



Homeland  
Security

# Biography

---

## **Michelle Benecke** Executive Director Management Integration

Michelle Benecke is Executive Director for Management Integration, Immediate Office of the Undersecretary for Management. Michelle joined the Management Directorate in September 2014 as a senior advisor to the Under Secretary for Management and was subsequently selected to the senior executive service and her current position.

Previously, Ms. Benecke served at FEMA, where she was an Associate Director and Chief Counselor for the Office of National Capital Region Coordination. Ms. Benecke has been with the Department since its creation and brings extensive cross-component experience, including prior posts as Acting Chief of Staff to the DHS Deputy Secretary, Executive Director of a DHS-wide task force to better facilitate travel, and as part of the team that started the Transportation Security Administration.

Prior to her DHS service, Ms. Benecke was a founder and Executive Director of Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, a non-profit organization known for providing legal aid to military members and leading the successful national campaign to end Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

Ms. Benecke is a former commissioned Army officer and a graduate of the University of Virginia and Harvard Law School, where she was selected as a Wasserstein Fellow in recognition of her public service commitment and accomplishments.

**WRITTEN STATEMENT OF**

**Michelle M. Benecke**

**Executive Director for Management Integration**

**U.S. Department of Homeland Security**

**Before the**

**Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

**Thursday, June 16, 2016**

**SD-342 Dirksen Senate Office Building**

**Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee**

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Carper and other distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department's efforts associated with its "strengthening management functions" designation on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO's) High Risk List. After the Department's formation in 2003, it was placed on the High Risk List due to the challenges associated with integrating 22 agencies with different cultures, systems, processes and existing management challenges.

The Department's leadership is committed to improving management and seeking removal from the GAO High Risk List. We are making progress in reaching that goal and appreciate the collaborative relationship with GAO that has helped us to strengthen the Department's management functions.

As Executive Director for Management Integration, I am the senior career executive who leads the Department's High Risk engagement for improving management and the issuance of our semi-annual report, *The Integrated Strategy for High Risk Management (Integrated Strategy)*. We appreciate GAO's favorable view of the *Integrated Strategy* as a best practice for making progress on high-risk issues.

The *Integrated Strategy* was first published in January 2011, when the previous Secretary and Under Secretary for Management decided to leverage the GAO high risk list to strengthen management at DHS. Secretary Jeh Johnson and Under Secretary for Management Russ Deyo have built further momentum through the *Unity of Effort* initiative, which has resulted in better integration of the Department's people, organizational structures and operational capability, and has enhanced our ability to address GAO's high risk criteria.

Based on GAO's April 2016 interim update, the Department has fully met three of the five high risk removal criteria:

- i.) Leadership Commitment (FULLY MET)
- ii.) Action Plan (FULLY MET)
- iii.) Monitoring (FULLY MET)
- iv.) Capacity (PARTIALLY MET)
- v.) Demonstrated Progress (PARTIALLY MET)

DHS is currently one (1) of only two (2) federal agencies who have fully met at least three of the criteria. Allow me to share some highlights of how we've achieved success in each of the three fully met areas.

### **LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT**

Commitment to sustaining positive organizational change within DHS has been driven by the Secretary. It has been two years since the *Unity of Effort* initiative was launched and remarkable progress has been made to strengthen management and integrate disparate organizational stove pipes. The result has been the implementation of coordinated and transparent strategy, requirements, budgeting and acquisition processes. Better management starts with strong governance at the highest levels. Today, major decisions are regularly made in consultation with the Secretary's Senior Leaders Council, Deputy Secretary's Management Action Group and Acquisition Review Board. The Department's senior leaders meet regularly with their GAO counterparts to discuss the Department's progress, including on each of the GAO criteria and high risk outcomes.

### **ACTION PLAN**

As mentioned earlier, the *Integrated Strategy* has provided a repeatable framework to address GAO high risk issues. There are 30 GAO Outcomes and Recommendations that span the following management areas: finance, human capital, acquisition, and information technology. To address these 30 Outcomes, the Department developed detailed action

plans, with measures and timeframes. To date, we have fully or mostly addressed 17 of the 30 GAO Outcomes. This positive trend will continue under the leadership of Secretary Johnson, Under Secretary for Management Deyo, and all of our line of business Chiefs, and they have made it a priority to prepare for the next Administration as future leadership continues these efforts.

## **MONITORING**

In March 2016, the GAO reported that DHS had established a framework for monitoring its progress in implementing the *Integrated Strategy* and improved its rating on the monitoring criterion, making it the third of five criteria the Department has fully met. The *Integrated Strategy* serves as a sustainable and repeatable framework that enables leaders to monitor the progress of our action plans, report on progress and potential risks, and track performance against pre-established goals. In addition, the Secretary and Under Secretary Deyo regularly meet with Component heads and other senior leaders to track progress on the Department's highest priorities, including the GAO High Risk list.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Department has made significant strides to improve its management functions. DHS has already fully met three of the five GAO criteria for removal from the high risk list. We are working diligently to demonstrate to GAO the Department's sustained commitment and progress. We are especially pleased with the most recent GAO interim update (April 2016), which further clarified the definitions for each of the five (5) removal criteria and will assist the Department in focusing our accomplishments in the upcoming *Integrated Strategy*. We appreciate the solid relationship with our GAO colleagues and look forward to working closely with them in the coming months to justify further progress toward removal of the high risk designation. At DHS, we understand that more effective and integrated management makes the Department stronger and we owe that to the American people.