

Ready for Duty: U.S. Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James Discusses Readiness in Meeting with FWA's Partners

fwa.org/spotlight/easy-for-duty-u-s-air-force-secretary-deborah-lee-james-discusses-readiness-in-meeting-with-fwas-partners/

Discusses Workplace Flexibility, Taking Risk & Corporate Involvement



Deborah Lee James, the 23rd Secretary of the US Air Force, addresses attendees.

As military budgets are downsized and as veterans face personal challenges in transitioning to careers in the financial industry, one word is key: Readiness.

That was the message Deborah Lee James, the 23rd Secretary of the US Air Force, delivered in an invitation-only event organized by the Financial Women's Association with key representatives from its President's Circle firms, its leading corporate supporters.

"In the Air Force, we have a saying, 'We have to be prepared to fight tonight,'" said Secretary James. "That means we have to be flexible and ready to pivot."

The event brought Secretary James together with 25 leaders in the veteran's space – from members of the FWA's President's Circle – to engage in an open dialogue about the challenges of transitioning out of the military into the private sector, and specifically to financial services.

Secretary James talked about her priorities and the value of corporate opportunities for transitioning service members. The event was hosted by Sidley Austin and attended by representatives from FWA Leadership and BNP Paribas, BNY Mellon, Delta, Deloitte, Goldman Sachs, MasterCard, Merrill Lynch/Bank of America Corporation, Morgan Stanley, MUFG Union Bank, New York Life, Proskauer, Prudential, SAP, Sidley Austin and Wells Fargo Advisors.



From left to right: Kathleen Navarro, New York Life; Michelle Latzer, MUFG United Bank; Katherine Smith, Delta; Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James; Michelle Morrow, Morgan Stanley; and Cherreka Montgomery, SAP.

Secretary James, who was appointed to her current position after serving as an executive of SAIC, a \$4 billion technology and engineering firm, now says she's keenly focused on three priorities:

- **Taking care of people** – This means caring for active duty, Guard, Reserve and civilian Airmen and their families. As she said, great people fuel great organizations;
- **Readiness** – Striking the right balance to be ready to fight today by improving training programs and modernizing current aircraft, together with increasing readiness to fight tomorrow by investing in technology, research and recruitment; and
- **Making every dollar count** – With military budgets facing cuts amid increasing global threats, Secretary James said her goal is to put those dollars to the best use.

“We need to kick it up and modernize,” she said, noting the need to invest in cyber capabilities – everything from IT to highly specialized personnel. Overall, Secretary James is responsible for 690,000 active duty, Guard, Reserve and civilian Airmen and their families, and for a \$110 billion budget – reduced from previous years, due to sequestration.

Flexibility for Women

Joined by her daughter, a recently married professional woman working at Bain Capital, Secretary James also focused on another top issue: the juggling act women – including female vets – face as they begin to have families.

“It’s difficult to manage a career, deployments, and family,” she stated.

She said the challenge – a common one the financial industry itself faces – leads women to leave the military, typically in their 30s, at twice the rate of men. The need for flexible work schedules has led the Air Force to consider a pilot sabbatical program that offers men and women three-year sabbaticals, enabling them to return to their same status while maintaining health and other benefits while away.

A Message to Companies

Andy Esposito, co-chair of the FWA’s Veteran’s Initiative, highlighted the challenge of attracting women veterans to participate in job or financial education to help them make the transition to civilian life.

Secretary James discussed ways corporations could support veterans. Her three recommendations are to:

- **Better match skills with jobs** – She noted that the special requirements of some jobs don’t



From left to right: Susan Harper, Chair, Restructuring Task Force; Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James; John Connelly, Sidley Austin; Kim Weinrick, past FWA president; and Andy Esposito, Co-chair FWA Directorships and Corporate Governance Committee.



From left to right: Lily Klebanoff Blake, Chair FWA President’s Circle/Corporate Sponsorships; Trier-Lynn Bryant, Goldman Sachs; Andy Yeo, BNP

directly align with skills acquired in the military and urged companies to “take some risk” to bring veterans into companies.

Paribas; Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James; and Cathy Christian, Prudential.

- **Partner with the military and other organizations** – “Individuals are looking to be matched with jobs,” she said.
- **Talk it up** – Having voices within a corporation who can bring attention to the need and opportunity to hire veterans can bring more visibility to the issue.

“The financial services community shares common goals in bringing veterans to Wall Street. In this important effort, there are gaps in translating valuable military experience on both sides,” said Kimberly Weinrick, past FWA president, when kicking off the conversation. “Through our trusted relationships, the FWA can help facilitate basic business protocols and help veterans take a leap forward in transitioning to the financial industry.”

Last year, the FWA launched its Women Veterans: Serving Women Who Served initiative. The program has featured events with 125 attendees from across the industry and the veteran’s community; resume writing for veterans at McGraw Hill Financial with “resume buddies” (mentors); and leadership on panels, including with OWLs (Officer Women Leadership Symposium) in Arlington.

To learn more about becoming an FWA Presidents Circle corporate partner, go here. If you have any questions or ideas for transitioning Veterans, email Veterans@fwa.org.



From left to right: Kimberly Weinrick, past FWA president; Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James; and Elizabeth Ortiz, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Air Force.

Corporate Attendees

BNP Paribas, Andy Yeo, Executive Champion BNP Paribas Military Business Networking Group

BNY Mellon, Wanda Hill, Managing Director

Deloitte, Sharon Weinstein, Director, Corporate Finance

Delta, Katherine Smith, Senior Sales Account Executive

Goldman Sachs, Trier-Lynn Bryant, Associate for Recruiting & Diversity

MasterCard, Ed Glassman, Group Executive, Global Commercial Products

Merrill Lynch Wealth Management/Bank of America, Jason Rich, Managing Director, Client Segment & Advisor Development

Morgan Stanley, Michelle Morrow, Director, Institutional Compliance Strategic Initiatives

MUFG Union Bank, Michelle Latzer, Global Relationship Management, US Corporate Banking Division

New York Life, Kathleen Navarro, Vice President

Proskauer, Jennifer Scullion, Litigation Partner

Prudential, Cathy Christian, Vice President, Financial Management, President VETNET

RBC Capital Markets, Elizabeth Derby, Director, US Diversity

SAP, Cherreka Montgomery, National Vice President of Corporate Development
Sidley Austin, Janet Zagorin, Client Services Officer
Sidley Austin, John Connelly, Director of Administration
Wells Fargo Advisors, Janet Moses, Senior Vice President, Regional Business Manager, Metro
Northeast Region

FWA Leader Attendees

Maureen Adolf, President
Lily Klebanoff Blake, Chair, President’s Circle/Corporate
Sponsorships
Katrin Dambrot, President-Elect
Andrea “Andy” Esposito, Co-chair, Directorships and
Corporate Governance Committee
Susan Harper, Chair, Restructuring Task Force
Jennifer Openshaw, Executive Director
Kimberly Weinrick, Past President



From left to right: FWA President
Maureen Adolf, Air Force Secretary
Deborah Lee James, and FWA Executive
Director Jennifer Openshaw

[Click here](#) to read Ms. James top 10 tips for success.