

## SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

### Elisa Basnight, JD, MPA



Elisa Basnight, JD, MPA, was appointed Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Center for Women Veterans in October 2013. In this role, she is the primary advisor to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on programs and issues related to women veterans. Ms. Basnight serves as an ex-officio member on the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) and the Department's representative on the White House Council on Women and Girls.

Prior to her appointment, Ms. Basnight, Esquire, served as corporate commercial counsel at Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney in Philadelphia, PA, and was an associate with Debevoise & Plimpton LLP in New York, NY. She also previously served as the Director of Resource Center for Workforce Essentials, Inc. in Clarksville, TN, assisting downsized U.S. Servicemembers with redeployment as Veterans into civilian employment.

Ms. Basnight graduated from the U.S. Military Academy – West Point in 1991. As a newly commissioned military intelligence officer, she completed Airborne School and other trainings, and received a Joint Chiefs of Staff appointment. Ms. Basnight served both overseas and in the United States, on active duty with the U.S. Army and in the U.S. Army Reserves. Ms. Basnight is also a graduate of Boston University-Brussels, Rutgers Law School-Newark and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government--earning a master's degree in public administration and selected to be a Zuckerman Fellow 2006-2007.

Ms. Basnight's lifelong passion for helping others is evident in her public service and private sector activities. She is a member of the U.S. Army Philadelphia Community Advisory Board, a former member of the West Point Association of Graduates annual award selection committees (Thayer and Distinguished Graduate) 2012-2013, and a former term member of the Council on Foreign Relations; authored the 2008 Veterans Day op-ed "Remember the Veterans;" provided commentary for and participated in HGTV's "Change the World: American Heroes Project;" engaged in volunteer work with WHYY-- a local media outlet--on its 2009 "Impact of War" series; and in 2005, was appointed by New Jersey's governor to serve on its Military and Veterans Affairs Transition Policy Task Force, where she served as co-chair. Ms. Basnight is the founder of Girls Action Network, Inc. a nonprofit with the mission to shatter stereotypes and expand opportunities for girls and young women, especially those from underserved communities, with a particular focus on STEM fields. In 2009, she was recognized as a Woman of Distinction by the Philadelphia Business Journal and has received special recognition and awards for her service to girls, women, and veterans.

### Joy J. Ilem



Joy Ilem, a U.S. Army service-connected disabled veteran, was appointed Deputy National Legislative Director of the 1.2 million-member Disabled American Veterans (DAV) in June 2009.

As a member of the DAV's legislative team, Ms. Ilem directs the advancement of DAV's public policy objectives to promote and defend reasonable and responsible legislation to assist disabled veterans and their families nationwide, while guarding current veteran's benefits and services from legislative erosion.

Ms. Ilem began her DAV career as a member of Class III at National Service Officer Training Academy in Denver. She graduated in 1996, and was assigned as an NSO Trainee at the National Service Office in Phoenix, Ariz. In 1997, she was assigned as a National Appeals Officer

with the DAV staff at the Board of Veterans Appeals in Washington, D.C. In 1999, Ms. Ilem transferred to the National Service and Legislative Headquarters to serve as an Associate National Legislative Director and appointed Assistant Director in 2000, holding that title until her current appointment.

Ms. Ilem enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1982. Following basic training at Ft. Jackson, SC, and advanced medical training at Ft. Sam Houston, TX, she was assigned as a medic to the 67th Evacuation Hospital in Wurzburg, Germany, where she underwent additional certification as an emergency medical technician. Ms. Ilem's military duties included emergency room assignments and non-commissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) of recovery room operations. She was honorably discharged from the Army in 1985.

A native of Shakopee, Minn., Ms. Ilem earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Arizona at Tucson in 1994, majoring in archaeology, with a minor in religious studies.

### **Kayla M. Williams**



Kayla Williams is a former sergeant and Arabic linguist in a Military Intelligence company of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). During her deployment to Iraq, Ms. Williams was at the forefront of troops' interaction with Iraqis while also navigating the challenges of being part of the 15 percent of the Army that is female.

Ms. Williams is the author of Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army, a memoir about her experiences negotiating the changing demands on today's military. She is a former member of the Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Women Veterans and a 2013 White House Woman Veteran Champion of Change. Ms. Williams also is a current Truman National Security Project Fellow and member of the Army Education Advisory Committee. Her second book, Plenty of Time When We Get Home: Love and Recovery in the Aftermath of War, about the traumatic brain injury her husband sustained in combat and their family's journey to healing, was recently released by W. W. Norton. She frequently writes and speaks about issues related to service members, veterans, and military families.

Ms. Williams graduated cum laude with a bachelor's degree in English Literature from Bowling Green State University and earned a master's degree in International Affairs with a focus on the Middle East from American University. She currently lives near Washington, DC with her husband and their two children.