



United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

GAO's Role in Support of Congress
Chairman Joe Lieberman
March 21, 2007

Good morning and welcome back to this hearing room Comptroller General; this must seem like a home away from home for you. The subject of this morning's hearing is how the GAO supports the work of Congress and what Congress can do to maintain and strengthen GAO's effectiveness.

In hearings before this Committee and others, you and your able staff have helped us evaluate and consider ways to improve the operation of agencies and programs throughout the federal government. We always ask what GAO can do for us, and now we are asking what we can do for you.

By the very nature of this Committee's government oversight responsibilities, we depend heavily on GAO. And, as the Committee with jurisdiction over the relatively new Homeland Security Department, we have been especially reliant in a different way for it to help us transform this amalgam of 180,000 employees and 22 agencies into a fine-tuned and superior security operation.

In the last 12 months alone, this Committee has received over 200 reports either requested by us or our subcommittees or initiated by GAO and addressed to us. The subject matter of these reports ranges over an astonishingly wide spectrum - from Hurricane Katrina and Rita disaster relief, to improving government-wide financial management, to strengthening the privacy of health information, to DHS management of homeland security first responder grants, to securing and rebuilding Iraq. Our work has benefited greatly from your output and so have the American people.

This morning, the Comptroller General will provide an overview of GAO's traditional work in supporting Congressional *oversight*, and also GAO's efforts to provide Congress with what he calls *insight* and *foresight* on approaches to problems that do or do not work and what best-practices should be applied.

The Comptroller General has been particularly active in providing Congress and the public with an understanding of our long-term fiscal outlook and the danger it presents to our future. GAO has issued significant and substantial reports in this area, most recently its January 2007 report on "Fiscal Stewardship." And now, like the hero of the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, Mr. Walker rides "booted and spurred" throughout the American countryside, sounding the alarm at town-hall meetings as part of a "Fiscal Wakeup Tour" led by the aptly named Concord Coalition, of which he is the central spokesperson.

During the mid-1990s, GAO suffered a 40 percent budget reduction and the loss of many full-time equivalent positions. Since the Comptroller General took office in 1998, he has transformed the agency into a more results-oriented, client-focused, and efficient operation. Last year, GAO determined that it provided a remarkable return on investment: taxpayers save \$105 dollars for every dollar spent by this office. It also enjoys very high client satisfaction ratings.

Yet, GAO's budget has declined by 3 percent after inflation over the past four years. So, I look forward hearing the Comptroller General testify about the agency's FY 2008 budget request, which includes additional funds to help it meet demand and maintain its high level of quality and cost-effectiveness.

Again, Comptroller General Walker, on behalf of the American taxpayers, I thank you and your staff for you excellent work, and I look forward to your testimony.