



GRANITE STATE
CONSERVATION VOTERS ALLIANCE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONSERVATION VOTERS GROUP DISAPPOINTED OVER D.E.S. COMMISSIONER'S "HOLDOVER" STATUS

Urges Governor Lynch to bring the nomination of DES Commissioner to the next Executive Council meeting

Concord, NH: The Granite State Conservation Voters Alliance (GSCVA) expressed its disappointment that Governor John Lynch did not nominate a new Commissioner for the Department of Environmental Services (DES) at today's meeting of the Executive Council. By not nominating an individual for the position, the Governor allowed the current Commissioner, Michael Nolin, to remain in "holdover" status. GSCVA does not support the reappointment of Commissioner Nolin.

"It is unfortunate that Governor Lynch chose today not to nominate a new Commissioner who shares his values and priorities," said Jim O'Brien, Executive Director. "Keeping this Commissioner in holdover status sends the wrong message to the employees at DES and sends a mixed signal to voters who look to the Governor for strong appointment leadership. We urge the Governor to make this nomination his top priority by working with Councilors to bring a candidate forward at their July 19th meeting."

Commissioner Michael Nolin, whose term expires on July 7th, was nominated by former Governor Craig Benson. Governor Lynch must nominate an individual for the position, and the Executive Council needs to approve that nomination. Today's meeting of the Council was the last opportunity for Lynch to bring a nominee to them for a vote prior to Nolin's term expiring. The next Executive Council meeting is scheduled for July 19th.

GSCVA has expressed the desire of New Hampshire's conservation community for Governor Lynch to nominate someone other than Michael Nolin to head the department. The organization's recent Op Ed on the subject is below.

The Granite State Conservation Voters Alliance is a bi-partisan, statewide, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting New Hampshire's environment by making it a priority for our elected leaders. GSCVA was established with the advice and encouragement of many of New Hampshire's conservation leaders to perform a critical role – hold state lawmakers accountable for their votes and inform the public about key environmental issues under debate by the legislature.

For more information, please visit www.VoteConservation.org

The Next DES Commissioner Must Make NH's Environment the Top Priority

By Rick Russman and Jim O'Brien

In the next few weeks, Governor John Lynch will have an important decision to make about his appointment to be the next Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Services. This decision is viewed by many as a direct reflection of the Governor's expressed commitment to protecting New Hampshire's environment and preserving our quality of life.

The individuals whom a Governor nominates to lead New Hampshire's executive departments reveal much about the importance and expectations he places on the work and mission of the state agencies. It is the responsibility of the Governor to appoint individuals who share his values and outlook and are committed to working for the best interests of the citizens of New Hampshire.

The Executive Councilors, who will ultimately vote to confirm the Governor's nominee, understand how important it is for a Governor to have individuals in his departments who share his governing priorities. Councilor Ray Wieczorek made this point clear in a 2002 interview explaining why the incoming Governor should be able to nominate his own people to lead DES rather than work with the former Governor's appointee: "When you come in you build your team... the people that you know you can work with to get the things done that are a priority with you."

The current head of DES, Commissioner Michael Nolin, represents the environmental priorities and values of the Governor who appointed him - Craig Benson. The next Commissioner, as Councilor Wieczorek argued, should share the environmental concerns and priorities of the current Governor.

The Executive Council and Governor Lynch need to look closely at the professional history, expertise and qualifications of any nominee and evaluate him or her based upon their ability to fulfill the mission of the Department: to protect and restore the environment and public health in New Hampshire. Judging by the performance of the past four years, Michael Nolin has not proven himself to be an effective leader in a vital state agency, and should not be rewarded with a second four-year assignment.

Commissioner Nolin has shown himself to be more interested in building his resume than in being a principled advocate in state government for environmental protection. Since Commissioner Nolin took the reins at DES, the Department has witnessed an overall weakening of enforcement for state laws and regulations, much to the dismay of the professional staff at DES. The tone and direction originating from the head of the Department has caused morale problems among the career staff that works hard to enforce state laws protecting the air we breathe and the water we drink.

Commissioner Nolin has adopted a closed-door approach in his dealings with the environmental community. Instead of working with advocates, scientists and environmental organizations to build consensus around issues of concern, Commissioner Nolin has increased the perception among the conservation community that he is more interested in business interests than he is at fulfilling DES's core mission of environmental protection.

Most troubling of all are reports now surfacing that under Commissioner Nolin's leadership and direction, DES engaged in an apparent end run around state laws and compromised the public process surrounding permitting at Laconia Airport. Governor Lynch has expressed concern that the Department bypassed customary procedure and has called for a formal investigation by the state Attorney General's office. The report of an apparent violation of the public trust and Commissioner Nolin's direct involvement should give the Governor and Council pause when considering his record and re-nomination to this important state post.

There are many well qualified, respected individuals in our state with a background of working with business, legislators, environmental organizations, and public agencies to make progress and achieve lasting results. It is essential that the Governor nominate someone who will steadfastly enforce environmental laws and will be a true reflection of his stated environmental principles.

We hope that each Executive Councilor adopts fellow Councilor Wieczorek's position and allow Governor Lynch to "build his own team," and have a DES Commissioner of his choice whom he can work with to "get the things done that are a priority" for him. The New Hampshire conservation community will be watching the appointment process closely, and expect that the final nominee will make New Hampshire's environment their top priority.

Rick Russman is an Exeter Attorney and serves as Chairman of the Granite State Conservation Voters Alliance. Rick is a former five-term State Senator, and for 8 years was Chair of the Senate Environment Committee. Jim O'Brien is the Executive Director of the Granite State Conservation Voters Alliance and is a former Republican consultant. Jim resides in Contoocook.