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Air Force Secretary Praises Mass. Bases, Says Force Is 'Turning A Corner' On Sex Assaults

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Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James in the WBUR studios. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

By **DEBORAH BECKER** and **DAN MAUZY**

Updated August 24, 2015, 7:27 am

Story continues below

BOSTON The fate of U.S. military bases around the country is uncertain.

Faced with pressure to cut defense spending, and the biggest troop draw down since the end of the Cold War, the Pentagon is pursuing a potential Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, but has faced opposition in Congress.

Gov. Charlie Baker recently traveled to Washington, D.C., where he says he spoke with federal officials about the importance of Massachusetts' six military bases.

"As all of this stuff has gotten more and more technologically sophisticated over the course of this past decade or so, what we do here I think becomes even more important."

Deborah Lee James, the secretary of the U.S. Air Force, was in Boston recently for a conference about women veterans and entrepreneurship, and to visit with Massachusetts members of the U.S. Air Force. We talked with her about women in service, the intersection of business and defense and the long-term future of bases in Massachusetts. Listen to the extended version of that conversation here:

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U.S. Air Force Secretary Speaks With WBUR's Deborah B...

0:00 / 22:03

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INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS:

On the work of Massachusetts bases and what she has seen on her visits to the state:

Deborah Lee James: "I am very impressed with everything that I have seen so far in the state of Massachusetts. This is my second visit. My first visit was to Westover Air Force Reserve Base, which has a very important mobility mission. Today, I'm here in the Boston-area in part to visit Hanscom, which has a critical research development and acquisition location for us. Not been as yet to Barnes or Otis, but certainly, the work of our F-15s at Barnes, which are standing watch for homeland defense purposes, very, very critical. And Otis has a very important intelligence, combat communications, so all of these missions are extremely important to us.

"One of the key aspects, I think, which is unique, I'll say, here in Massachusetts, is surrounding these four Air Force installations we just have a multitude of academic and other talent."

On sexual assault and harassment charges in the military:

DLJ: "First of all, I take it very seriously as I travel around the country and travel around the world. An appointment at each and every location that I have always have — and I'm doing it here at Hanscom, as well — is I check in with our SARC, our sexual assault response coordinator. So think of the