



STATE OF VERMONT
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
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May 05, 2024

Senator Kesha Ram Hinsdale
Chair, Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Subject: S.30

Dear Madam Chair,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to your committee last week regarding the House Commerce Committee Proposal of Amendment. I am writing to clarify the role of the Vermont Adjutant General with regards to Senate bill 30, which proposes the creation of a Sister State Committee – or in current language from the House Commerce Committee amendment to the Senate version of the bill, a Sister State Working Group. I understand Senator Hardy, sponsor of the bill, is concerned the bill is too military focused. I respectfully disagree and believe the inclusion of the Adjutant General or designee will only enhance the objectives of the Sister State program, not dominate it. Whether the Adjutant General may serve on this committee is obviously a decision for Legislators.

I remain in support of this approach to building international relations. As you know, the Vermont National Guard has been a part of the National Guard State Partnership Program for over 30 years. We currently have three state partnerships with the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Senegal, and the Republic of Austria. While these partnerships are foundationally a military-to-military partnership, to truly capture the potential, we must capitalize on a “whole of society” approach. Senate bill 30 exemplifies this approach.

The VTNG conducts dozens of engagements and exercises with our State Partners each year. In my role, I normally visit once a year to each, with key leader engagements with the U.S. Ambassadors and teams, partner nation Ambassadors, Ministers of Defense, Agriculture, Environmental Conservation, Commerce, and Interior. These engagements are not specifically focused on the military. Rather, they serve as opportunities to facilitate engagement well beyond the traditional military-to-military relationships. While I, or the Vermont National Guard, are a military organization, we do retain a great deal of international experience outside the confines of uniformed service.

Through our experience with the State Partnership Program, I have developed an understanding that regional security and stability is not simply a military approach. Since my election to this position, I have been working diligently to bring to bear the expertise

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and networking potential that resides in our state, such as food and fuel security, agriculture exchanges, higher education and arts exchanges, Women in Peace and Security (WPS), workforce development and apprenticeships, environmental conservation, domestic response/crisis management, commerce, and trade and tourism. The National Guard is unique in the ability to assist in building relationships through the respective U.S. Embassies through the respective Defense Attachés assigned to the Ambassador's country team. This is a logical linkage to all other interested agencies that fall under the U.S. Ambassador's purview.

Should the Adjutant General or designee remain as a member of the Sister State Committee or Working Group, I would certainly present a rationale that our existing partnerships be considered for inclusion as Sister States under this bill. These partnerships are established, with each potentially meeting the criteria outlined in the bill. It makes sense to me to reinforce success. Whether our partners become Sister States is, of course, a discussion for the committee and is not my decision to make.

As testified to in House Commerce Committee, establishing a Sister State program in Vermont is a complex undertaking. As noted, I advocated for the inclusion of the Adjutant General or designee as a committee member. I also advocated for the inclusion of the Vermont Council on World Affairs. Given their mission and experience, this is logical. In addition, I did note the importance of including the State Department (Ambassadors) and potential Sister State Ambassadors in the process for application to become a partner. While this appears to add bureaucracy, the Sister State initiative cannot be successful without this level of engagement. Again, the Adjutant General and VTNG can assist with this process given the opportunity. It is not my intent to subsume the Sister State initiative into another version of the State Partnership Program. It is simply to assist where needed in building a process to facilitate this initiative, albeit through leveraging international military relationships into civilian, legislative, education and business endeavors. Again, whether Vermont Legislators chooses to include the VTNG and Adjutant General is their choice.

In closing, I would offer to our Legislators the opportunity to learn more about the National Guard State Partnership Program. Given the proper funding mechanism, it would be very beneficial to have key legislators travel to one of our partner nations during one of our engagements. I anticipate it would be very educational if we can make it happen.

Sincerely,

GREGORY C. KNIGHT
Major General
The Adjutant General