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Leading Voices on National Security and Defense Highlight Technology and Workforce Development Opportunities

Three-Day Thought Leadership Conference for Policymakers and Industry

NEWPORT, R.I. — SENEDIA, the alliance for defense tech, talent, and innovation, yesterday closed Defense Innovation Days 2022, a three-day national convening that brought together national security experts and policymakers with defense industry leaders developing innovative solutions for the U.S. military and its next-generation workforce. This is the eighth annual convening and served as a celebration of SENEDIA's 20th anniversary year.

On the agenda were some of the nation's most influential voices on national security and defense, including **Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Senator Jack Reed, Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro, and Chief of Naval Research RADM Lorin Selby.**

The event serves as an opportunity for defense companies, both small and large, to gain insights into how they can more effectively compete for defense contracts, access resources to spur innovation, build a talent pipeline that will fuel their growth, and highlight their innovative technology.

"The defense industry has a shared mission of protecting our nation and supporting our men and women in uniform," said **Molly Donohue Magee, Executive Director of SENEDIA.** "Defense Innovation Days is an opportunity to showcase the latest technologies, share best practices with a focus on collaboration to advance mission critical priorities of our military, and increase access to opportunity and economic growth for business."

Senator Reed kicked off the event from the exhibition hall on Monday evening and was joined by Secretary Kendall. Both provided insights, toured displays, and met with businesses that provide a range of products and solutions, from engineering services to technology innovation.

"We have to continue acquisition reform, invest in innovation and scalable technology, implement new industrial base policies, and leverage the capabilities of our allies," said Reed.

Secretary Kendall reinforced the urgency facing the industry and our national security infrastructure: “We need to accelerate change or we will lose,” he said. “Industry has enormous capacity, and I want industry to help us solve our problems.”

Technical sessions covered challenges for national security, such as climate resiliency and [cybersecurity](#). They also focused on opportunities facing the industry through the lens of both security and the economy, including the development of strategic partnerships that will increase innovation, fortify U.S. maritime dominance, and inspire a new wave of talent to pursue the high-wage, high-growth, high-demand careers that the approximately \$900 billion a year defense sector has to offer.

Among the key takeaways are:

- The U.S. needs to accelerate innovation and scale up solutions. Investment in robust research and development is an essential piece of this strategy.
- Government is increasingly looking to and relying on industry to help solve problems, and to break down barriers for those looking to do business with government agencies. We need to get better about sharing best practices and making it easier to collaborate.
- People are our most important resource in defense. We must prioritize workforce development and support for the existing workforce. We must also recognize that the future of work is changing, so industry must be nimbler and more flexible in meeting the needs of workers.
- We must innovate in how we do business, accelerate technology, and build the workforce for today and tomorrow.

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro spoke to the imperative to reach out to ensure a strong partnership between industry and the Department of the Navy.

“From artificial intelligence to robotics to machine learning and autonomous systems, staying ahead of the competition is and will always be a team sport. Together, we need to expand our base of capable and innovative businesses,” Del Toro said, noting that in 2022, they have seen 36 percent greater engagement from companies that have not traditionally done business with the Department of Defense. “The door is open and believe me when I say that I am listening.”

The Secretary’s remarks were reinforced by **Rear Admiral Lorin Selby, the Chief of Naval Research; Nicholas Guertin, Department of Defense Director of Test and Evaluation; and Jimmy Smith, Director of Small Business Programs for the Department of the Navy.**

Rear Admiral Selby focused on the importance of innovation—from government and industry alike.

“We are at a pivotal moment in history and the time is now to find ways to strengthen deterrence, to continue to build the capable systems needed for today, and to focus on what will be needed next,” he said.

Guertin discussed how his organization is transforming test and evaluation to enable delivery of the world's most advanced warfighting capabilities. "We are the key to weapon systems that work," he said, "delivering them at the speed of need."

Smith addressed the business leaders in the room, focusing on the importance of small business in the defense ecosystem.

"We are in the business of providing capabilities to the warfighter, and small businesses are the key to doing that," he said.

The importance of expanding the pool of supply chain companies working with DoD and fortifying, growing, and diversifying the workforce, from cybersecurity and climate change to the manufacturing industrial base, was emphasized throughout. Trade and industrial skilled workforce development was detailed in the breakout [Department of Defense summit: "Building the Shipbuilding Workforce to Meet National Security and Supply Chain Priorities."](#)

"The number one thing that keeps me up at night is the workforce—in the immediate, where attrition rates are double what they were before COVID, but it's also the workforce of the future. We need generations of people interested in returning to manufacturing careers to support defense and national security," said **Deborah Rosenblum, assistant secretary of defense for Industrial Base Policy (PTDO)**.

Professional photographs of Defense Innovation Days are available for media outlets interested in sharing information about the event.

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SENEDIA, the alliance for defense tech, talent, and innovation, is a catalyst for thought leadership, technical innovation, and workforce development. SENEDIA connects, convenes, and partners across the industry to support talent, innovation, and growth. For more information on SENEDIA, please visit www.senedia.org.