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February 3, 2010

Members of the Connecticut General Assembly
State Capitol
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Robert T. Ross, nominee for Executive Director of the Office of Military Affairs

President pro tem Williams, Speaker Donovan, Senators and Representatives:

I write in support of the confirmation of Robert T. Ross as Executive Director of the Connecticut Office of Military Affairs. I have known Mr. Ross for about twelve years, first as a friend, then as Salem's First Selectman, and now as Acting Executive Director of the Office of Military Affairs. I will not repeat his resume. I will focus on his personal qualities relating to this important position.

The mission of the Office of Military Affairs, and of its Executive Director, includes coordinating efforts to prevent the closure or downsizing of the Naval Submarine Base in Groton and, in general, encouraging the retention of established defense missions in Connecticut and moving new ones here. Bob Ross has seven main qualities which make him uniquely qualified for these crucial parts of the mission. First, he is a retired Navy Commander who served as the Public Affairs Officer at the Groton Sub Base. He knows the base – its strengths and its weaknesses as they are likely to be seen by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission ("BRAC"). Second, while Mr. Ross's Master's in Public Administration degree from the University of Connecticut shows his education, the fact that he has taught at UConn – and was honored as a distinguished alumnus – shows an even deeper commitment to the field than getting the degree: Bob loves studying, debating and teaching public policy and brings to the Office of Military Affairs a great zeal. Third, Mr. Ross is extraordinarily articulate on his feet and in writing. Fourth, Bob has a big heart and gets along with all kinds of people. This is a gift that will serve him and this state well in building and maintaining the networks necessary to keep "the sub base" off the BRAC list. Fifth, Mr. Ross is very well organized. He identifies and focuses on the most important tasks. Sixth, he is extraordinarily diligent. Finally, he has that crucial quality for big projects: he is a patient, persevering person.

Another aspect of the mission of the Office of Military Affairs is to support Connecticut's military families and enhance their quality of life. The qualities I have already mentioned will be important to Mr. Ross's fulfillment of this part of the mission.

To the Connecticut General Assembly
February 3, 2010
Page 2 of 2

But those qualities are not all that is needed. Compassion is needed to understand, to want to help, and effectively to advocate for, and otherwise help, military families. I know from his stalwart and enduring help in my own life that Bob Ross is an extraordinarily compassionate person. He knows the struggles of service members and their families – and he and his family have been through many of the experiences which lead to those struggles. Mr. Ross may be relied on to do everything in his power to ensure that servicepersons, veterans and their families are appropriately honored and supported by the policies, budgets and agencies of this State.

Advocacy for Connecticut's defense industry is another part of the mission of the Office of Military Affairs. In addition to the qualities so far discussed, Mr. Ross is a very imaginative person when it comes to problem-solving. His interest in public policy is both a source and a reflection of this. Bob Ross will be able to integrate information from Connecticut defense contractors, from the CEOs to the assembly line workers, and come up with new, effective ways for the State and for his office to help those businesses grow.

The final aspect of the mission of the Office of Military Affairs is something essential to the other four aspects: to serve as liaison between the State and our congressional delegation on defense and military issues. At the nexus of Bob Ross's ability to get along well with all kinds of people and to develop and advocate for sound public policies is the phenomenon that he is above party politics in the best sense. He assumes public officials will listen – as he does – to facts and reason and serve the public interest without regard to party politics. A longtime unaffiliated voter, he does not judge people, hesitate to contact and recruit people, or fail to nurture alliances with people based on their party, past pronouncements, ego, rank or reputation. Mr. Ross is a team builder – and a team leader in the "let others take the credit" way.

The office of Executive Director of the Connecticut Office of Military Affairs is a very big job. Robert T. Ross has what it will take to do it very well – to continue to do it very well. I urge you to confirm Governor Rell's nomination of him. Thank you for considering this letter.

Very truly yours,



Leeland J. Cole-Chu

cc: Governor M. Jodi Rell
State Sen. Andrea Stillman
State Rep. Edwin Jutila