

Incoming, Outgoing Morgan Lewis Chairs On Transition Plans

By Tracey Read

Law360 (March 24, 2026, 12:50 PM EDT) -- On Monday, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP announced that longtime firm chair Jami McKeon will be retiring at the end of the year.

McKeon has spent her entire 45-year legal career at Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP, the last 12 as firm chair. "I always tell people I've had two jobs — lifeguard, and lawyer at Morgan Lewis, and that's it," she said.

Now, McKeon is preparing to pass the baton to another longtime firm partner, David A. McManus, who will start his five-year term as chair on Oct. 1. McKeon will stay on with the firm until she retires Dec. 31 to help McManus, who has spent over 30 years at Morgan Lewis, become acclimated to his new role.

McManus was unanimously elected as the firm's next chair. He is the global leader of the firm's labor and employment practice, a member of the firm's advisory board and a previous member of the compensation committee, among other leadership roles.

Law360 Pulse spoke to McKeon and McManus about the upcoming leadership change. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Any plans for retirement yet?

McKeon: I told our partners last fall that as I looked at kind of the state of the world and just everything, I realized that I just want to focus on this job until the last minute. So what I said to them is, I'm running through the tape on this job, and after that, I'll decide what I'm doing next. But this is my priority and my focus. I'm not focusing beyond that yet.

I do have four children and five grandchildren and a fabulous husband and a very large extended family, and I spend a lot of time with all of them.

What attributes made your successor the best choice to lead the firm?

McKeon: Our partners really value not just his length of management and leadership experience at the firm, but he's a real culture carrier for our firm, someone who understands and appreciates the collaborative and the collegial approach that we have. His practice extends into virtually every one of our 15 practice groups and every one of our 33 offices. He's really well known, really well respected, and I think people are very



David A. McManus



Jami McKeon

excited about having him as our next chair.

David, do you have any goals you can share?

McManus: What I'll be doing for the next six months is being a sponge, having the opportunity to be side by side with Jami, and learning the firm even better, getting more integrated into the leadership role, and then really drawing upon the insights and views of the leaders in our partnership. I plan to do a lot of listening for the next six months. The tremendous value of having this transition is it gives me an opportunity, not only to partner with Jami through this process, but it also gives me time to be out at the offices with the partners, listening and talking to people and getting their views.

Maintaining and fostering our culture is one of the things that I think Jami has been extraordinary at throughout her tenure, the personal touch which Jami has brought to her leadership. You know, messages to our partners or our professional staff, or our lawyers when they have a significant life event, birth of a baby, a college graduation. The unfortunate circumstances when people have tragedy in their lives, and Jami's sort of innate and unique ability to connect across the firm, with all of our lawyers and professional staff alike, is something that I'm definitely going to try my best to emulate. I think that's incredibly important to the glue that makes up our firm.

I think also Jami has fostered tremendous respect and relationships with other law firm leaders and chairs, and with Jami's assistance, I'll be focused on carrying that forward as well over the next six to nine months, continuing to ensure that we're part of the law firm community and engaged and have those strong relationships with law firms.

How do you feel about being one of the first women leaders at a BigLaw firm?

McKeon: It's funny. When I was first elected chair of Morgan Lewis, I didn't think it was such a big deal that I was a woman. I never really thought of it that way. And then when I realized how few women there were who were chairs, it really provided an opportunity for all of us to support the women who then came into that role. And of course, now there's many, many more, and I think that's been a real privilege to be able to look at the new generation of women who have come along and taken leadership roles at firms.

When I first joined Morgan Lewis, we didn't have women partners, and when I first had children, there weren't many women with children, and then when I became the chair, there weren't many women who were chair. And all those things have really progressed so far. And I know that sometimes people think that progress feels slow, but that's a really nice thing to see, the way that things have improved and changed in that period of time, and that opportunities are there for everybody.

What are your proudest accomplishments?

McKeon: I'm so proud of our firm. Whether you look at unusually high lateral retention rates, or whether you look at, six weeks into my tenure, we did a huge combination with Bingham, which has been wildly successful and has taken our firm to additional heights. We survived and thrived during COVID. I think we've been a leader in innovation in AI, and at the same time, we've done all those things while continuing to serve our clients in matters of monumental importance to them that are big and also some that are small.

I just look at how our firm has continued on that steady state, becoming really a global powerhouse, while at the same time retaining our essential culture. When I walked in the door 45 years ago, we had under 200 people, and now, we're 10 times that size, and we're still the same place where the mantra we had then is

true now, which is, "There's no limit to what we can achieve, as long as no one cares who gets the credit." And I think that's very much the firm today, and I'm really proud that we've done all this while preserving that.

Will you continue to make pro bono and community service a firm priority?

McManus: Pro bono has been incredibly important to me throughout my career. Even at the University of Pennsylvania when I was attending law school, there was a requirement of students to do a certain amount of pro bono. Throughout my career, I've been involved in representing community not-for-profit organizations, with various initiatives and focus, including HIV and AIDS. I've worked on asylum cases. I've spent every year for the last 10 years with the Fordham Law Summer Institute, partnering with a client, Colgate-Palmolive, and it's so important to our associates and our partners.

A few years ago, I helped two associates gain asylum for a young mother and her children, and the thrill that they felt in the courtroom when it was granted is just invaluable. It's hard to put into words. It has been part of our culture for decades, and it will continue. It was bolstered and amplified under Jami's leadership. Our commitment to pro bono, serving our community and providing our lawyers an opportunity to advocate for individuals and organizations that need advocacy, is near and dear to our hearts, and is going to continue to be a core pillar of our culture.

Why did you decide to focus on labor and employment?

McManus: My father worked for Western Electric and AT&T, and he was very involved in labor relations when I was young, on the business side. But when I went to University of Pennsylvania, I had the great benefit of having a professor as a mentor who was a labor and employment lawyer, and had some opportunities as a summer associate to do work in that area. The counseling part of it became a very big part of my practice. I've been able to work with general counsel, in-house counsel and C-suite executives on solving problems, coming up with practical but informed decisions with respect to approaching potential risk, and helping clients work through organizational change that presents both legal and personnel issues in some of the most important kind of transitions that clients that we have the privilege to serve have faced, including through COVID and other dramatic events that have occurred.

The other thing is, it's enabled me to work with nearly every practice group across all of our global offices. It's helped me build relationships with partners and clients across the world. It's helped me do extraordinary things with clients that you never would have thought coming out of law school you'd be able to do as a labor and employment lawyer. That's been immensely gratifying.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

McManus: I am fortunate enough to have a mother who just turned 96 who's vibrant and engaged. We just spent time together yesterday, and I have a large extended family. In this busy life that we lead, getting those moments to spend time with families is critically important. My activities generally revolve around my family and my son and so hopefully I will find the time to continue to do all those. Jami always seems to carve time for her family. I know how important that is to her, and it's the same with me. My wife will be upset if I'm remiss in leaving out our two extended family members, our two dogs, that pretty much go with us everywhere we go.