

REMARKS TO THE EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

By Robert T. Ross

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Good morning Senator Duff, Representative Janowski, Senator Kane, Representative Buck-Taylor and distinguished members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. I am Bob Ross, nominee for Executive Director of the Connecticut Office of Military Affairs (OMA). I am honored to have been nominated by Governor Malloy to continue serving the citizens of Connecticut and I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this committee today. I would like to begin by thanking Governor Malloy for his nomination. I've enjoyed his unwavering support and being part of his team. I'm looking forward to another term supporting his vision for protecting and promoting our defense industries, creating jobs and enhancing quality of life for all service members and their families here in Connecticut.

My Professional Background

I've been a public servant my whole adult life. I spent 23 years in uniform serving in the United States Navy as an enlisted Sailor, a Surface Warfare Officer and Navy Public Affairs Officer. I've experienced the rewards and challenges of military life from the very bottom of the ranks and as a senior officer. I spent nearly half of my career at sea, deployed on numerous warships. When ashore, I served as a spokesman at the Pentagon and on major staffs of the Atlantic Fleet where I specialized in Navy public affairs and community and government relations. During my career I earned a masters degree in National Security and Strategy. As I retired from the Navy I earned a second masters degree in Public Policy and Administration. Since leaving the Navy I've served as a City Emergency Manager, a City Administrator and as a Chief Elected Official for a Connecticut municipality. I've served as the Executive Director of Connecticut's Office of Military Affairs since July 2009.

I believe my military background, experience in national defense policy matters, understanding of the economic relationships between military bases and surrounding communities, and education in national security and strategic planning give me the credentials to undertake the mission the General Assembly has prescribed for the Office of Military Affairs. I'm grateful for the opportunity to use my background to protect and promote the thriving military bases and defense industries in our state.

Connecticut's long history as a leader in our nation's defense is something our residents should be proud of. In the revolutionary war, General George Washington called Connecticut the *Provisions State*. Defense of our nation is part of our character, embedded in the economic fabric of our state, and a legacy we should carefully protect. We can protect that legacy by helping it flourish today.

Connecticut's Economic Interest in Military Operations and Defense Industries

The State of Connecticut ranks in the top 10 among all states in defense spending and ranks sixth on a per capita basis. This year, defense spending in Connecticut will be about \$12 billion for direct purchases by Department of Defense (DoD). That's about six percent of our state's total economy and does NOT include military sales to many foreign governments. These defense dollars translate into stable, good paying jobs, modern production facilities, new technologies, state-of-the-art research and design enterprises, new military construction programs, and subcontracting in townships throughout our state. At a time when most of our nation's economy is still recovering from a global recession, unemployment and plummeting revenues, federal defense spending in our state has been experiencing growth. The long-term outlook is good as we are positioned to remain competitive for future military operations and defense-related business. This assessment is encouraging, but should not be taken for granted.

Congress will have extensive debates over the details of the President's proposed budget for fiscal year 2016. Also the lingering threat of sequestration spending caps continues to pose a great challenge for DoD program managers and inflicts tremendous uncertainty on our defense industries.

The President's proposed defense budget is very encouraging for Connecticut. It includes \$5.7 billion for construction of two Virginia-class submarines as part of the Navy's plan to build two such submarines a year through fiscal year 2020. It also includes \$1.4 billion for research and development toward replacement of the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines. This long-term work, which will continue over the next decade, is being done at Electric Boat.

The request also includes \$11 billion for procurement and continued development of the next generation military jet aircraft, the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. The funding covers continued development of the F135 single engine propulsion system produced in Connecticut by Pratt and Whitney. This aircraft will be used by all the military services and many of our allied forces.

And the request contains \$2.6 billion for Black Hawk and other helicopters produced by Sikorsky. In addition, there is early stage funding of \$500 million for the Presidential Helicopter Replacement Program for which Sikorsky is the prime contractor.

From a broader perspective, the FY16 defense budget clearly demonstrates that the weapons programs produced in Connecticut -- which is to say the world's most technologically advanced submarines, military jet engines, and helicopters -- are indispensable components of our national defense strategy and will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

All of this translates into ongoing employment opportunities in the years ahead, not only with Connecticut's big prime contractors but, importantly, with the many hundreds of smaller suppliers all around the state. It's important to emphasize, however, that such welcome opportunities carry implications for our state regarding the kind of work force needed by our increasingly high tech industries. We need to emphasize education programs focusing on science, technology, engineering and math so that our future generations can go to work right here in Connecticut and ensure that our defense industrial base continues to thrive with the talented employees they need.

Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commissions

Chief among the reasons to create the Office of Military Affairs was the very real probability that the Naval Submarine Base (SUBASE) in Groton would be closed. Twice it was targeted by the DoD for closure in the BRAC process. Twice, Team Connecticut, a nonpartisan group of public and private sector individuals, got organized and worked tirelessly to reverse the almost certain closure of the SUBASE. After the second difficult episode in 2005, the Governor and General Assembly realized the need to create an office to watch over the state's interests in Connecticut-based military operations and defense industries.

The primary task of OMA is to do proactively now what Team Connecticut had to do reactively in 1993 and 2005. We don't want to wage this battle again. We don't want to be in the BRAC battleground again. The OMA is responsible for strategies and initiatives to prevent the SUBASE from being targeted for closure again. Should this base close -- the last naval base in all of New England that still deploys operational naval forces -- New England would no longer be part of our nation's operational Navy. Only training commands and shipyards would remain.

The predictable economic catastrophe associated with the potential closure of the SUBASE is obvious to anyone familiar with southeastern Connecticut. The loss of the positive effects we realize from the base -- its \$4.9 billion annual economic impact and over 15,000 jobs -- would be devastating. The ripple effect throughout the state would simply be the reverse of what we experience today. Hundreds of small businesses deriving their business and clientele from the base would go under. Without this economic anchor, the regional and state economy would be severely distressed.

In 2007, the General Assembly authorized \$40 million for investments in *military value* at the SUBASE to protect it from closure. Since then, funding has been directed to carefully selected projects. This strategy seeks to use the criteria of a BRAC Commission to enhance the *military value* of the base, thereby decreasing the likelihood it would be targeted for closure. By increasing *military value* in operations, infrastructure and efficiency, we reduce the likelihood of closure because DoD simply can't afford to recreate it anywhere

else. It's not about sunk cost. It's about future *military value*. Today, the SUBASE is undergoing a remarkable transformation as we demolish old infrastructure and replace it with modern capacity.

In 2009, having worked closely with the Navy to identify several projects for this unique *military value* investment strategy, the first round of state funding was used to design and construct a \$3 million boiler to replace 1960s technology and provide more efficient energy to the SUBASE. And the state funded the design and construction of a \$4.65 million Diver Support Facility for the Navy Divers who perform repairs and maintenance on submarines. Each of these projects replaced archaic infrastructure with state-of-the-art, energy efficient construction and enhance the *military value* of the SUBASE as part of our long-term strategy.

In the second round of *military value* investments the state funded two state-of-the-art, first-of-their-kind training facilities on any Navy base. A \$2.48 million structure now houses a high-tech Submarine Bridge Simulator to enhance training for submarine commanders and their bridge teams in surface navigation. And a \$740 thousand fully-functional replica of a Virginia-class submarine galley will provide a realistic training environment to prepare Culinary Specialists for the unique challenges of food service in a submarine environment. Both of these projects add unique *military value* to the Submarine School, a major training command on the SUBASE.

The third round of *military value* investments focused on encroachment mitigation. Encroachment around military bases is one of the highest concerns in the DoD. Partnering with the abutting Towns of Groton and Ledyard, the state funded the purchase of land on the southern and northern boundaries of the SUBASE to prevent any future development that could be incompatible with Navy operations. It will also solve significant traffic, safety and security concerns for the Navy.

Negotiations with the Navy for projects in the fourth round are nearing completion. The next projects will focus again on encroachment mitigation and energy efficiency.

These state-funded projects complement many federally funded projects also underway on the base. Today there are over \$200 million worth of demolition and construction projects in various stages of completion on the base. While only about seven percent have been funded by the state, the state's participation in this investment strategy sends a powerful unprecedented message to DoD and the Navy about Connecticut's commitment to partner with the SUBASE to support its mission, people and infrastructure improvements.

Today, those who know the history of the SUBASE know that it is not the same base it was in 2005. Our efforts to transform the base have turned it into something like a modern college campus with open space, new facilities and room for growth. The base is in a much better position to withstand another BRAC round if and when it comes.

Connecticut's direct investment strategy was unprecedented. No other state had taken such a bold step to fully fund construction projects on a military base to enhance its *military value*. However, several states are now following Connecticut's lead. The Association of Defense Communities (ADC) is a national organization focused on building partnerships and best practices between military bases and communities across the country. Last year, ADC highlighted Connecticut's innovative programs by selecting Connecticut OMA as their first ever MEMBER OF THE YEAR.

The Connecticut National Guard

Our Connecticut National Guard is undergoing a similar transformation as a result of the last round of BRAC which identified chronic problems and directed new investments in infrastructure. Decades of underfunded construction programs and deferred maintenance created a state military infrastructure of outdated, undersized and ineffectual military facilities. Today, under the leadership of General Thaddeus Martin, our National Guard continues implementing a Capital Project Program of both state and federally funded improvements to facilities throughout the state. Over \$240 million in military construction projects over the last four years have produced the modern facilities our troops deserve for training, support and operations

The U.S. Coast Guard and the National Coast Guard Museum

The National Coast Guard Museum is coming to New London. In February 2014, the Governor signed a memorandum of agreement with the Coast Guard, the National Coast Guard Museum Association and the City of New London. In this agreement, the Governor committed up to \$20 million in state funding to construct a pedestrian bridge to connect the train station, new museum and proposed ferry terminal at the proposed waterfront site for the museum. This bridge will enhance public safety within this multimodal transportation hub and serve as the gateway to the national museum. The Governor directed state agencies to support this project and assigned OMA to coordinate the project on his behalf.

This year the Coast Guard will celebrate its 225th birthday as the nation's oldest continuous military service. And the Coast Guard Academy will commemorate 100 years at its current location in New London. To raise awareness of the long-standing relationship between Connecticut and the Coast Guard, Governor Malloy designated the summer of 2015 as *Connecticut's Coast Guard Summer*. Events planned in Connecticut will include festivals, education programs and maritime heritage celebrations to pay tribute to these men and women who have served our nation since the revolutionary era. The OMA is coordinating state support with the City of New London and event planners.

Advocating for Service Members and Their Families

Leaders in the State of Connecticut want to promote the highest possible quality of life and quality of service for all service members and their families who serve in our state or deploy from Connecticut to other destinations. Advocating for these active duty families has become one of the most important roles for the OMA Executive Director. Working with fellow agency heads, we have resolved a wide range of issues for military families. Commissioners of other agencies have been very responsive to issues OMA has raised with them.

For instance, the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles quickly issued a policy directive to resolve the great difficulty service members and their families were having obtaining a CT drivers license when transferring from overseas to the SUBASE in Groton. The

Commissioner took the burden of obtaining foreign driving records off the service member and families, and made that administrative hurdle the DMV's responsibility. This resolved great frustration and a frequent problem for families in transition.

Similarly, the Commissioner of Education directed school nurses to accept student physicals signed by Advanced Practice Registered Nurses in the cases of children seen in military medical clinics. This resolved the conflicting state requirement that the physicals be signed by a physician, preventing enrollment of military kids. And, as a member state to the Interstate Compact on Education for Military Children, Connecticut makes other reasonable accommodations for kids transferring between state school systems regarding enrollments, curriculum and athletics.

The OMA Executive Director meets each month with school superintendents, principals, and teachers in the communities around the southeastern Connecticut Navy, Coast Guard and National Guard bases. In this forum they identify and address issues affecting military children and families in transition. As an example, we realized that the military generally transfers families in the summer months. Although families may have known for months they were coming to Connecticut, they often arrived too late to establish residency and participate in magnet school lotteries. The superintendents collectively agreed to hold back a number of seats for a second lottery to give these incoming families an opportunity to attend one of these excellent schools.

Several other state agencies have helped OMA resolve similar challenges. It's important to note that when we solve such problems for military families, it also helps civilian families in transition who face the same challenges.

Military families are tremendous assets to Connecticut. They are active in our schools and neighborhoods. They make significant contributions to our economy, civic affairs and sense of community. In our many efforts to address quality of life issues for military families, we want to send a simple and powerful message of welcome: Connecticut is a great place to be stationed, a great place to raise a family, and a great place to retire.

Connecting People, Industry, Communities and Government

Key to the success of the Office of Military Affairs is close coordination with our congressional delegation in Washington D.C. As the state's primary liaison to the delegation on military, defense and BRAC issues, I'll continue to work closely with our U.S. Senators, Representatives and their staffs to identify early trends in defense policy, prioritize our joint efforts in federal projects and programs, and advocate for Connecticut's interests. From this collaboration, I'll communicate with and advise the Governor and stakeholders on critical national defense issues important to Connecticut.

The OMA serves as a conduit connecting our military bases, local municipalities, and defense industries to state agencies and resources. As Executive Director, I look forward to continuing my service to the citizens of our state. I will continue to work with members of the General Assembly and other state agencies to seek opportunities to enhance military and defense industry presence in Connecticut and advocate for the many organizations and people in our state who serve and support our nation's defense.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to take your questions.