

## The Voice Of America's Leading CEOs In Washington

An Interview with Kristen Silverberg, President and Chief Operating Officer, Business Roundtable

**EDITORS' NOTE** Ambassador Kristen Silverberg is President and Chief Operating Officer at Business Roundtable. Prior to BRT she was a Managing Director at the Institute of International Finance. She served in the George W. Bush Administration as U.S. Ambassador to the European Union from 2008 to 2009 and as Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs from 2005 to 2008. She also held a number of senior positions at the White House including Deputy



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Assistant to the President. Ambassador Silverberg served in 2003 in Baghdad, Iraq for which she received the Secretary of Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service. She formerly practiced law at Williams and Connolly, LLP in Washington, DC and served as a law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and Judge David Sentelle of the U.S. Court of Appeals. She attended Harvard College and the University of Texas School of Law, where she graduated with High Honors. Ambassador Silverberg also serves on the Boards of Vorbeck Materials, the

International Republican Institute, the Forum for American Leadership, and the Vandenberg Coalition, and is a member of the Steering Committee of the Reagan Institute Strategy Group.

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** Business Roundtable ([businessroundtable.org](http://businessroundtable.org)) is an association of more than 200 chief executive officers (CEOs) of America's leading companies, representing every sector of the U.S. economy. Business Roundtable CEOs lead U.S.-based companies that support one in four American

jobs and almost a quarter of U.S. GDP. Through CEO-led policy committees, Business Roundtable members develop and advocate directly for policies to promote a thriving U.S. economy and expanded opportunity for all Americans.

### Will you highlight your career journey?

After growing up in Austin, Texas, I attended Harvard College and the University of Texas School of Law. Following law school graduation, I clerked at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit Court, practiced

law for two years at a litigation firm, and then clerked on the Supreme Court. In 2000, as my Supreme Court clerkship was ending, I decided to move back to Austin to volunteer on the policy team of the George W. Bush presidential campaign. When President Bush was elected, I was hired for one of two policy positions in the White House Chief of Staff's office. In 2003, I served in Iraq for six months before returning to the White House. In the second term, I moved to the State Department as an Assistant Secretary of State and later served as U.S. Ambassador to the European Union. I joined the Institute of International Finance in 2013 as a Managing Director. In 2019, I moved to Business Roundtable, an association of more than 200 CEOs of leading American companies, where I serve as President and COO.

### What interested you in leading Business Roundtable and made you feel it was the right fit?

I was inspired by the opportunity to work with the CEOs of America's most important companies. The companies represented at BRT are powerful engines of opportunity, security, and innovation for Americans. More than a million Americans move into the middle class every year through employment at a BRT company. The best leaders in corporate America run their businesses in a way that benefits workers, small business, and shareholders, and I wanted to play a role in helping them advance their missions.

### How do you define Business Roundtable's mission and purpose?

As the voice in Washington for more than 200 leading CEOs, BRT advocates for public policy that promotes a thriving U.S. economy and expanded opportunity for Americans. We support, among other policies, pro-growth tax policy to keep jobs and investment in the U.S.; regulatory reform to unleash American innovation; and reform of our workforce development system to ensure that American workers have access to the training and skills they need to get ahead.

Four times a year, BRT CEOs come to Washington to meet with policymakers on issues of importance to BRT companies and to the nation. We are nonpartisan and work with policymakers on both sides of the aisle. For example, during the 2024 campaign, we hosted President Trump and Senator Vance, as well as Governor Walz.



Kristen Silverberg moderating a bipartisan panel discussion with Senators-elect Bernie Moreno (R-OH) and Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) at a recent Business Roundtable CEO quarterly meeting



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*Kristen Silverberg with Business Roundtable Chair Chuck Robbins, Chair and Chief Executive Officer, Cisco Systems, Inc., and former Roundtable Chair Doug McMillon, President and CEO, Walmart*

In addition to our policy agenda, BRT also works with our members on private sector initiatives to support employees. More than 80 BRT companies are participating in an effort to promote skills-based hiring to ensure that Americans without college degrees have paths to success. Other BRT members are working on programs to expand apprenticeships and to support mental health.

**How valuable has it been in your role to have such an engaged and committed membership and board of directors?**

Business Roundtable CEOs lead some of the most important companies in the world.

Together, they support one in four American jobs and almost a quarter of U.S. GDP. When they speak collectively through BRT about policies to promote a strong economy, they are a very potent force. I have been especially honored to work closely with exceptional BRT Chairs during my tenure: Jamie Dimon of JPMorgan Chase; Doug McMillon of Walmart; Mary Barra of General Motors; and now Chuck Robbins of Cisco.

**What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you approach your management style?**

Working for President Bush at a relatively young age taught me a lot about leadership. In his 2000 campaign, President Bush said that government should be focused – it should “do a few things, and do them well.” Mission creep can be a challenge for any organization, and I frequently think about President Bush’s determination that his Administration act with focus and resolve in the areas where he thought we could make the biggest difference. The experience taught me about the importance of a thoughtful decision-making process. The Chief of Staff’s office, where I worked, was in charge of ensuring that decisions were put to the President with the options and tradeoffs clearly laid out and the views of relevant advisors fairly presented. Strong leaders protect the integrity of the process. Even if someone on the team doesn’t like a final decision, they should feel they were heard and respected. President Bush wanted staff to give him frank advice. Even as a young staffer, I felt comfortable giving him my honest views. Strong leaders have to be open to hearing their positions questioned.

Finally, I learned a lot about the importance of humor. White House jobs are stressful, and they can strain even the hardest working members of the team. President Bush’s sense of humor – his nicknames for the staff and his jokes in tense meetings – helped to keep everyone even-keeled.

**What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?**

Choose your first bosses carefully. The early years of your career can be formative. They will help to shape your professional habits, your leadership style, and your reputation for years to come. Work for people with integrity and decency who are invested in your success. ●



*Kristen Silverberg facilitating a discussion with Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell*