

New Morgan Lewis Chair On Leading 'Very Special Firm'

By Tracey Read

Law360 (October 2, 2026, 11:12 AM EDT) -- It's been six months since Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP announced that longtime firm Chair Jami McKeon will be retiring at the end of the year and passing the leadership baton to partner David A. McManus.

On Thursday, McManus, the former global leader of the firm's labor and employment practice, began his five-year term as chair.

McManus spoke to Law360 Pulse recently about the leadership change and his goals for the position. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



David McManus

What have you learned over the last six months?

That we're a very special firm. I joined 31 years ago because of the culture and the people, and that remains true today. The firm has grown exponentially, but we've managed to make it still seem small because of the glue that binds us. And that's because of the manner in which our lawyers work with each other and collaborate with each other, the innate collegiality, the sort of selfless approach to helping others service our clients.

What I've learned is that the market has really responded to that. Over the last six months, I've met with more laterals and lateral groups than I have in the past, and they're telling us that they gravitate toward us because of both the breadth and depth of our platform, but also because our culture is tangible.

Clients are gravitating to us because of it. It's been reaffirming. One of the joys of being in this transition period is I've made a point to connect with a number of general counsel of our really valued clients, and they talk about the firm being special. We had an opportunity for a significant client to present to a team of 10 or 12 of our partners, and what I heard from the general counsel afterward was not just being struck by the depth and breadth of our platform and our talent, but the way in which the partners interacted. There were so many smiles in the room, and people stepping out of the way to let another shine in that moment with the client.

I grew up here, so it's what I've always believed and have seen in the firm, but to have it reaffirmed the way it's been reaffirmed to me from the outside has been deeply satisfying.

What are your immediate priorities as chair?

I really have been focused on listening. I've spent a good deal of time speaking with partners — more than 100 partners. I've had an opportunity to talk to, listen, to hear their views of the firm. I've been working closely with my management team, and we are crystallizing our vision. We have very, very ambitious goals, and we've been aligning on how to execute.

I've been making a point to connect with clients and engage with them on how they see the firm, why they value the firm, and how we can better deliver services to them. And then I've spent a lot of time meeting with consultants and recruiters in the market to share with them our vision and engage them and make them partners in helping us execute on that vision.

We have bold goals. We intend to be very intentional and deliberate with strategic growth, but strategic growth not for growth's sake, but consistent with our strategy, mindful of our culture, and primarily focused on how we can amplify and strengthen the services that we provide to clients.

Will you remain focused on pro bono and community service, which were major priorities for the former chair?

Yes, it has been a critical part of my practice since I've gotten out of law school. Even when I was in law school, I did a significant amount of community service, and it continues to be a commitment of the firm. It's not just a commitment of leadership and a fundamental value of leadership. It's a shared value across the firm. We're very proud that, each year, every single lawyer in the firm will have devoted time to pro bono and community service — both pro bono providing legal services, but also community engagement. We're very, very engaged across all our offices in the community. It's one of the things that we're all very proud of.

How is the firm using artificial intelligence?

I'm in a very enviable position coming into this role to have a world-class AI team that I do believe is the envy of the market. We have spent the last three or four years building an incredibly strong AI platform. We benefit from a unique partnership with Thomson Reuters that we leverage to our mutual benefit, where we've gone from building the platform, training and governance to partnering with clients about how we can effectively integrate our AI into the client service and meet their expectations. And then now it's moving from a tool to an integral part of how we deliver client service.

Our leaders across the firm are driving the integration of AI into the practice of law on a daily basis. I truly believe clients are going to distinguish between firms — not just who has AI, but who can use it most effectively, responsibly and consistently to deliver client service in the most efficient way. We're focused on harnessing the power of our AI platform to provide space to lawyers to focus on providing the advice and counsel to clients that require the high-level judgment, the high-level strategic considerations, the legal training and experience of years of practice, supported by our agentic platform.

What would people be surprised to know about you?

Every good day starts and ends with me talking to my son.

--Editing by Daniel King.