

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Elisa Basnight, JD, MPA

Elisa Basnight 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.

Prior to her appointment, Ms. Basnight was an associate with Debevoise & Plimpton LLP. Most recently, she was corporate commercial counsel at Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney, focusing on general corporate, commercial contracts; small, women-, veterans- and minority-owned businesses; and technology. Prior to her legal work, Ms. Basnight served as the Director of Resource Center for Workforce Essentials, Inc., where she developed and led the conception and implementation of an innovative career development center to assist downsized service members with redeployment as veterans into civilian employment.

Ms. Basnight graduated from the U. S. Military Academy – West Point in 1991, making her the first African American woman graduate from the state of Wisconsin. 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 a member of the U.S. Army Philadelphia Community Advisory Board and a former term member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She authored the 2008 Veterans Day op-ed, “Remember the Veterans,” and provided commentary for, and participated in, HGTV’s “Change the World: American Heroes Project.” Ms. Basnight also engaged in volunteer work with local media outlet WHYI 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.

Ms. Basnight also has earned degrees from Boston University-Brussels, Rutgers Law School-Newark, and Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, where she earned a master’s degree in public administration and was selected to be a Zuckerman Fellow 2006-2007.

Ashleigh Bryant

Ashleigh Bryant, a combat veteran of the Afghanistan War, was appointed Assistant National Director of Communications of the 1.2 million-member Disabled American Veterans (DAV) in August 2012, assigned to the DAV National Service and Legislative Headquarters in Washington, DC. In this capacity, Ms. Bryant’s responsibilities include producing a wide variety of written, photographic, and multi-media projects for DAV’s internal and external communications programs.

Ms. Bryant enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in January 2004. Following duty as a broadcast journalist with American Forces Network Tokyo in 2009, Ms. Bryant deployed to Afghanistan, where she established and led the American Forces Network Kandahar news bureau to expand internal broadcast coverage of combat operations in the southern area of the country. Following her combat tour, Ms. Bryant served as a supervisor and reporter for the Pentagon News Bureau, where she managed daily production for the news bureau and associated personnel covering Defense Department news, policies, and operations. She also served as the military announcer for the 2009 Presidential Inaugural Parade.

Ms. Bryant holds numerous decorations and awards for combat service and humanitarian assistance, as well as national awards for military broadcast journalism. She was honorably discharged in October 2011, and joined DAV as an Associate Director of Communications at Washington headquarters prior to being appointed to her current position.

Ms. Bryant holds a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Maryland in College Park. She is a graduate of the Basic Public Affairs Writers Course, Basic Public Affairs Broadcaster Course, and Advanced Electronic Journalism Course from the Defense Information School at Fort Meade, Maryland. She currently is pursuing her master's degree in Public Relations Management at the University of Maryland.

Velma R. Hart, FASAE, CAE

Velma Hart is a Board Trustee of the Business and Professional Women's Foundation and Chief Financial Officer of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund. With over 20 years of nonprofit experience, Ms. Hart is a proven and respected nonprofit financial professional who has worked for a wide variety of nonprofit organizations over her career in several capacities. However, her passion and home is in the area of finance, which she considers to be the heart and soul of business.

A proud Army veteran, Ms. Hart was a Secretarial appointee to the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans for the Department of Veterans Affairs. She formerly served as the National Finance Director/Chief Financial Officer for AMVETS National Headquarters, a position she held for ten years until December 2010. In addition, Ms. Hart has held various positions with organizations, such as The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists (AAPS), and the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO).

Ms. Hart is an innovative thinker with vision and leadership, and is known for her strategic focus in moving companies and organizations forward in their goals. She serves on various nonprofit boards in a number of capacities, including as Past Chairman of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), Treasurer of the Alliance for Nonprofit Management, and of the Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA) Foundation, and as a member of the Army Women's Foundation Planning Committee.

A 2005 ASAE Fellow, Ms. Hart earned her Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation in 1994.

Charlie Palumbo

Charlie Palumbo is the Veterans Outreach Coordinator at the Virginia Employment Commission, where she assists in efforts to hire veterans.

Prior to joining the Virginia Employment Commission, Ms. Palumbo served for three years as a Program Manager at the Federal Executive Institute within the Office of Personnel Management. Previously, she volunteered as the Social Media Director and Partnership Liaison for the Veteran Artist Program. In that role, she collaborated with community partners to inspire and provide opportunities for veterans wishing to pursue their artistic talents as a career.

A published poet, Ms. Palumbo has used her own poetry to raise awareness and support for Give An Hour, a non-profit that offers free counseling to veterans and spouses.

Ms. Palumbo served in the United States Navy. She resides in Charlottesville, VA with her husband, also a veteran, and two sons.