The pandemic has shown us the inequalities that we have been tolerating for so long, that background noise that I talked about earlier, it impacts every single one of us.

None of us will be safe from the pandemic unless healthcare is available to all who need it. Those who may be bemoaning the resistance to COVID vaccines in some communities of color, I want to suggest something to you. We created that. Inequality breeds suspicion and distrust. The price is paid by the whole society in terms of security. None of us is safe from racism until the opportunity is equally available. Those who may think, "oh, the police don't use excessive force on innocent people," I think we all need to know otherwise, and that we created this environment because as a society, we tolerated abuse of power and authority in law enforcement. We allowed it to be just background noise for too long, because we otherized what this

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work was, and we're paying a price now in our communal security. Those who said, "Well, the problem is those people burning businesses in response to police violence," well, we created that, too. That's the anger and the frustration that boils up over decades of exclusion and inequity.

As a nation, I think we have to own all the parts of the problems that we've created. Lawlessness is indeed unacceptable but neither is oppression. The tipping point that we've reached in the last year, I think, is a telling sign. It's a culmination of benign neglect and outright hostility towards equity and diversity. And this is a watershed moment for us. Our future security depends on problem-solving that include lenses on access and opportunity that are comprehensive. They have to touch on office politics, hiring, promotion, and networking. They have to build career ladders and encourage mentoring. They have to shape policies that drive the work of our institutions. They have to saturate the cultures of our communities.

They have to make sure that students like Jacquelyn Flores have the finances to finish her four-year degree at UMBC after her Montgomery College

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associate's degree. Jacquelyn started as a biotechnology major at Montgomery College and then enrolled in our translational life sciences technology program at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County. She is now working full-time in the cell therapy department at Lonza, a biotech company, while completing her four-year degree.

And students like Firehiwot Gurara get to -- all types of her talents need to be brought to our communal space. She is from Ethiopia and graduated from Montgomery College with honors in electrical engineering. She completed her four-year degree at Cornell and is pursuing her master's degree.

In another era, these values might have been radical but today they're fundamental because actually, if you think about the Latin for radical is just simply to get to the root. They're intrinsic to the challenge of getting everyone vaccinated so that COVID-19 doesn't shrink our economy. They are essential to creating safe communities where law enforcement is seen as a resource, not a threat. They're integral to creating career ladders so that every person in our community gets the training they need to develop their talents at work and to bring

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their best selves here. These are the key ingredients to our communal recovery.

Now if you're new to some of this thinking about equity, that's okay. And even if you're trying to problematize some of what I've said, that's okay as well. You may have had the luxury of pushing this noise into the background for years. The idea is not to shame people. If you're not new to these ideas or these new conversations, that's important. But if you are new, there may be some anxiety about doing it wrong.

I want to share a secret from one of my mentors, Brené Brown, who says, "There is no daring leadership without vulnerability." This is from her book called, *Dare to Lead, Whole Hearts, Tough Conversations and Brave Work*, which I highly recommend. One of her observations is that the most effective organizations are ones in which people are encouraged to bring their whole hearts to the work. In her language, that means all of their human emotions, among them being vulnerability. And that -- in fact, Brown says this is the most valuable.

Doing the work of equity and inclusion is, in large part, an inside job. If you work in an

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institution or organization that's trying to re-imagine itself through equity lenses, each person in that organization is going to have to do some internal work.

So if any of you are thinking "I'm nervous about this, I'm feeling vulnerable about getting called out on some of my blind spots," I can give you some advice on that. The only way to do wrong is not to do it at all. None of us is perfect and none of us have lived the experience of others. So if you identify with that nervousness, it's okay. You're likely reacting to the vulnerability that these conversations put all of us in. Growth requires vulnerability at both the individual and the institutional level.

We need everyone to be a part of these conversations. We need everyone to talk about living and working in multi-cultural diverse communities. We need everyone to examine equity and outcomes. These are "we" problems. You don't get the solutions without everyone's voice being a part of that solution creation. We may have different roles in solving them and different things to teach one another, but each person matters. We all live at the intersection of

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many identities.

As we face the stressors of COVID, unemployment, racial enmity, and police violence, such stressors, and each one of them on top of each other creates more instability. Individuals are often the ones who can break these links with a simple conversation that is filled with dignity or a respected question showing sincere curiosity, not just judgment. Sometimes it's a matter of speaking up for some of us and other times we need to listen more.

Judge Judy says, "You got one mouth and two ears for a reason." There's no one formula that works for every circumstance, but I do know that transformation is impossible. Dare I say it is essential and it is necessary. And I know that this is the part of the change that is not all radical. It is fundamental to who we are. And I know for sure that it belongs to all of us.

I thank you all very much for this time here, and I look forward to engaging in some Q and A with you at this point. Thank you.

MS. MEHTA: Thank you so much for your like wow remarks, Dr. Pollard. They're really poignant. So we're going to ask to see if Alex has

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any questions for Dr. Pollard at this time.

MS. SIWY: Yes. Well, first of all, we're getting some really great feedback on your speech, so thank you so much. Let's go to this question. Thank you for your remarks, President Pollard. How can we, as individuals of a larger agency or organization, work toward achieving racial inclusion in our day-to-day interactions in the workplace?

DR. POLLARD: You know, I think one of the best things we need to do is look at who we surround ourselves with and the intention of stepping out of our comfort zones. I had a great conversation with my son the other day. He -- we live in Montgomery County which is gloriously diverse, and this child is able to tell me more about the world that we live in simply because of the people that he sits -- used to sit next to at lunch and conversations that he engaged in.

And I think part of this work is twofold. As I said, it's internal work, doing the reading, understanding the lived experience, looking at media, listening to voices that may differ from your own and then demonstrating courage to sit down and have conversations when we can do that whether it be in virtual spaces such as this -- one of my favorite

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things I started last year before the pandemic, I held dinner parties at my house. And I have a roundtable that sits 10 people. And I was very deliberate that I would bring 10 people together whose experiences may be similar but also very different and have provocative conversation.

We need to be willing to have the conversations in the public spaces that we have in the private spaces, and organizations like your own can get active in the public conversations and adopt conversations into your workspace but also take them into your private spaces as well. Those are some of the things that I would think of and then be willing to create intentional spaces within the organization to really help coach people about how to have those conversations that can be very painful but also can be very rich at the same time.

MS. MEHTA: Thank you, Dr. Pollard. I think, unfortunately, we don't have time for more questions. We really appreciate all your effort and time for coming to speak to us today, and we're so inspired by you and Montgomery College doing the work of equity and inclusion to achieve real and lasting success in both your college and the community around

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you. So thank you so much again for joining us today.

DR. POLLARD: I'm deeply appreciative and grateful to you all for inviting me here today.

Ms. Mehta: Thank you. So Dr. Pollard's message hit on so many important themes at the NRC, especially embracing change. The desire to create positive change from a grassroots level resulted in the creation of NextGen and NTWN.

To continue our conversation around efforts to effect positive change at the NRC, in the following videos, the leaders and founders of NextGen and NTWN as well as staff at all levels will talk about being change agents and will share their inspiration and stories related to recruitment, retention, female leadership, diversity and inclusion.

Just a side note. Staff appearing in the videos will not be able to answer any questions live today. However, we'll pass off any questions that you have to them or you can email us later at the contact information at the end of the session. So please roll video one. Thanks.

(Video played.)

MS. MARSHALL: So Lauren, can you remind us again how we got started with NTWN. And I also

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really want to hear about how NextGen got its start.

MS. GIBSON: So NTWN got started about 2015 -- 2014-2015. The charter was officially signed in 2016, but there was a lot of work that went into it before then. It started as a conversation between two friends, and we decided we realized that we wanted to have a type of training that was not available at the NRC. We wanted something that could help bridge the gap between what we learned in our technical education and what would be useful for us as technical women in the -- to advance to management. And we thought if we wanted this type of training, maybe other people did, too. So we wanted to create a network and an opportunity across the agency to be able to do that.

MR. BETANCOURT: NextGen's started the same way as you guys, with a conversation between two friends. And what happened was like it was interesting that we had this program that is called a week at the NRC, and we were trying to figure out how we can actually do more stuff to also be able to recruit and retain the people, because at that time, we were figuring out there were a lot of good people leaving the agency. And we know that there were a lot of good people all throughout the agency doing good

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stuff, but everybody was doing -- was isolated. And I remember that Candace and I sat down, said, "Hey, what can we do about it?" And then it started like a word of mouth. Well, I know that Gladys is actually helping us in this area. I know that Minh-Thuy is helping us in this area. Everybody was in different offices. So we reached out to those folks and everybody was, "Wow, what a great idea." And that's how we came together as a group.

And then, lucky for us, we also had good management support. Like, when we were talking to our management, this actually came up as a grassroots effort. It didn't come up as a management-led initiative. It started from the bottom up. It feels like NTWN was the same way. Nobody directed you guys to do anything. It just literally blossomed from the bottom up.

And I think the beauty about this, like literally blossomed, and then when we reached out to our management to let them know, hey, we want to do this, they was like, you guys, go ahead. -You guys have our full support. And not only that, we -- so then, back in the day -- we started in Summer of 2019 -- Chairman Svinicki was actually speaking at a

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conference in the 2019 North American Young Generation in Nuclear, and she said these words that really resonated to our group. "Don't wait for the future. You are now. You are the now. You have the ability.

You have the power to make the changes that you see fit." And for us, it was like wow, that's really our group, and that's how we started.

MS. GIBSON: Yes. So we did start as a grassroots organization. We had the conversation between two people, and we had to convince management, and we had to convince other offices that there was a need for this and that there was an opportunity and that we could do it. So it took a lot of networking just to be able to get the group started.

And we had started unofficially meeting once a week, and then as we became -- as the group jelled and we became more and more not official but more and more formed, you know, as we worked on the charter and we got executive sponsors, more structured, then we were able to do that. And it took a lot.

We had to do a lot of explaining to people who we were and what we wanted to do, because this was a different sort of an idea at the time. We were not

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in it to say that the agency was a bad place or that anything wrong was going on at the agency. We were just looking for something very particular, and we thought we had a path forward where we could create it and we could contribute to the agency. So once that was understood, then there were no issues and we were able to form which is awesome.

MR. BETANCOURT: It's funny that you say that because that's literally how we just formed. Like we didn't want to replace someone. We wanted to actually help the agency. We wanted to energize the agency. And people were doing already good stuff already. We just wanted to figure out a better way, because the way that we were thinking, we were thinking way ahead. We were thinking about the middle schooler, the elementary school kid, like how can we change the agency when they come around because at the end of the day, we are a stepping stone for those folks that are coming in.

MS. FIGUEROA-TOLEDO: I think -- I feel like we were doing things already. We were engaging high schoolers, and we were supporting job fairs. We were networking with DOE and the industry at millennial caucuses. And then we started forming or

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coming up with more of a structure. People were even asking, hey, what is your charter, and we were like, oh, yes, we got to work on a charter. So I feel like NTWN paved the road for NextGen in that regards, because I don't feel like there was a lot of explaining for us. I think we started doing things. Then we became and thought about a structure. So we were a little more of doing things so like --

MS. MARSHALL: Yes. I think that that's the beauty of both of our groups is, you know, that we're grassroots organizations and we're doing these things because we want to be doing them. We're here because we want to be doing them and, you know, it comes from an authentic place. We're not here because it's part of our job. We're here because we want to make the agency a better place to work.

You know, certainly NextGen's focus is more so on the recruitment side of things, but NTWN has the same interest. We want to make sure that we have a fantastic pipeline of folks coming into the agency to help fulfill the future needs that we have.

MS. SIWY: Our second video focuses on recruitment, which is a vital first step in energizing the NRC workforce. Recruiting high-performing

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individuals from diverse backgrounds ensures fresh perspectives to carry out our mission. Here are a few messages on how the agency is building a foundation for the next generation of nuclear regulators. Roll video two, please?

(Video played.)

MR. CUSUMANO: I'm Vic Cusumano. I'm the Chief of the Technical Specifications branch here at the NRC where I oversee the development and implementation of power plant tech specs. Before that I led the resolution of longstanding generic safety issues and was a reactor technical assistant to former Commissioner Magwood.

So interestingly enough, I was recruited by the NRC at a job fair while I was there recruiting for my defense contractor employer. I finally joined the NRC 24 years after my original interview. At the time, I was looking for a change. I remembered that interview with the NRC all those years ago, and I'd had the opportunity at several points in my career to work alongside NRC staff.

I believe in what the NRC does. As the regulator of the nuclear industry, we play a big part in building and maintaining public trust in nuclear

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power. Without that, any benefits nuclear power offers to the country will never be realized. That's how we make the safe use of nuclear power possible.

MR. CAPONI: Hi, everyone. My name is Louis Caponi. I'm originally from the small town of Oakland in Northern New Jersey, and I just graduated from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute with my bachelor's degree in nuclear engineering. I am one of 23 general engineers and scientists part of the Nuclear Regulator Apprenticeship Network. The NRAN program recruits recent graduates with bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degrees to address the expected skill gaps of the agency.

Over the course of the two-year program, NRANers will select apprenticeships in different offices across the agency. This will allow each member to have a wide range of experiences both at NRC headquarters and at regional offices. Each NRANer will be paired with senior mentorship and supported by a dedicated supervisor and program manager in addition to an apprenticeship supervisor for each individual apprenticeship.

What's unique about the NRAN program is that each of its 23 members were on-boarded together

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as a cohort. We did not start in individual teams, divisions, or offices. We were brought into the agency together, and we had 15 weeks of initial training to learn a little bit about how the NRC works before we were sent off into our first of many apprenticeships.

The NRAN program was really attractive to me as a recent graduate. The apprenticeship opportunities will allow me to gain a breadth of knowledge in all things NRC, to become a well-rounded regulator. This employee centered program allows the recent graduate to drive their own experience and create their own opportunities in their desired skill areas.

My NRAN experience started in the Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards doing work related to decommissioning and low-level waste. I will then join the Office of Nuclear Security and Incident Response before venturing out for a regional apprenticeship to gain some more hands on experience.

Last but certainly not least, I will be joining the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation to round out my NRAN experience.

Us 23 NRANers were on-boarded shortly

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after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency worked tirelessly to make sure that all of our on-boarding and initial training could be done safely and virtually. I am very proud to be a member of the first ever Nuclear Regulator Apprenticeship Network here at the NRC. I plan to contribute, ask questions, and make a difference.

MR. KHAN: Hi, everyone. My name is Nadim Khan. I am an electrical engineer here at the NRC. My journey to the NRC began when I was a high school student, and I attended NRC's IT job shadow day. From there I had the opportunity to explore the NRC and come back to the NRC during the summer to do an internship. I continued to intern at the NRC during my time in college and eventually decided to come back to the NRC after graduating.

I decided to come back to the NRC because of my colleagues, friends, mentors. They were a huge influence in helping me grow as an individual and as an engineer. Because of their kindness and eagerness to help me grow and succeed, made me want to come back to the NRC and pursue my career as an electrical engineer. What I look most forward to in my NRC career is to help other students that come to the

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agency and mentor them and help them grow and succeed.

MS. GOVAN: For the past eight years, I have attended the Morgan State University Career Fair.

My goal at this career fair is to one, gain the resumes of the best and brightest engineers and scientists that Morgan State has to offer. Second, is to explain to the students the advantages of working at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and how I have thrived at the agency. Recruitment activities such as this are essential if the NRC wants to maintain diversity in its pipeline. And as such, it gives me great pride to go to universities and explain to students how the NRC is one of the greatest agencies to work for.

MS. SIWY: It is not enough to just recruit new staff. Retention of a skilled diverse and inclusive workforce is essential to continue to meet our safety and security mission and to take on the challenges of being a modern risk-informed regulator.

Here are some perspectives on what keeps people at the NRC. Roll video three, please?

(Video played.)

MR. LUBINSKI: Hi. I'm John Lubinski. I'm the Director of the Office of Nuclear Material

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Safety and Safeguards, or NMSS. I started at NRC over 30 years ago. AT the time, I thought I'd only be here two to three years. It had nothing to do with the NRC. I just had the mindset that I only wanted to work at an organization for a few years, learn what I could and leave before it got boring or stale. I was so confident that I'd only be here a short time, I didn't even bother moving closer to work. Instead I endured the long commute 60 miles each way.

Well, the three-year mark came passed without me even thinking about it. Why? Because I was still enjoying my work. I was enjoying what I was doing. I was still challenged. I was always doing something new. I If you would have asked me at the time why I stayed, I would have probably told you two key reasons. First, our mission -- we are playing such an important role in protecting people and the environment. And second, because I always had opportunities to do something new and learn something new. These are two of the reasons I'm still here today.

Probably took me a few more years to recognize that there was a third key reason I enjoyed working at the NRC, and that is when you work at NRC,

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you work as part of a team with team members who are also your friends. We trust and support each other both professionally and personally. Whenever I or someone needs help, no matter how big or how small, someone is always there to help. If necessary, it's all hands on deck and no questions asked. Knowing I'm on a team that I can rely on and that relies on me is what inspires me. To continue to encourage people to do great work and become change agents, you need to recognize and reward them. All of us want to be recognized when we do good work. There are old sayings such as you get what you reward. Brains, like hearts, go where they are appreciated. And people work for money but they go the extra mile for recognition, praise and awards. Some want to follow a variation of the golden rule for rewarding people. Reward others like you like to be rewarded. I prefer a variation of the platinum rule. Reward others like they like to be rewarded.

MR. VASQUEZ: As my career develops at the NRC, what I look forward to most is the diversity of experience and opportunities that I will have access to as I go along the way. When I speak to students and developing professionals interested in joining the

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NRC, the one thing I always mention is that at the NRC, you can make your career whatever you want it to be. If you want to find your niche and pursue it to the fullest, you will have the opportunity to dive in and become a respected subject matter expert in your field. If you want to travel around the country, perhaps even internationally and gain experience in subjects that span the entire nuclear industry, you can do that as well. The NRC really lets you set your own goals, and our people give the support one needs to achieve those goals.

In the end, we are a learning organization whether it's placing new employees in teams that will nurture them and teach them what they need to do the job right or training sessions to pass on knowledge and experience from one generation of experts to the next. We foster a culture of expertise and knowledge retention.

MS. ATACK: Hello. My name is Sabrina Atack. I'm Director of the Division of Security Operations in the NRC's Office of Nuclear Security and Incident Response. I am fortunate to work with a team of approximately 50 talented individuals who cover a broad range of NRC activities including information

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security, intelligence liaison and threat assessment, force on force inspections, and security oversight.

Looking back on my career at the NRC, one of the main things that keeps me at the agency is the sense of community and goodwill. People care for one another, want the best for each other, and band together to fulfil the mission. I see our experts challenge one another often to ensure that we arrive at the best possible technical or policy solutions.

I've also been fortunate to have great career opportunities in my time at the NRC. I've had supervisors and peers who believed in me and gave me opportunities to learn new skills and to challenge myself. I think that moving forward, we need to encourage our colleagues to gain new skills and seek new career development opportunities.

I have a colleague who often says, "humans work here." We often use that phrase when someone has made a mistake or we've made a misstep. And in looking at it more broadly, it's true that when humans work here, we may need that nudge. It may be a kudos, a thank you, words of encouragement or kindness that encourages someone to take the next step in their career and try something new. So I think that if we

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continue to support one another and encourage each other to expand their careers and cultivate new skill sets that we can continue to make the NRC a great place to work.

MS. SIWY: We not only need staff who can perform the work of the agency, we need effective leaders. NextGen and NTWN believe that diversity in leadership, including female leadership, is essential to help us make the best decisions possible. Those leaders should foster a diverse and inclusive workforce from the top down so everyone is able to contribute to their full potential. Roll video four, please.

(Video played.)

MS. DALZELL: Hello. My name is Jenni Dalzell, and I am a Decommissioning and Dry Cask Storage Inspector in the NRC's Region III Office. I have been the Region III representative for the Federal Women's Program Advisory Committee for several years, and I have even served as their Secretary. My focus for working with both the Federal Women's Program Advisory Committee and the NRC Technical Women's Network has been to ensure that the NRC staff receive training and experience that they will need to

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be the leaders of tomorrow. This includes all NRC staff no matter where they are located or the number of years that they have worked for the agency.

Over the years, I have helped to coordinate countless training opportunities, networking events, and virtual speed mentoring sessions, even before the public health emergency made everything go virtual.

But the achievement I am most proud of is that I was able to open up opportunities for more people to volunteer for leadership roles in the NRC's Advisory Committees by allowing regional staff to serve as Secretary. While I am very proud that I was the first regional staff member to serve -- to hold the role of Secretary, I am even more proud that I am not the last. I created a legacy of inclusion and opened the door that allows anyone no matter where they work to be a leader.

MS. CLARK: So you need to have confidence in your abilities and be willing to toss your name in the hat for opportunities that come up and let them tell you that you aren't ready or that you aren't the best fit and not self-select yourself out. The selecting official might just see something in you

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that you don't see in yourself. And this doesn't apply just to women, of course, and I'm hoping that the advancement of diverse leaders at the NRC helps others see what's possible.

MS. VEIL: I believe that women's perspectives in leadership are very important. No one group is one thing, but women tend to be more pragmatic, more consensus building, and in the 29 years that I've been at the NRC, it's been a pleasure working with groups that are majority women. We tend to get to solutions quicker, and we don't worry about people talking over us or someone discounting our ideas which unfortunately sometimes happens when there aren't enough women in the room.

I try to inspire my female colleagues by mentoring. I mentor a lot of people and also leading by example. Women shouldn't be fearful about taking leadership roles because they deserve a seat at the table just like everyone else. I also try to demystify the SES and let people realize that you can have work-life balance. It all depends on how you set your standards and set them at the beginning.

I'm very truthful about the challenges, but I also share my experiences like I'm doing today.

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Thank you.

MR. CUSUMANO: So I spent most of my career in heavy industries. These are usually ethnically diverse but have relatively few women in the workplace. One thing I noticed when I came to the NRC is that we've made some progress in addressing this. For example, a couple of years ago, at an executive committee meeting with an industry group, I noticed that about half of the 20 or so NRC staff on our side of the table were women. Also, at the same time, more than half of the staff in my own branch were women. And when I looked above myself in the organization, all but one person, from my immediate supervisor up to the chairman, were women.

This helps the NRC with recruitment and retention, and that diversity just makes us a better regulator. For me, that's one of the biggest differences to my private sector experience.

DR. RODRIGUEZ: Creating partnerships with stakeholders, will not only innovate and transform the NRC's regulatory framework, but it can also transform the NRC's work environment and culture. Most of us usually hold back a big part of what make us human and vulnerable, and we leave part of our own self at home

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in order to be seen as professional, competent and successful. Being vulnerable is a risk because it is mistakenly taken as not being strong to handle challenges. We try hard to fit in.

It is proven that in a work environment and a culture, when people can bring their whole self to work, people are more productive, engaged, loyal, present, and committed. I became a member of the NRC Pride Alliance Advisory Committee to contribute in promoting diversity and inclusion. I want every NRC employee to feel that they can bring their whole self to work and feel respected and valued.

The Employee Resource Group gave me an opportunity to partner with other NRC employees and external stakeholders. I started participating in a monthly call with Pride in Federal Service, a forum where government employees share best practices, resources, and efforts related to LGBTQ+ individuals.

I also connected with private organizations at the Out and Equal Workplace Summit. Private companies are very supportive and respectful for transgender and gender non-conforming employees and clients. Through these partnerships, I obtained best practices and ideas that I can bring to the NRC

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and start implementing.

Through Pride in Federal Service, I learned that other government agencies have in place a policy and guidance for transgender and gender non-conforming employees. Using these policies and guidance as a template, the agency is currently in the process of developing a policy and guidance for NRC transgender and gender non-conforming employees. This is a great example of how partnership can transform and change the NRC.

We want to be proactive, not reactive. Diversity and inclusion should be a forethought, not an afterthought. I also learned that as individuals, we can make a difference. If I want the NRC to become a place where you can bring your whole self to work, I can start the change by being a role model. Every day I bring my whole self to work while successfully contributing to NRC's mission.

MS. MEHTA: We want to say thank you to each of the staff in the videos for sharing their stories. They provided a brief glimpse into the good things that are going on in these areas at the NRC and they continue to inspire us. Thank you also to our AV friends who helped us compile these amazing videos.

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MS. SIWY: If you have questions or comments, we would love to hear from you at the email addresses listed on the slide. Thank you all for attending this session. We hope you leave with a sense that everyone can be a change agent and that you just saw the future of nuclear regulation. Please consider the following questions as you depart. What motivates me and keeps me engaged at work or school? How about my colleagues or classmates? How can I make a positive impact whether it be at work, school, or in my community? How can I help the folks I encounter feel comfortable being fully themselves and provide them with room to excel?

Thank you again and enjoy the final session of the RIC.

(Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went off the record at 12:31 p.m.)