



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

287 West Street
Rocky Hill, Connecticut 06067

Testimony of Sean M. Connolly Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee March 24, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Duff, Representative Janowski, Senator Kane, Representative Buck-Taylor and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee.

What an incredible honor to be appointed as Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Affairs by Governor Dannel P. Malloy. What a tremendous opportunity this is to be able to serve the great veterans of the state of Connecticut and their families. As a veteran myself, who continues to wear the uniform in the Army Reserve, I am deeply humbled to be standing before you today to introduce myself and share with you why serving CT's veterans as the Commissioner of Veterans' Affairs is so very important to me.

Our department's mission is serving those who have served. It doesn't get any better than that.

As you may know, with a name like Sean Connolly, my family originally comes from Ireland. In 1966, my father emigrated from County Galway, Ireland, landing at Logan Airport in Boston with not much more than the clothes on his back. Within days he arrived in Hartford and got himself a job.

My mother grew up in East Hartford, but both of her parents also came from Ireland. Back in 1928, just on the cusp of the Great Depression, my grandfather emigrated from Ireland. He later met and married my grandmother, who had also emigrated from Ireland. After enduring the effects of the Great Depression, and my grandfather's short enlistment in the Army during the World War II era, they were still determined to find an opportunity for the better life they dreamed of when they arrived in New York. By 1943, my grandfather heard about a young aircraft engine company in CT. He took the train to Hartford and soon had a job in maintenance at Pratt & Whitney's headquarters in East Hartford. As a veteran, he and my grandmother qualified for veterans housing in East Hartford and a few years later, my grandmother also began working in the factory at Pratt & Whitney.

By the end of 1967, my father and mother met and married and worked so hard and sacrificed so much for my siblings and I, so we could get a good education and have opportunities that they didn't have.

I grew up in East Hartford and attended public school. I went on to Bryant University (it was Bryant College at the time) in Smithfield, Rhode Island where I earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration with a double concentration in Finance and Accounting. I also joined the Army Reserve Officer Training Program (ROTC) and earned a commission as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army. I was granted an educational delay of my service to attend law school at the Catholic University of America, Columbus School of Law. After passing the bar and being admitted to practice law in Connecticut, I began my active duty service

in the U.S. Army as a First Lieutenant after a short stint clerking for Judge "Sparky" Gierke at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces.

I served on active duty for over seven years, first with the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, as well as in Kuwait and Iraq, and later at the Pentagon in Virginia. I left active duty in 2007 at the rank of Major.

I then joined an international law firm, Greenberg Traurig, in Washington, DC, for about three years. During my time in Washington, I was an adjunct lecturer at the Catholic University of America, Columbus School of Law and was very involved with the Federal Bar Association, serving as President of the Pentagon Chapter and later on the National Board of Directors.

In 2010, I was privileged to return home to Connecticut and join Pratt & Whitney, almost 70 years after my grandfather started. I first joined as Assistant Counsel supporting Pratt & Whitney's Military Engines Division and most recently served as Pratt & Whitney's Global Ethics and Compliance Officer. I am also currently serving as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. army reserve.

As you all know, our veterans and their families all across the state and nation face significant challenges every day. Homelessness, physical and mental health challenges, finding and transitioning to good civilian jobs when their military mission is complete, and getting the recognition they so deeply deserve are all obstacles they face after their active service to their state and nation.

The opportunities and freedom we have here in the United States and our very own state, led me to want to serve our nation and engage in public service from a young age. Those public service strings pulled on my heart once again for this mission in particular.

We ask so much of our men and women who wear the uniform. They have served, and continue to serve us selflessly and with tremendous sacrifice. We owe it to them to support them when they come home – and always. I can see no greater calling than to return to public service to serve our great veterans of the State of Connecticut.

So building upon the foundation that the staff at the Department of Veterans Affairs' has already put in place, and building upon the significant programs and support that many of our other state agencies have implemented on behalf of veterans, I look forward to facing the challenges head on by collaborating with our other state agencies, our hardworking non-profit veterans organizations, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the General Assembly, our individual veterans around the entire state, and our fellow citizens.

I believe that working together, we can, and we will, build a world class veterans program for all of our veterans at Rocky Hill and across the state. Those who have selflessly served our state and nation deserve no less.

Again, I thank this committee for your time and consideration. I am looking forward to working with you and all veterans, their families and the citizens of Connecticut to support our fine men and women veterans and continue to make Connecticut a strong advocate for all veterans.