

# LEGISLATIVE BRANCH ADVANCEMENT: GAO MODERNIZATION

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## HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MODERNIZATION OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

SEPTEMBER 27, 2023

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## **SUBCOMMITTEE ON MODERNIZATION**

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**September 27, 2023**

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MODERNIZATION,  
COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION,  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
*Washington, DC.*

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:32 a.m., in room 1310, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Stephanie Bice [chair of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Bice, Steil, Kilmer, and Morelle.

Staff present: Hillary Lassiter, Clerk; Jordan Wilson, Director of Member Services; Alex Deise, Elections Counsel, Assistant Parliamentarian; Derek Harley, Modernization Subcommittee Staff Director; Jessica Smith, Detailee; Jamie Fleet, Minority Staff Director; and Owen Reilly, Minority Legislative Assistant.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. STEPHANIE BICE, CHAIRWOMAN OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MODERNIZATION, A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM OKLAHOMA**

Chairwoman BICE. Well, good morning. The Subcommittee on Modernization will come to order.

I note that a quorum is presented. Without objection, the chair may declare a recess at any time.

The meeting record will remain open for 5 legislative days so Members may submit any materials they wish to be included therein.

Thank you, Ranking Member Kilmer, Subcommittee Members, and our witnesses for taking the time to be with us today.

The mission of this Subcommittee, building upon the work of the Select Committee, is to continue to examine ways to strengthen Congress to make it a more effective, efficient, and transparent institution for the American people.

Today we will hear from and about the Government Accountability Office, one of the congressional support agencies that is truly a force multiplier. It provides essential nonpartisan, fact-based analysis, and expertise across a wide range of issues to support Congress in our legislative and oversight duties on behalf of the American people. It gets results.

I understand that there is an inside joke among friends and supporters of the GAO that a common theme is said to run through GAO's work, quote: Progress made, challenges remain. While that may get a laugh from the GAO insiders, it undersells the true value of the GAO. It can serve to underscore one of the principal

themes I would like us to cover today, which is, what can we do to strengthen the agency for the future and provide the additional tools it needs to support Congress and fix the challenges that remain?

With that said, I would like to welcome Mr. Gene Dodaro, U.S. Comptroller General of the GAO. The Committee welcomes your remarks on the future of the GAO, the agency's strengths, and the best practices you see working well at the GAO that should be replicated by other agencies.

Our second panel includes two former GAO employees and a former Senate Oversight staffer, who was an important customer of the GAO, all of whom continue to be advocates for the agency and can share an outside perspective on what modernization efforts have been successful and how the agency can expand on their prior success.

The GAO conducts oversight of our Federal agencies and programs, identifies waste, fraud, and abuse, and analyzes the efficacy and efficiency of Government programs. GAO reports typically issue recommendations to Federal agencies or highlight matters for congressional consideration, all of which can remedy identified issues, improve program outcomes, and reduce fragmentation, overlap, and duplication across Federal Government. Their work has resulted in saving roughly 1.31 trillion taxpayer dollars since 2002. Indeed, for every \$1 appropriated to GAO between 2018 and 2023, GAO has had a \$145 return on that investment. I think we can all agree that a Government agency saving taxpayer dollars should be recognized for their outstanding work.

In the previous Congress, the Select Committee on Modernization made several GAO-related recommendations focused on strengthening and improving GAO's service to Congress.

Two of these recommendations were included in the Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act, introduced by my colleague, Ranking Member Kilmer. That bill was enacted as part of the Fiscal Year 2023 NDAA (National Defense Authorization Act) and directed GAO to submit to Congress a targeted report on the costs of unimplemented priority recommendations, as well as additional policy or oversight options for Congress to consider.

We are eager to hear how GAO has responded to those requirements, which were designed to help Congress better understand and more easily address the outstanding GAO recommendations that could provide real savings to American taxpayers.

Over time, the GAO has implemented several modernization initiatives on its own and represents a prime example of an agency that has evolved proactively to meet the needs of its primary customer, Congress.

For example, in 2019, the GAO expanded its capacity for science and technology support through Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics Team. The STAA Team has developed new products and services that have provided Congress access to scientific and technological expertise.

I look forward to hearing about STAA's modernization efforts and how the team can be strengthened to best support science and tech policymaking in Congress.

Finally, we will discuss the future of GAO and its vision. For 3 consecutive years, GAO was rated the best midsize agency to work for in the Federal Government. This notable achievement leads to high employee motivation and, most importantly, to results for Congress and the American people.

I look forward to hearing from our panelists about the path ahead, the new and innovative ways in which the GAO can support Congress, help identify savings and greater efficiencies, and increase accountability for our Government agencies.

I want to again thank the witnesses for being here this morning. [The prepared statement of Chairwoman Bice follows:]

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. STEPHANIE BICE,  
CHAIRWOMAN OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MODERNIZATION**

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I look forward to hearing from our panelists about the path ahead, the new and innovative ways in which the GAO can support Congress, help identify savings and greater efficiencies, and increase accountability for our Government agencies.

Now I recognize Ranking Member Kilmer for the purpose of providing an opening statement.

Mr. KILMER. Thanks, Madam Chair.

Thanks for being with us. I do not know, do I call you General Dodaro, Mr. Dodaro?

Mr. DODARO. Gene is fine.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DEREK KILMER, RANKING MEMBER OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MODERNIZATION, A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM WASHINGTON**

Mr. KILMER. All right. Thanks for meeting with us, Gene. When we were walking in, you said you were in your 50th year at the GAO. I thank you for a long tenure of service and for a whole lot of impact. Excited to hear from you and from our second panel as well.

I really appreciate the work that you do, the oversight that you provide. You know, I am a big believer in the notion of loving critics, you know, those who do not want to bash institutions but make them better. I think the GAO is really vital to that, certainly when it comes to Congress, but other agencies as well.

You know, the value of representing the West Coast of Washington State is I spend 11 hours a week on an airplane, which means I get plenty of time to read GAO reports and get a sense of some of the results of your work and some of the open recommendations. Honestly, they lead to a lot of legislation that our team does.

We just introduced a bill called the REACH Our Tribes Act, which is focused on—which we are hoping to attach to the farm bill, which is based on GAO reports that found that some of the Department of Agriculture's programs do not do a good job of engaging Tribal communities and serving Tribal communities.

We are working on legislation to direct NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) to improve its weather radio coverage and ensure it extends to areas at risk of tsunami like the one I represent. That came from a GAO report.

I represent a big naval shipyard, and GAO has been super helpful in looking at the Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Program.

I share that just to let you know the work you do matters to my office and I think really matters to the Government and to this institution. You know, it is part of the reason the Select Committee on Modernization of Congress in the 116th and the 117th looked at recommendations to help you do the work that you do.

I am hoping that we can hear some updates on some of those recommendations. One was bolstering legislative support agencies' access to Federal data and experts. One was bolstering bipartisan oversight training for Members and staff, enhancing the customer experience at GAO, including increasing presence and awareness of your work among congressional Members and staff, and one was identifying how increased regulatory and legal resources could help strengthen the role of the legislative branch, which we look forward to your forthcoming report on.

The chair mentioned the Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act, which I know GAO has worked to implement, and, you know, that comes from a couple Select Committee recommendations; the notion being that the GAO can help Congress know about some of the open recommendations, how long they have been open, how much money could be saved if those recommendations were acted upon, and some legislative options for closing those recommendation.

When you hear about the return on investment that the chair mentioned, you guys are where it is at I think. The spirit of the law that we passed and that was part of the NDAA was, you know, let us get cooking on some of the recommendations you have made.

Looking forward to hearing from you and looking forward to hearing from our other witnesses too.

Thanks for being with us.

[The prepared statement of Ranking Member Kilmer follows:]

#### **PREPARED STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MODERNIZATION DEREK KILMER**

Mr. KILMER. Thanks for meeting with us, Gene. When we were walking in, you said you were in your 50th year at the GAO. I thank you for a long tenure of service and for a whole lot of impact. Excited to hear from you and from our second panel as well.

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Looking forward to hearing from you and looking forward to hearing from our other witnesses too.

Thanks for being with us.

Chairwoman BICE. Thank you, Ranking Member Kilmer.

It is with great delight that we have the full Committee chair of the House Administration Committee Mr. Steil here with us. At this time, I would recognize Chairman Steil for an opening statement as well.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BRYAN STEIL, CHAIRMAN OF  
THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION, A U.S. REP-  
RESENTATIVE FROM WISCONSIN**

Chairman STEIL. Thank you very much, Chair Bice.

I will be brief. I just want to say thanks to you and Ranking Member Kilmer for taking the lead on the Modernization Subcommittee.

When we think about modernizing Congress, making the legislative branch work more efficiently, I do not think there is anything better than the GAO being here with us where you are dedicated to figuring out ways to make our Government be more efficient, more accountable, identify waste, fraud, and abuse. It is one of the few things I think operates a little bit more like a private sector business than a true Government operation. Any private sector business, this would be par for the course. It is too often not par for the course across Government in our country. In identifying the savings that we can make, making things work more efficiently, and ultimately serving the American people better I think is essential. As we continue our work here on the modernization of Congress, diving in and looking at where we can take the GAO in the years ahead. It is 102 years I believe you have been—the GAO, not you, sir—the GAO has been in existence and looking for ways that we can also leverage that history but also develop it for the future so we can continue the work of weeding out waste, fraud, and abuse, but also thinking proactively about how we can make our Federal agencies more efficient.

The answer of “We have always done it this way” is insufficient for me, and I think you bring that approach in many ways to how we should be thinking about the Federal Government. “We have always done it this way” is not sufficient. You guys are often looking at ways to create efficiencies.

Appreciate you being here and look forward to today's conversation.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Steil follows:]

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE  
ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION BRYAN STEIL**

When we think about modernizing Congress, making the legislative branch work more efficiently, I do not think there is anything better than the GAO being here with us where you are dedicated to figuring out ways to make our Government be more efficient, more accountable, identify waste, fraud, and abuse. It is one of the few things I think operates a little bit more like a private sector business than a true Government operation. Any private sector business, this would be par for the course. It is too often not par for the course across Government in our country. In identifying the savings that we can make, making things work more efficiently, and ultimately serving the American people better I think is essential. As we continue our work here on the modernization of Congress, diving in and looking at where we can take the GAO in the years ahead. It is 102 years I believe you have been—the GAO, not you, sir—the GAO has been in existence and looking for ways that we can also leverage that history but also develop it for the future so we can continue the work of weeding out waste, fraud, and abuse, but also thinking proactively about how we can make our Federal agencies more efficient.

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Appreciate you being here and look forward to today’s conversation.

Chairwoman BICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We now welcome Gene Dodaro, the Comptroller General of the Government Accountability Office. Mr. Dodaro was nominated by President Obama and confirmed by the U.S. Senate in December 2010 as the eighth Comptroller General of the GAO.

In his role, Mr. Dodaro helps oversee the development of hundreds of reports and testimonies each year, paving the way for improvements to a wide range of Government programs and billions of dollars in taxpayer savings.

With a GAO career dating back more than 50 years, Mr. Dodaro contributes a wealth of expertise and knowledge to the development of GAO’s strategic plans for serving Congress and improving Government in the 21st century.

Mr. Dodaro, we appreciate you being here today.

Please remember to press the button on your microphone in front of you so the green light is on. When you speak, the timer will begin and turn green. After 4 minutes, it will be yellow. When the red light comes on, your 5 minutes have expired, and we would ask that you please wrap up quickly.

It is my pleasure to recognize the Comptroller, Mr. Dodaro.

**STATEMENT OF GENE DODARO, COMPTROLLER GENERAL,  
U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE**

Mr. DODARO. Thank you very much, Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Kilmer, Chairman Steil.

It is very nice to be here today. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about GAO’s important work for the Congress and the country. I would emphasize a couple of things right up front. One, we do work on a regular basis for 90 percent of the standing Committees of the Congress. The scope of our work is across the entire breadth and scope of the Federal Government. We have subject-matter experts, technical experts, a very multidisciplinary organization that we built over the years. As has been mentioned already, we get results, tens of billions of dollars of savings each year but also, importantly, beyond just the dollar savings, the impact on improving

public services, making agencies operate more efficiently and effectively, address risk, address fraud, waste, and abuse in the Federal Government.

Now, my vision for GAO has always been to try to enhance it to be an agile, dynamic organization, always working on the most important national issues and also to be ready at a moment's notice to do real-time auditing in national emergencies, which is what we have done during the global financial crisis, both with the Troubled Asset Relief Program and also the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Most recently during the pandemic, we did monthly reports to the Congress on what was happening with the \$4.5 trillion in assistance, what impact that had on the public health and on the economy, how to deal more with transparency and accountability issues.

Now, we do these things by constantly refining our strategic planning and foresight process so that it enriches our dialog with the Congress on what are the top priorities that the Congress has and what ideas we have. We developed a shared agenda of things to work on, and it is very—it is not only current issues but emerging issues, and it is very important. We try to get ahead of those things before they become a crisis.

Second is our workforce. We are modernizing our workforce. In addition to very senior people that have decades' of experience at GAO, we are bringing in a pipeline of younger people: 36 percent of our workforce is 40 or younger; 13 percent are 30 or younger.

We have a very dynamic—and this is one area that I have encouraged other agencies to implement. We have a robust internship program. We sell our mission. We have a good work environment where people feel valued, respected, and treated fairly. We give them flexibilities, and our attrition rate is only 6 percent, which is really low. You build this institutional knowledge. We are a knowledge organization, and we are only as good as our people. You need to get good people. You need to keep good people. You need to train them and retain them. This enables us to provide the highest quality service to the Congress on whatever challenges come our way and during that approach.

Now, you mentioned the science and technology area. We have tripled the size of the people in that group. We now have over 100 people with STEM degrees, 36 of them are Ph.D.s. We have expanded our technology assessments work. We have done spotlight work, you know, explainers of different technologies. I want to continue to grow that. I have been trying to grow it before Congress became a full partner with me over the decades, and that needs to continue to grow. That is one area where I would enjoy support from the Committee as well.

The last area that is a focus for me and GAO is trying to get our Government on a more long-term sustainable fiscal path, and this—I am taking two tracks on this. One is to try to change the debt ceiling approach. I believe the approach we have now does not change the long-term trajectory of the debt. It causes us to pay more interest, and people stop buying treasuries around the time there might be an impasse.



Plus, we need to plan. There is no guidepost now. We need a debt-to-GDP target. We have laid out a plan there. Plus, we are also working to try to—in other areas.

Now, the main drivers are healthcare costs and then interest on the debt, but there are a lot of other areas in the Federal Government where you can achieve savings. Witness our results. We have got over \$600 billion in financial savings as a result of recommendations that we have made to eliminate overlap, duplication, and fragmentation of the Government. Our recommendations on waste, fraud, and abuse regularly, on average the last 17 years, have over \$40 billion of savings.

We are working hard to try to do in those areas, and I would be happy to answer questions about some of the efforts and recommendations that have been put forth by the Committee in the Q&A.

[The prepared statement of Comptroller General Dodaro follows:]

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
DODARO**



DRAFT

## GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-900536](#), a report to congressional requesters

### Why GAO Did This Study

GAO is a force multiplier to help Congress meet its constitutional responsibilities. Through its oversight, GAO improves the performance and accountability of the federal government for the American people. GAO's work spans the full reach of the federal government, including both domestic and international activities and mandatory and discretionary spending.

GAO has continuously evolved to meet the needs of Congress. From its initial focus on financial management matters, GAO has evolved into a multi-disciplinary professional services organization. Located in the legislative branch, GAO is an independent agency that provides Congress with objective, nonpartisan, and evidence-based information, analysis, and recommendations. As Congress's oversight responsibilities have evolved, GAO has actively modernized its work products and services to benefit its congressional clients and the American people.

This testimony describes how GAO's impactful products, wide-ranging services, and multi-disciplinary workforce help the government save money and be more efficient and effective.

View [GAO-23-900536](#). For more information, contact A. Nicole Clowers at (202) 512-4400 or [clowersa@gao.gov](mailto:clowersa@gao.gov)

September 2023

GAO

### Evolving and Innovating to Meet Congressional Needs

#### What GAO Found

For the last 5 years, GAO's work yielded an average of \$145 in financial benefits for every \$1 invested in it. Over the past decade, GAO has delivered an annual average of about \$81 billion in financial benefits. In addition, GAO regularly delivers over 1,200 other benefits annually that improve services to the American people, strengthen public safety, and make government work better. GAO's work is in high demand: each year approximately 90 percent of standing committees submit hundreds of requests for studies, and legislation and committee reports require hundreds more.

GAO accomplishes these results by:



**Understanding congressional priorities and needs and evolving national issues.** GAO regularly reaches out to Congress to both understand their priorities and highlight emerging issues and challenges, and discuss the array of services that GAO can provide. GAO is working with the Committee on House Administration to have physical space in a House building next year to further these efforts.



**Recruiting and retaining a talented, motivated multi-disciplinary workforce.** GAO's diverse and dedicated workforce has policy, program, and technical expertise in virtually all major federal domains. GAO has deep institutional knowledge of federal agencies, programs, and operations from decades of work. GAO is recognized by the Partnership for Public Service as one of the best places to work in the federal government. For the past three years, GAO has ranked first among mid-size agencies.



**Continuing to modernize its products and services.** Efforts include introducing quick-read products that synthesize information on current or emerging issues. GAO is also innovating to produce more accessible and user-friendly digital content. In addition, GAO also increased technical assistance services to Members and committees.



**Growing its science, technology, and cybersecurity expertise to meet evolving needs.** Since 2019, GAO has more than tripled the size of its Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics team, with staff who hold over 100 STEM-related advanced degrees. In this time, GAO issued 22 in-depth Technology Assessments and 44 Science and Tech Spotlights, distilling technical issues into two-page summaries. Topics covered in these products include artificial intelligence use in health care, quantum computing, regenerative medicine, generative artificial intelligence, and fusion energy. GAO has also increased the size and capacity of its cybersecurity workforce and its Center for Enhanced Cybersecurity. These efforts resulted in hundreds of recommendations to improve federal agencies' cybersecurity vulnerabilities.

Source: GAO (analysis) and Icons-Studio and Sabavectoristock.adobe.com (icons). | GAO-900536

United States Government Accountability Office

DRAFT

Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Kilmer, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) work for the Congress and the American people. GAO's mission is to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government. We do this by examining how federal funds are spent and how federal programs and operations are managed. Our work spans all federal programs and spending—including agriculture to space programs, banking to public health, national security to international aid and more.

GAO provides objective, nonpartisan, professional, and fact-based analysis and recommendations to help the government save money and be more efficient and effective. Congress routinely uses our work to craft legislation, make decisions about authorizing or reauthorizing programs, make funding decisions, and conduct oversight of federal spending and programs.

Today, I will discuss GAO's impact and the factors that have contributed to achieving our mission. In doing so, I will outline how we have actively worked to modernize our work products and services to benefit our congressional clients and efforts to continue this evolution. Several of our efforts also speak to recommendations made by the Select Committee on the Modernization of the Congress (the Select Committee).<sup>1</sup>

#### **GAO Consistently Delivers Results**

GAO has a well-established record of delivering significant results for the nation. Over the past five years, GAO's return-on-investment is \$145 to every \$1 dollar invested in GAO. Over the past decade, we have delivered an annual average of about \$81 billion in financial benefits. In addition, GAO regularly delivers over 1,200 program and operational benefits annually that improve services to the American people, strengthen public safety, and make government work better. GAO's results stem from agencies and Congress implementing our recommendations. On average we issue about 1,600 each year and consistently over 75 percent of these recommendations are implemented over time.

To achieve these benefits, we rigorously follow up on our open recommendations to encourage agencies and Congress to take action. Each year I send agency heads a letter that includes information about open recommendations directed to their agencies and identifies a subset of these as "priority recommendations" for their attention.<sup>2</sup> Our teams also meet regularly with senior officials at agencies to discuss their progress in addressing our open recommendations; for example, senior executives meet quarterly with the Secretary of Agriculture and his team to

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<sup>1</sup> The Committee made nine recommendations to GAO across the 116<sup>th</sup> and 117<sup>th</sup> Congress. See *Final Report: Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress* (Washington, D.C.: December 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Priority recommendations are the GAO recommendations that warrant priority attention from heads of key departments or agencies because their implementation could save large amounts of money; improve congressional and/or executive branch decision-making on major issues; eliminate mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or ensure that programs comply with laws and funds are legally spent, among other benefits.

discuss the recommendations status, among other things. Similar regular, senior-level meetings occur with the Department of Homeland Security, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. We also plan to support the Department of Defense's new portfolio recommendation reviews which are designed to spur senior-level action on our open recommendations. Individual audit teams also follow up with the agencies at least once a year. We post the status of agencies' progress in implementing each recommendation on our website.

As of August 2023, there were 229 open Matters for Consideration, or recommendations, for Congress. Congress is actively considering many of these recommendations. Bills introduced in the 117<sup>th</sup> or 118<sup>th</sup> Congress would have addressed or partially addressed 87 (or 38 percent) of these recommendations, as of September 2023. Action by Congress to address open matters can produce financial and other benefits for the nation. For example, in December 2015, we recommended that Congress consider equalizing the rates Medicare pays for certain health care services, which often vary depending on whether the service is performed in hospital or office settings. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that this could result in \$141 billion in financial benefits from fiscal years 2021 through 2030. Bills to address this recommendation have been introduced in the Senate and the House.

To help get more recommendations to Congress addressed, our senior executives meet with Members and congressional staff to discuss options and provide technical assistance. For example, we have shared legislative text with multiple congressional offices and committees for the 10 recommendations that we made March 2022 to help prevent improper payments and fraud in federal spending. In addition, we are frequently working with committees and Member offices on draft legislative text that address our other recommendations.

Because GAO is a trusted source of nonpartisan, high-quality work, demand for our work is high. We receive hundreds of requests each year to work with about 90 percent of standing committees. Congress also includes provisions for hundreds of studies in legislation and related committee reports. For example, in the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act alone, Congress required 158 GAO reviews. Congress also often asks us to provide expert witnesses at congressional hearings on a wide range of topics such as DOD's F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program, VA and DOD suicide prevention efforts, and the Paycheck Protection Program (see fig. 1.)

**Figure 1: Selected Testimony Topics, Fiscal Year 2022**

### **Goal 1: Address Current and Emerging Challenges to the Well-being and Financial Security of the American People**

- Increasing Paycheck Protection Program Loan Access for Smaller and Underserved Businesses
- Increasing Focus on Access to Mental Health Care
- Increasing the Number of Electric Vehicles in the U.S. Postal Service and Federal Government
- Addressing Bureau of Indian Education Management Weaknesses
- Enhancing DOD and VA Suicide Prevention Efforts
- Strengthening Federal Agency Efforts and Addressing Challenges Repatriating Cultural Items for Tribes
- Improving FAA's Efforts to Address Community Concerns on Aircraft Noise
- Addressing Inaction on Coal Operator Self-Insurance that Increases Financial Risk to Trust Fund
- Improving Opportunities for Minority- and Women-Owned Asset Managers
- Improving DOD's Monitoring of Provider Qualifications and Competence
- Monitoring Efforts to Implement COVID-19 Recommendations and First Step Act at Federal Prisons
- Improving Reform Efforts at the National Weather Service
- Leveraging VA Partnerships to Address VA Health Care Facility Needs

### **Goal 2: Respond to Changing Security Threats and the Challenges of Global Interdependence**

- Identifying and Addressing Barriers to Receiving Federal Disaster Recovery Assistance
- Facing Uncertainties of DOD's F-35 Sustainment Strategy May Limit Military Services Achieving Missions
- Helping HUD Focus on Data to Ensure Vulnerable Populations Receive Disaster Block Grant Funds
- Addressing Biodefense National Strategy and Programmatic Challenges
- Improving DOD's Acquisition of Space Systems
- Addressing Continued F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Cost Growth and Schedule Delays
- Ongoing Challenges Could Jeopardize Navy's Ability to Improve Public Shipyards
- Implementing FISMA Cybersecurity Requirements among Agencies
- Improving Missile Defense Acquisition Processes
- Addressing Oversight Challenges of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative
- Prioritizing the Nation's Critical Infrastructure

### **Goal 3: Help Transform the Federal Government to Address National Challenges**

- Addressing Challenges in NASA's Moon Landing Plans
- Monitoring Federal Information Technology through Biannual Scorecards
- Reducing Freedom of Information Act Backlogs at Selected Agencies
- Increasing Confidence in Public Health Research by Addressing Political Interference
- Sharing Lessons Learned to Inform Future Space Telescopes
- Applying Lessons from Ongoing NASA Major Acquisitions to Improve Future Outcomes
- Identifying IRS Audit Trends for Individual Taxpayers
- Understanding the Federal Use and Privacy Implications of Facial Recognition Technology
- Highlighting Need for Continued Scrutiny of Agency Proposals for the Technology Modernization Fund
- Sharing Initial Observations on Effects of States' Expanded Authority on Remote Sales Tax
- Ensuring Transparency of Judicial Decision-making on Patents
- Enhancing Data on Opportunity Zones Investment Activities and IRS Challenges Ensuring Compliance

Source: GAO. | GAO-900536

Congress regularly uses the results of GAO's work to inform its legislative decisions. For example, the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act and the Consolidated Appropriations Act

included 60 directives to spur agency action on GAO's recommendations. This includes directing the Department of Transportation to develop a national aviation-preparedness plan for communicable diseases, as we previously recommended.

GAO uses its signature bodies of work as strategic tools to help highlight the most critical issues for congressional attention. These signature series include our biennial High-Risk report and our annual reports on Duplication and Cost Savings. These reports have gotten results. For example, over the past 17 years, progress in addressing issues that we have raised in the High-Risk series has resulted in, on average, \$40 billion in financial benefits per year and key operational improvements, such as the use of more sophisticated satellites for weather forecasting.

Through the Duplication and Cost Savings series, we have made 1,885 recommendations to Congress and executive branch agencies. As of April 2023, 73 percent of these recommendations were fully or partially implemented, resulting in about \$600 billion in financial benefits. To help highlight further opportunities for cost savings or revenue enhancement, the annual reports also include a table listing specific actions that could each generate over \$1 billion in financial benefits.

Figure 2 provides a summary of the range of GAO's services.

Figure 2: Evolution of GAO Services

Since its creation in 1921, GAO has evolved in response to the growing size and scope of the federal government. Today, GAO primarily reviews the efficiency and effectiveness of federal programs and agencies, identifies areas at risk for waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement or in need of transformation. We have also become a leading voice in cybersecurity oversight and more expansive in science and technology work for Congress. As these bullets illustrate, GAO is a force-multiplier for Congress.



**Evaluating government performance.** These assessments represent the majority of GAO's work, and result in hundreds of recommendations each year to improve government operations and billions in financial benefits. Agencies typically implement 75 percent or more of GAO's recommendations, consistently resulting in over \$50 billion in financial benefits and over 1,200 program and operational benefits each year. Congress has adopted 80 percent of GAO's suggestions for it to act.



**Conducting real-time analyses.** From bi-monthly reporting on the implementation of economic stimulus programs and the Troubled Assets Relief Program during the global financial crisis to providing monthly briefings on its oversight of the federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic, GAO gathers information in real time, from its source. In addition, we offer informal, quick turnaround, technical assistance to provide just-in-time information to Members and committees.



**Conducting technology assessments and technical guides.** We assess science and technology breakthroughs, along with the opportunities and risks they present to the nation. Our goal is to conduct in-depth analyses on emerging issues and provide policymakers with insight into key technologies, including context, status, benefits and challenges, and policy options.



**Improving the government's financial management with audits and investigations.** GAO conducts financial and other management audits to determine whether public funds are spent efficiently, effectively, and in accordance with applicable laws. We conduct the annual audit of the U.S. government's consolidated financial statements as well as the audits of the financial statements for certain federal agencies such as IRS and FDIC. We also set generally accepted auditing standards for audits of government funds and internal control standards for managers across government. In addition, GAO conducts investigations to assess whether illegal or improper activities are occurring.



**Providing legal decisions and other work.** GAO issues decisions on appropriations law and bid protest of government contract awards. We also issue decisions on whether an agency action is a rule is subject to Congressional review and alert Congress to vacant executive positions exceeding legal limits.

Source: GAO (analysis) and Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com (icons). | GAO-900536

### Ongoing Efforts to Modernize our Products and Services

We have a number of recent, ongoing, or planned, efforts to modernize our products and services to continue to meet congressional clients' needs consistent with many of the Select Committee's recommendations.

- Over the last several years, we introduced several quick-read products that synthesize information relevant to current or emerging issues, generally no more than two pages, for the busy reader. Examples include:
  - Our "[Science and Tech Spotlights](#)" explain emerging science and technology—such as brain-computer interfaces and generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)—and highlight the associated opportunities challenges and relevant policy considerations.



- We developed “Snapshots” to summarize bodies of work in other policy areas and highlight open recommendations. For example, we have issued Snapshots on DOD and the Intelligence Community’s preparedness for biological threats and the federal government’s disaster assistance efforts.
- All reports have a “Fast Facts,” a brief summary of our findings and recommendations. We also use podcasts, blogs, and social media to draw attention to our work.
- We are currently implementing our new Digital Strategy that aims to innovate and produce more accessible and user-friendly content across digital devices. Consistent with this strategy, we already issue signature products, like the High Risk Report, in a digital-first format. We have also launched a pilot to make traditional reports more mobile-friendly as well.
- In May 2023, GAO brought on board a new Chief Information Officer (CIO), who will lead GAO’s information technology modernization efforts. Prior to joining GAO, the CIO served in similar senior leadership roles at large executive branch agencies for over two decades. GAO also recently hired an experienced Deputy CIO as well.
- We have increased congressional outreach about our ability to provide technical assistance to individual Members and congressional committees. Technical assistance is quick-turnaround, informal assistance on discrete topics. Examples of this assistance include reviewing draft legislation, analyzing publicly available data, providing congressional hearing support, or briefing Hill staff on the workings of a particular federal program or technical issue. Technical assistance requests have increased as more Members and committees are made aware of this service.
- In July 2023, GAO hired its first Chief Data Officer (CDO). The CDO will develop and implement best in class data strategy, management, and governance in pursuit of digital innovation, reduced costs, improved timeliness, and ultimately more opportunities for cost savings. For example, an initial project involves consolidating our data catalogs and upgrading our tools so that analysts have better visibility into data availability.
- GAO is launching its new Enterprise Content Management strategy to modernize how we gather, share, and retain information and documents obtained from audited agencies. Analysts will have a robust set of tools to use in carrying out their audits, which should drive audit efficiency and timely reporting to Congress.
- To help ensure we obtain timely, detailed, and sufficient information from audited agencies, we enhanced GAO’s strategies for addressing access to information challenges as soon as they arise. Our strategy emphasizes timely elevation of issues to agency senior officials by GAO’s most senior officials, including myself and the General Counsel as well as our congressional clients.

#### **Factors Contributing to GAO’s Impact**

##### Understanding Congressional Priorities and Needs and Evolving National Issues

GAO conducts ongoing outreach to our congressional clients to both understand their priorities and make them aware of our services, capabilities, and work. Our senior executives conduct

annual outreach to congressional staff to discuss the committees' legislative and oversight priorities and our work. These executives then conduct regular, ongoing outreach to understand how the committees' priorities may be evolving and to ensure that we are meeting the committee's informational needs.

GAO also conducts special outreach at the beginning of each Congress to make sure new Members and staff are aware of GAO's role and services. For example, in early 2023, we emailed new Member offices and included an introductory video about GAO's work, services, and impact. We subsequently provided a more tailored outreach to these Members on our science and technology work that aligned with their new committee portfolios.

We also conduct periodic outreach on specific topics, like science and technology. For instance, in the spring of 2022 and 2023, we met with staff from 13 committee and 11 Member offices about our science and technology capabilities. We sought to make staff aware of our science and technology work and how they could use or request work in this area. We also solicited ideas for emerging topics we should explore.

I also meet with the Chairs and Ranking Members of congressional committees to discuss their committee work and priorities; how GAO's work can support them in their committee assignments; and any feedback and suggestions they have for GAO.

Coupling the information that we obtain through ongoing outreach with our strategic plan, we aim to develop a shared work agenda with the committees. In addition to laying out strategies to accomplish our mission, our strategic plan identifies key emerging challenges and opportunities facing the nation. For example, our strategic plan, as far back as 2000, has identified opportunities and challenges of technological advances with subsequent plans highlighting key issues like quantum computing and nanotechnology in 2010 and AI in 2018.

AI remains a top priority for many congressional committees and offices. In meeting our congressional clients' need for information on AI's promise and risks, we have developed a robust body of work on this topic. For example, we have examined AI's use in facial recognition technology, deepfakes, health care, automated trucking, and money laundering. In recognition of the opportunities and risks of AI, in 2021, GAO's Innovation Lab and GAO's Center for Strategic Foresight led the development of an AI Accountability Framework. This framework identifies key practices to help ensure accountability and responsible AI use by federal agencies and other entities involved in the design, development, deployment, and continuous monitoring of AI systems. In addition, GAO has planned two technology assessments and one audit on generative AI, intended to gain insight into commercial development, human and environmental effects, and agencies' research and implementation efforts.

In addition to conducting outreach on congressional priorities, we continually seek feedback on the work that we provide Congress, consistent with recommendations from the Select Committee. Through a client feedback survey, we seek feedback on the usefulness, clarity, and timeliness on each product that we issue. We also periodically undertake extensive, systematic efforts to collect feedback; our most recent efforts resulted in 20 recommendations we are currently implementing to improve client services, such as a new tip sheet for staff on principles and helpful practices for working with congressional staff.

While we have a good understanding of congressional priorities and informational needs, we continually look for opportunities to enhance our efforts as the Select Committee recommended. Some recent, ongoing, or planned efforts including the following.

- To make it easier for congressional staff to access our services, experts, and work, we revamped our “For Congress” webpage. This one-stop page is designed to contain everything that a staff person may want to know about GAO or our services—from contact information for all GAO subject matter experts (searchable by topic) to how to request a GAO study or legal decision.
- We modernized our client feedback survey instrument. The survey is now mobile-friendly and the survey questions have been streamlined for ease of use.
- We collaborated with the House’s Office of the Chief Administrative Officer to deliver a “GAO 101” training this spring, which featured the Comptroller General. We also worked with the Congressional Staff Academy to offer seminars in 2022 on AI, blockchain, and food safety and security policy.
- We are currently working with the full committee to secure office space in a House building. Having space on site will offer a number of benefits, including more visibility with congressional staff, increased opportunities for impromptu consults, and space for in-person meetings or training sessions.
- We are currently updating our protocols for legal decisions to help ensure that we are meeting Congress’ need for timely information. These updates will reflect feedback from committees and Members and will outline key touch points and status updates on our work.

Moving forward, as we continue to evolve our congressional outreach we would appreciate this subcommittee’s support in securing our in-person participation in the New Member Orientation at the beginning of each Congress. We would also appreciate your help in making the link to GAO on the House and Senate intranet sites more prominent. Both actions will further raise Members and staff’s awareness about how GAO can help them carry out their work.

#### Recruiting and Retaining a Talented, Diverse, Motivated Multi-Disciplinary Workforce

GAO’s diverse, dedicated and talented workforce has policy and programmatic expertise that spans the entire federal government. GAO has deep institutional, subject matter knowledge of federal agencies, programs and operations from decades of work. We also possess a rich array of technical expertise in many disciplines and fields. Our staff have degrees in law, engineering, information technology, economics, public policy, social sciences, physical and life sciences, accounting, contracts and acquisition, national security policy, and international relations, among others. For example, our Health Care team has three nurses on staff to help with the clinical aspects of some audit work. Our Science, Technology Assessment and Analytics (STAA) team has an array of scientists along with civil, electrical, chemical, and systems engineers who provide expertise on technical matters. About three-fourths of our analyst and attorney community have post-graduate degrees.

GAO’s 3,500 staff are located in headquarters in Washington, D.C. and 11 offices throughout the country. This decentralized structure allows us to be co-located with key federal operations, such as NASA and Army operations in Huntsville, AL; Navy operations in Norfolk, VA; and Air Force operations in Dayton, OH. It also allows us to draw on the diverse backgrounds of our staff and recruit and retain staff from across the country. We also use the geographical diversity of our staff to meet congressional needs. For example, our staff located throughout the country are visiting 30 sites for our mandated work on community project funding. GAO’s workforce also

reflects the American public: in fiscal year 2022, women and people of color made up about 58 percent and 36 percent of the GAO workforce, respectively.

We use a national recruiting strategy to attract and hire our talented and diverse workforce. We have longstanding relationships with university staff and professors at about 70 schools across the country, and professional organizations nationwide that we collaborate with throughout the year to attract and hire high-performing, skilled, and diverse talent. We promote job vacancies through job posting platforms, social media posts, recruiting materials, job fairs, and other recruiting events. We also have a robust intern program that draws undergraduate and graduate students from top universities from across the country. The program serves as an important recruiting mechanism; most of the people that we hire each year come from our intern program.

After we recruit and hire candidates, we tend to keep them. We consistently maintain low attrition rates— about 6 percent, on average, over the past 6 years. Our low attrition rate contributes to our significant institutional knowledge of the programs we audit.

We are able to recruit and retain highly qualified staff because we offer an important and meaningful public service mission. Our staff believe in the mission of improving government performance and operations, and they get to work on challenging, topical, and important public policy issues. They perform this work in an organization that is committed to creating a workplace where employees feel valued, respected, and treated fairly. We also offer a number of important employee benefits for today's worker, such as telework.

As a result, GAO staff morale and job satisfaction is high. In our fiscal year 2022 employee feedback survey, just over 90 percent of staff reported that they would recommend GAO as a good place to work. GAO is recognized by the Partnership for Public Service as one of the best places to work in the federal government, consistently ranking among the top four mid-size federal agencies during my 15-year tenure so far in the Comptroller General position. For the past three years, GAO has ranked first among mid-size agencies. We also have consistently ranked among the top mid-size agencies for our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Our reputation as an employer of choice enhances our ability to attract and retain the talent at all levels needed to meet congressional needs.

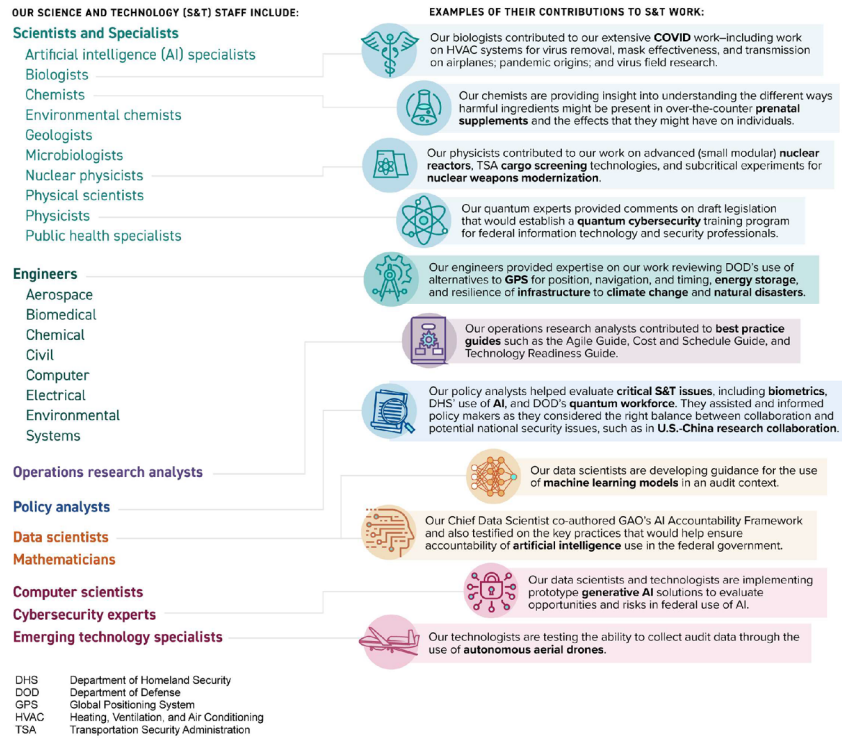
#### Growing our Science, Technology and Cybersecurity Expertise to Meet Evolving Needs

##### *Science and Technology*

To meet congressional needs, we have significantly expanded our science and technology and cybersecurity expertise. This has allowed us to meet growing demand for work in these areas. Our continued growth is consistent with congressional encouragement that we continue to develop and expand our science and technology capabilities.

Since 2019, we have increased staff resources in our Science, Technology Assessment and Analytics (STAA) team from 49 to 156 employees, as of September 2023. Collectively these staff hold over 100 advanced STEM-related degrees, including 38 STEM PhDs, as of September 2023. These degrees are in a variety of fields such as microbiology, quantum mechanics, nuclear physics, public health, chemical engineering, mathematics, physical sciences, and digital sciences. (See fig. 3.)

Figure 3: Expertise of Science, Technology Assessment and Analytics Team Staff



Since 2019, we have issued 44 Science and Tech Spotlights, which distill complex issues into a two-page summary. For example, we have issued Spotlights on generative AI, quantum technologies, and non-fungible tokens. During this period, we also issued 22 in-depth Technology Assessments on various topics, including regenerative medicine, fusion energy, and quantum computing and communications. (See fig. 4). We also issued a series of reports, in collaboration with the National Academy of Medicine that examined the potential use of AI in healthcare. These reports focused on accelerating drug development; medical diagnostics; and the provision of healthcare.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is a private, non-profit society of distinguished scholars. Established by an Act of Congress, NAS is charged with providing independent, objective advice to the nation on matters related to science and technology and is composed of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the National Academy of Medicine.

Figure 4: Examples of Recently Issued Reports on Critical Science and Tech Issues (including Technology Assessments)

**GAO** U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE  
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT, AND ANALYTICS

FALL 2023

● Audit report  
○ Spotlight  
▲ Technology Assessment

### Recently issued reports on critical S&T issues

#### Biomedical and Health Innovations

- ▲ **Economic Incentives for Therapeutic Development for Potential Pandemics**, GAO-23-105847
- ▲ **Regenerative Medicine**: Therapeutic Applications, Challenges, and Policy Options, GAO-23-105430
- **Synthetic Biology**, GAO-23-106648
- **Pandemic Origins**: Technologies and Challenges for Biological Investigations (GAO-23-105406); and related Testimony, (GAO-23-106562)
- ▲ **Artificial Intelligence in Health Care**: Benefits and Challenges of Machine Learning Technologies for Medical Diagnostics, GAO-22-104629
- **Brain-Computer Interfaces**, GAO-22-106118
- **Long COVID**, GAO-22-105666

#### Computing and Communications

- **Generative AI**, GAO-23-106782
- **Artificial Intelligence**: Key Practices to Help Ensure Accountability in Federal Use, GAO-23-106811
- **Securing Data for a Post-Quantum World**, GAO-23-106559
- **Digital Twin-Virtual Models of People and Objects**, GAO-23-106453
- **Zero Trust Architecture**, GAO-23-106065
- ▲ **Blockchain**: Emerging Technology Offers Benefits for Some Applications but Faces Challenges GAO-22-104625
- **Extended Reality Technologies**, GAO-22-105541
- ▲ **Quantum Computing and Communications**: Status and Prospects, GAO-22-104422
- **Artificial Intelligence**: An Accountability Framework for Federal Agencies and Other Entities, GAO-21-519SP

#### Defense and Homeland Security

- ▲ **Chemical Weapons**: Status of Forensic Technologies and Challenges to Source Attribution, GAO-23-105439
- **Directed Energy Weapons**, GAO-23-106717
- **Counter-Drone Technologies**, GAO-22-105703
- **Facial Recognition Technology**: Current and Planned Uses by Federal Agencies, GAO-21-526
- ▲ **Forensic Technology**: Algorithms Strengthen Forensic Analysis, but Several Factors Can Affect Outcomes, GAO-21-435SP
- **Biodefense**: DHS Exploring New Methods to Replace BioWatch and Could Benefit from Additional Guidance, GAO-21-292

#### Environment, Energy, and Agriculture

- ▲ **Utility-Scale Energy Storage**: Technologies and Challenges for an Evolving Grid, GAO-23-105583
- ▲ **Fusion Energy**: Potentially Transformative Technology Still Faces Fundamental Challenges, GAO-23-105583
- ▲ **Decarbonization**: Status, Challenges, and Policy Options for Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage, GAO-22-105274
- ▲ **Large Constellations of Satellites**: Mitigating Environmental and Other Effects, GAO-22-105166
- ▲ **Persistent Chemicals**: Technologies for PFAS Assessment, Detection, and Treatment, GAO-22-105088
- **Deep-Sea Mining**, GAO-22-105507

#### Federal R&D Oversight and Cross-Cutting R&D

- **Federal Research**: NIH Could Take Additional Actions to Manage Risks Involving Foreign Subrecipients, GAO-23-106119
- **Priority Open Recommendations**: Office of Science and Technology Policy, GAO-23-106571
- **National Institutes of Health**: Better Data Will Improve Understanding of Federal Contributions to Drug Development, GAO-23-105656
- **Small Business Research Programs**: Reporting on Award Timeliness Could Be Enhanced, GAO-23-105591
- **Scientific Integrity**: HHS Agencies Need to Develop Procedures and Train Staff on Reporting and Addressing Political Interference, GAO-22-104613
- **National Science Foundation**: Better Reporting Could Give More Visibility into Gains in States' Research Competitiveness, GAO-22-105043

#### Manufacturing and Innovation

- **Semiconductor Supply Chain**: Policy Considerations from Selected Experts for Reducing Risks and Mitigating Shortages, GAO-22-105923
- **Advanced Manufacturing**: Innovation Institutes Report Technology Progress and Members Report Satisfaction with Their Involvement, GAO-22-103979

#### Patent and Intellectual Property

- **Patent Trial and Appeal Board**: Increased Transparency Needed in Oversight of Judicial Decision-Making, GAO-23-105336
- **Department of Energy**: Improved Performance Planning Could Strengthen Technology Transfer, GAO-21-202
- **Biomedical Research**: NIH Should Publicly Report More Information about the Licensing of Its Intellectual Property, GAO-21-52

#### Space and Transportation

- **Drone Swarm Technologies**, GAO-23-106930
- **Advanced Batteries**, GAO-23-106332
- **Satellite Licensing**: FCC Should Reexamine Its Environmental Review Process for Large Constellations of Satellites, GAO-23-105005
- ▲ **Defense Navigation Capabilities**: DOD is Developing Positioning, Navigation, and Timing Technologies to Complement GPS, GAO-21-320SP

#### S&T Workforce

- **National Institute of Standards and Technology**: Improved Workforce Planning Needed to Address Recruitment and Retention Challenges, GAO-23-105521
- **Digital Services**: Considerations for a Federal Academy to Develop a Pipeline of Digital Staff, GAO-22-105388
- **High-Performance Computing**: Advances Made Towards Implementing the National Strategy, but Better Reporting and a More Detailed Plan Are Needed, GAO-21-104500
- **Science and Technology**: Strengthening and Sustaining the Federal Science and Technology Workforce, GAO-21-461T

Ver. 2.12 | Updated: 9.21.2023

Source: GAO analysis | GAO-23-800505

Scan the QR code to view a comprehensive list of our S&T work.

GAO's Innovation Lab, housed within STAA, leverages advanced analytic capabilities to bolster the federal accountability community. For example, the Lab helped pioneer the ID Verification Controls Simulator, an interactive web-based resource that helps federal agencies analyze controls in their programs and prevent improper payments. The Lab is also developing a generative AI prototype with the same basic capabilities as those found in industry. This AI

prototype could summarize GAO products on specific topics, which will help us efficiently use and digest past work and target outreach to congressional clients.

To ensure STAA continues to attract the diverse interdisciplinary expertise required for evolving science and technology needs, we plan to leverage two additional flexible hiring authorities moving forward. First, we are strengthening an entry-level pathway to hire data science students through undergraduate and graduate internships. Second, for more advanced and specialized expertise needed on a temporary basis, we are pursuing the appointment of Science and Technology Fellows. Both of these flexible hiring authorities could help STAA in supporting requests from Congress.

### *Cybersecurity*

GAO has also worked to expand its cybersecurity expertise. We have a decades-long track record of informing congressional decision-making on cybersecurity and information technology issues. Since 2004, the Information Technology and Cybersecurity team (ITC) has made about 8,400 recommendations to agencies to improve their information technology and cybersecurity operations and programs. Of these recommendations, 82 percent have been closed/implemented.

In 2019, we created our Center for Enhanced Cybersecurity within ITC, bringing additional focus and capacity to GAO's work. This Center is a dedicated group of cyber professionals who dig deep into the technical details of systems and networks to get to the bottom of persistent cybersecurity weaknesses within federal agencies as well as helping to ensure that the nation's critical infrastructure is protected. This critical infrastructure includes systems and assets so vital to the nation that their incapacitation or destruction would be debilitating to U.S. security, economic stability, or public health and safety.<sup>4</sup> Since 2019, we have increased ITC's staff resources from 172 to 206 employees.

GAO will continue to assess multiple cybersecurity priorities. We are currently evaluating the execution of the Administration's recently announced national cybersecurity strategy and the need for sustained leadership to perform effective oversight. In fiscal years 2023 and 2024, GAO's cybersecurity assessments will include federal efforts to enhance cybersecurity protections in areas such as the implementation of zero-trust architectures, the deployment of sophisticated systems to monitor federal networks for intrusions and other malicious activity, and strategies for leveraging AI to enhance cybersecurity and for addressing cyber risks to operational technology.

### Leveraging External Networks

GAO continues to develop and leverage external networks to meet Congress's information needs. Our well-developed professional networks allow us to avoid duplication of effort, identify emerging issues, and most importantly, connect with subject matter experts for our audit work and other technical, strategic topics. For example, at the start of every audit, we reach out to officials with the Congressional Budget Office and Congressional Research Service to make

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<sup>4</sup>The 16 critical infrastructure sectors are Chemical; Commercial Facilities; Communications; Critical Manufacturing; Dams; Defense Industrial Base; Emergency Services; Energy; Financial Services; Food and Agriculture; Government Facilities; Health Care and Public Health; Information Technology; Nuclear Reactors, Materials, and Waste; Transportation Systems; and Water and Wastewater Systems

sure we are not duplicating efforts. Similarly, we work closely with the Inspectors General and other audit communities at the federal, state, and local levels to leverage each other's work and share insights. Through our networks, we also tap public and private experts to get their input when we are developing guidance, such as our [Technology Assessment Design Handbook](#), [Cost Estimating and Assessment Guide](#), and [Technology Readiness Assessment Guide](#). By seeking input and sharing drafts for public comment, we work to ensure that our guidance is comprehensive and reliable and reflects leading private and public sector practices.

Our network includes officials and experts from government, nonprofit, and private sector entities, academic institutions, and associations. For example, for over a decade, we have maintained a standing contract with the National Academy of Sciences; this enables us to quickly engage the Academy when we need outside expert help with our work.

Our network is also global. Through our leadership and participation in the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), we have contacts at national audit offices from over 190 countries. This network is especially important given today's interconnected world. GAO participates in multiple INTOSAI committees and currently chairs the Working Group on Financial and Economic Stability.

We also consult a number of advisory boards for various issues. For example, the Polaris Council brings together exceptional science, technology, and policy leaders and experts who advise the Chief Scientist and others on emerging science and technology issues. The Educators Advisory Panel advises me and other GAO executives on existing and emergent public policy issues as well as strategies, best practices, and trends related to recruiting, hiring, and developing a talented workforce. The panel is composed of deans and highly qualified professors from a range of public and private academic institutions.

Finally, our network includes eight fellows who are experts in foresight and futures thinking from around the world. They are part of our Center for Strategic Foresight, which was created in 2018 to provide foresight on emerging issues. Collectively, the fellows' backgrounds span government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, academia, and international organizations.

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Chairwoman Bice and Ranking Member Kilmer, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to answer the subcommittee's questions at the appropriate time.



Chairwoman BICE. Perfect. Thank you, Mr. Dodaro.

We will now question the witness, beginning with myself, followed by Ranking Member Kilmer. We are going to alternate questioning. Any Member wishing to be recognized should just signal to the chair. I will now recognize myself for the purpose of questioning the witness.

I first want to just mention that you said a couple of things in your opening statement that caught my attention, words like “agile,” “dynamic,” “real time,” “constant reevaluation.” These are things that I think many of your counterparts across Government could maybe adopt and embrace because we do not often see that. The comment was made earlier, you know, we continue to do the same things over and over. I really appreciate and value the work that you are putting into really focusing on how can we make things more successful within the GAO.

Let me start by asking you a question. You have been with this institution for quite some time. We mentioned earlier we are thankful for your service of 50 years. In 2025, it will actually mark the end of your 15-year term as Comptroller General. As we think ahead for the agency and understand that you want to be somewhat deferential to the process in finding and onboarding a new leader for the agency, what are some of the critical performance functions that should be required for an incoming Comptroller General?

Mr. DODARO. I think you need someone who has a broad perspective on management issues and policy issues in the Government. You know, GAO started out as an organization focused on financial management issues following World War I. We have changed dramatically over a period of time to evolve to meet the current needs and the future needs of the Congress and the country.

As part of doing that, right now less than 10 percent of our workforce are financial auditors. We still audit the consolidated financial statements of the Federal Government. We still are financial advisors to the Congress. I have been trying mightily in that area. The bulk of our work are performance audits of Government programs, policies, and issues. We have economists, operations research people, public policy analysts. We have added scientists and, you know, information technology, cybersecurity experts in those areas. The GAO is really a multidisciplinary organization.

You know, while we have our roots in financial management, still do some of the important work in that area, you need someone who has a breadth of knowledge beyond just financial management to be able to run GAO effectively and serve the Congress going forward.

You need someone who can maintain our nonpartisan status. That is essential to GAO’s reputation and effectiveness. We are one of the few institutions that are still respected for our independence and nonpartisan status on both sides of the aisle in both Chambers of Congress. I take great pride in that, and I hope that the next Comptroller General can do that.

Then also you need someone who will be focused on accountability within the organization but across Government, but also treat our people well. I mean, it is very important. You know, one of my emphasis as Comptroller General was to not only have our

dedicated people—we were always dedicated to the quality of our products but not always the same level of attention on developing our people, as individuals, as professionals. It is very important. I try and put that on a par, and I hope the next person recognizes that because they are a dedicated, talented workforce, one of the best in the world for our type of organization.

Chairwoman BICE. It sounds like this is a tall order, Mr. Dodaro, to find someone to fill your shoes in the future.

Mr. DODARO. I am not willing to take another 15-year term. My wife—

Chairwoman BICE. All right. Fair enough.

You do not want to make it 65 years? I mean, that sounds like a good, nice round number.

Mr. DODARO. If it was up to me—

Chairwoman BICE. Let me pivot to another topic if I may.

One of the Select Committee's recommendations from last Congress was that the Committees of jurisdiction should examine the underlying statutory authorities for the support agencies and determine if they need to be updated or modernized to better support your work for Congress.

In the light of that recommendation and looking at GAO's organic statute, which I understand is actually from the 1970's, do you have any recommendations of where Committees of jurisdiction might consider changes or updates to improve the agency and enhance your work and strengthen the service to Congress?

Mr. DODARO. Yes. There have been selective updates past 1970. 1980 we were given our own personnel authority, which has been terrific. We are not under OPM (Office of Personnel Management) rules, regulations. We have a whole different pay system that we have had. We are not on a GS (General Schedule) system. Up through—the most recent change was 2017 when Congress reaffirmed our right to go to court to enforce our access authorities if agencies did not give us the information that we need in that area.

You know, my feeling on this is it is very important that Congress be very prudent in opening up the legislation for GAO. Once you do that, you invite the executive branch to participate in the discussion of how they are audited, and our independence is very important. You know, because the President would have to sign some legislation, they weigh in in that process. Now that Congress is in control, we will have to see what happens. I think anything that—our authorities right now are strong. We are able to do everything we need to do for the Congress, and I would encourage the Congress to be very careful.

Chairwoman BICE. OK.

Mr. DODARO. GAO is unique, you know, because we have to be independent, and that is why we are in the legislative branch.

Chairwoman BICE. Absolutely.

Mr. DODARO. I think—my philosophy is, if there are things that Congress would like to have GAO do, we should have a dialog about it.

Chairwoman BICE. Thank you for that. My time has expired, so I need to pause there.

At this time, I recognize Ranking Member Kilmer for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. KILMER. Thanks, Madam Chair.

I am going to try to ask, like, seven questions in 5 minutes, so all related to the Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act.

Again, I think the work you do is really important, but it is only as important as like we act on. Right? To start, can you comment on how most of your recommendations get closed out right now?

Mr. DODARO. Yes. Most of them are voluntarily adopted by the executive branch agencies.

Mr. KILMER. OK. What—

Mr. DODARO. On average, 77 percent of our recommendations are implemented within a 4-year period of time that we make them. I send a letter to the head of every department and agency every year with open GAO recommendations, prioritize a few that I think are most significant.

Mr. KILMER. Yes.

Mr. DODARO. Now, Congress—since 2000, we have issued 1,100 matters for Congress, directly to Congress to consider; 80 percent of those have been implemented. There is a couple hundred still open; 38 percent of those have been included in legislation that has been introduced last Congress and this Congress. We are working to get those implemented. It is a big—we have a rigorous follow up process.

Mr. KILMER. Why do one in five remain open?

Mr. DODARO. One in five?

Mr. KILMER. You said 80 percent get acted on, 20 percent do not.

Mr. DODARO. Yes, right. Well—

Mr. KILMER. Is it because they are hard?

Mr. DODARO [continuing]. Congress is not of like mind.

Mr. KILMER. Yes.

Mr. DODARO. It is hard—

Mr. KILMER. What?

Mr. DODARO. I know this comes as a shock to you today, but sometimes it is tough to get consensus on some of these recommendations that we make to the Congress for them in order to act because everything we do to the Congress requires legislation.

Mr. KILMER. Right.

Mr. DODARO. The legislation sometimes is slow in coming, you know.

Mr. KILMER. You mentioned the report that you make to us.

Mr. DODARO. Yes.

Mr. KILMER. Are there other things that you are doing to try to increase that uptake?

Mr. DODARO. Yes, sure. Yes, one thing we do is we develop legislative language. I just testified before the Congress, in a 5-hour hearing I might add, on fraud, waste, and abuse coming out of the pandemic. I have 10, 12 legislative suggestions. We have drafted legislative language, have given it to Committees, and are working with them to try and get that implemented to go forward. We are very proactive in working with the Committees.

Now, we report things. The overlap duplication report that we have every year I have added cost savings and revenue enhance-

ments. That is not even required under the legislation. I use that as a platform. There is a report card in there of how many recommendations Congress has adopted as opposed to the executive branch.

Mr. KILMER. Gotcha.

Mr. DODARO. You know we report things several times. It is in the original report. We reiterate it again in the overlap and duplication report. Now we have this third report on open matters that we issue to the Congress. The real work gets done with us working with the Committees—

Mr. KILMER. Yes.

Mr. DODARO [continuing]. to try and encourage them to do legislation.

The same thing on the executive branch, if the executive branch balks, we work with them to try to get legislative language and appropriations or authorizations to require the executive agencies to implement our recommendations. That routinely happens as well.

Mr. KILMER. Can you share more about how GAO has implemented the new law, the Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act, and whether you have seen any difference in terms of how Congress responds to open recommendations?

Mr. DODARO. Yes. It has been not that long since we have issued the reports. We have issued two; one where we estimated the total cost of implementing our open recommendations, and we said it would be between \$92 billion and \$182 billion if Congress implemented those recommendations.

Now, what we do is we give some idea of the magnitude of what the savings would be on our recs—millions, tens of millions, a hundred million, billion, tens of billion—and because, at the end of the day, the real estimate that counts is CBO's (Congressional Budget Office) estimate, and we do not want to duplicate and get in the business of trying to replicate CBO.

Many times, when we talk to Committees they will say: Well, it is nice we have your estimate, but unless we have CBO's estimate—now that gets done if it gets in legislative language and Congress asks CBO to make the estimate.

Most of the savings that we report come from third-party estimates, you know, about what happens.

You know, while it is important for us to try to give Congress a signal on how much money could be saved, we do not want to duplicate CBO. They are the official scorekeeper.

Mr. KILMER. I know you are setting up shop in Longworth, which I am excited about. I want to just ask ahead of time, please do not put a restraining order out against my team. It seems like an opportunity to enact some of those recommendations around increased staff oversight training—

Mr. DODARO. Right.

Mr. KILMER [continuing]. and enhancing the customer service experience with GAO. Is that the plan?

Mr. DODARO. Yes, that is the plan. It is underway.

A couple of things I would ask for—and I think that is a good idea. We asked years ago to get an office up here in Congress. When I started in 1973, we had an office here in the Capitol. It was in the basement. It was a nice, cozy place, but it was a beach-

head. We lost that over the years as things got tied up here and a lot of renovations were underway. I think that would help.

What also would help, the last time I was before the Select Committee last Congress, I asked—for years I have been trying to get into the Orientation Program for New Members, and we have not been very successful in doing that. I would ask again to do that because I think it is an opportunity to explain what GAO could do for individual Members and then their Committee assignments as well, and also to get a more prominent marking on the House—on the home page, so there is more direction to GAO to be able to do that. If the Committee could help us in that regard, I think it would be a good idea. We plan to have people up here all the time in the office and try to help, and we have Find an Expert on Issues planned and Ask a Scientist planned, you know, a lot of things—

Chairwoman BICE. Well, as someone who is passionate about the New Member Orientation Program and process and wrote a paper on how it should be changed, I now sit as the chair of the Subcommittee I think maybe because of that. We will certainly take your suggestions into consideration.

It is my honor to now recognize the chair of the full Committee, Chairman Steil, for his 5 minutes' worth of questions.

Chairman STEIL. I think we got through about three of Mr. Kilmer's seven questions.

Mr. KILMER. No. We got through like six.

Chairman STEIL. No, I am teasing. I am teasing you.

I want to pick up right where Mr. Kilmer was on how we integrate the GAO recommendations in the Congress. You have the beachhead coming in. You talked about training. Can you talk about how you interact with oversight staff—I know you do some of that work—and how we should think about that?

Mr. DODARO. Yes. No, we do a lot of work with the oversight Committees as well. They are one of our most frequent requesters of GAO. They sponsor the high-risk series that we have. Now, this is a series that we started in 1990 actually. It is probably the longest running bipartisan supported good Government effort in our Government's history. What we focused on initially was fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement in the Federal Government. Then it has evolved over time to also be on transformation.

We update the list at the beginning of each new Congress, and we focus on recommendations in that area. I always appear as I did in February—or I think it was March—April maybe this year to unveil the updating of the list in that area, and that leads to a lot of savings. Areas on the list are, like, Medicare, Medicaid. We have got a payment problem in the Federal Government, overpayments, since we work with Congress to require them to be reported. They are \$2.4 trillion. Last year, it was \$242 trillion alone. Fraud during the pandemic was epic. We just issued a report that just in the unemployment insurance area alone, there is \$100 billion to \$135 billion.

Chairman STEIL. To dig into—so let me take that and just shift gears slightly—

Mr. DODARO. Sure.

Chairman STEIL [continuing]. because I hold your concern. Actually, I hold it for how the EV tax credits are going to be paid as

we go into 2024 with car dealers being the determination and sending the money. I think that is ripe for fraud. That is a whole separate conversation.

Mr. DODARO. Right.

Chairman STEIL [continuing]. is we look at your uptake of 20 percent remain open. We are conflicted; maybe not everyone agrees. Could you just give a little more color as to why we are at one out of five not being implemented?

Mr. DODARO. Yes.

Chairman STEIL. I accept that not everybody is going to agree 100 percent with everything that is put out by you.

Mr. DODARO. Yes. I will give you a couple good examples of some big ticket ones that I think could be. For a number of years—and I have been reiterating this over and over again—in the Medicare program, if you go in for evaluation services and you go to a doctor associated with a hospital as opposed to going to a doctor in their own private practice in a separate commercial building, the Government pays you more for the doctor in the—if you equalize that, you would save \$141 billion over 10 years. This is CBO's estimate.

You know, healthcare has got a lobby, and it is no surprise to anybody, and it is tough to change some of the rules in healthcare. A lot of our recommendations open are in healthcare.

Chairman STEIL. Are some of these recommendations then rule changes that Congress has to enact?

Mr. DODARO. Absolutely.

Chairman STEIL. Congress is actually the block, not a Federal Government agency that is failing to act?

Mr. DODARO. You said "block," not me.

Chairman STEIL. No, you are right.

Mr. DODARO. It requires—

Chairman STEIL [continuing]. disagree or not implement the recommendation.

Mr. DODARO. Right.

Chairman STEIL. It is the legislative side is some of this 20 percent rather than a Federal Government agency that you identify—

Mr. DODARO. It is a mix. It is a mix, but it is some.

Chairman STEIL [continuing]. for making false payments. You are making payments change X to Y.

Mr. DODARO. Yes, right, right, right. Yes, some require legislation. Most of the big dollar amounts require legislative changes.

On the administrative side, the problem we have had cybersecurity. All right. I designated cybersecurity a high-risk area across the entire Federal Government. The first time we ever did that, 1997. We have issued thousands of recommendations. Many of the open recommendations now are in the cybersecurity area, more on protecting critical infrastructure protection that I added in 2003. The agencies are slow to implement these things. That is why I have prioritized the recommendations to them.

We are now meeting with—our team meeting with the Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack, for example, on a quarterly basis to go over open recommendations. We do that at CMS. The CMS and Defense have the lowest record of implementation rates, and I have talked

to them. We are working on that, meeting with them on a more on-going basis.

There is a culture in some of the agencies where it is just difficult to get change in place, and DOD is one of them.

Chairman STEIL. Understood.

Thank you for your time, for being here.

I know there is a lot of people on your broader team at GAO that work incredibly hard. Thanks to them as well. Nobody can do anything without a good team behind them.

Mr. DODARO. Absolutely.

Chairman STEIL. I know you have a lot of great men and women that are dedicated to rooting out waste, fraud, and abuse. There is work we can do to continue to modernize GAO, but appreciate you being here.

I now yield back, Madam Chair.

Chairwoman BICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I recognize myself for 5 minutes for additional questioning.

I want to start by just touching on a couple of quick things. You mentioned your excitement around putting in an office in Longworth to be able to sort of highlight the work that GAO does, and I think that is important. I do want to ask you what other avenues you are looking at to try to build awareness and maybe bridge that awareness gap that currently exists.

While I will tell you that certainly we will take the consideration of putting your information into the New Member Orientation, the reality is there are a lot of people that want time in those meetings, and it becomes a competition in some ways of, you know, what is a priority.

What I would tell you is I am not sure that I have a lot of awareness of what GAO did or does until maybe the last year or so. For me, knowing now the reporting and, you know, information that you are providing is incredibly crucial. I want to help you do that, but I would also like to know sort of how you are addressing that issue.

The second point I want to make is maybe one of more of a little bit of a concern. You mentioned that you are focused on being non-partisan. That is important to you. You also said in your comments that you have developed some legislative suggestions. Where did that directive come from?

Mr. DODARO. In terms of developing legislative language? Well, we do it in two cases. One, we are asked to by some of the Committees.

Chairwoman BICE. OK.

Mr. DODARO. In areas that are GAO, you know, sort of hallmark areas, like fraud, waste, and abuse, you know, I have done that as a service in those areas, but only in those areas. We do not get into policy areas or issues associated with that unless we are asked to. Sometimes we provide drafting legislative language to the Committees without any, you know, attribution to GAO. It is just done as a service to them.

Chairwoman BICE. Perfect. I think I just want to be cautious about that. Right? If you are providing legislative suggestions, you could be—it could be perceived as you are being partisan in one

way or another, and I think that is something that we want to try to avoid.

Mr. DODARO. Yes. I only do it where—this, what I referred to, is on fraud, and fraud is—

Chairwoman BICE. Bipartisan issue.

Mr. DODARO [continuing]. bipartisan issue I think.

Chairwoman BICE. I would hope so.

Mr. DODARO. Nobody is supporting fraud. They want to fix fraud.

Chairwoman BICE. Exactly.

Mr. DODARO. I only do it in those sort of safe harbor areas.

Chairwoman BICE. OK. Thank you for clarifying.

Mr. DODARO. Sure.

Chairwoman BICE. You want to talk a little bit about addressing the awareness gap.

Mr. DODARO. Yes, yes. We have an Office of Congressional Relations. They outreach to the Committees. One of the things that is—

Chairwoman BICE. Let us talk about individual offices because I think the Committees is great—

Mr. DODARO. Yes.

Chairwoman BICE. [continuing]. and I think that is important. I think that there is so much value—

Mr. DODARO. Right.

Chairwoman BICE. [continuing]. in actually connecting with individual offices, especially as an appropriator myself, you provide a lot of information. I do not know that maybe that is a place that has been a focus, but—

Mr. DODARO. Yes. Well, you know, we sent letters to all 80 new Members this year with a link to GAO, had a message on there about how they could get access to our services or whatever.

What has happened over the years, as I looked up—when I first joined GAO, we had over 5,000 people. OK. We have got about 3,500 right now. We—our priorities and protocols that we have worked out with the Congress is to do work based upon—priority one is things in law or Committee or conference reports accompanying the law. Two is chairs and Ranking Members. We treat both the same. Then third is requests from an individual Member of Congress.

We have not had any—enough resources to entertain that for a while. The Members have to go to—the individual Members would have to go to a Committee to get support to get a GAO report. That was not always that way.

Chairwoman BICE. OK.

Mr. DODARO. We had more reason to interact with the Members before, and they had more interest in receiving information from us, so—

Chairwoman BICE. Well, I think that you all provide such a valuable service. I understand what you are saying about challenges, but—

Mr. DODARO. I think what could be done to be helpful would be for this Committee to encourage other Committees to at least within the Committee to have a meeting about what GAO is doing for the Committee and what all of the Members are on the Committee because right now it is usually the chair or Ranking Member or



both that understand what is going on with their staff. The individuals on—the Members of that Committee may not be aware of GAO's extensive work for the Committee in on more fulsome manner.

Chairwoman BICE. Perfect.

Mr. DODARO. We will try to continue to meet with individual Members' offices to try to provide the services.

Chairwoman BICE. Great. Thank you.

Mr. DODARO. Whatever ideas you have there would be helpful.

Chairwoman BICE. Last, I want to pivot to GAO detailees, which has become quite a fun topic for us in the office. Can you talk a little bit about currently how many GAO detailees are out in the field with placements either in the House or the Senate? Have these numbers changed over time?

Mr. DODARO. Yes. Well, we try to keep it around 12 or 14 people right now. Historically—

Chairwoman BICE. How long are they typically detailed to?

Mr. DODARO. By law they can only be detailed to Committees for up to a year.

Chairwoman BICE. OK. Is that how long you typically have them there is a year?

Mr. DODARO. Yes, yes.

Chairwoman BICE. OK.

Mr. DODARO. Sometimes it will go for 6 months. Then, you know, if we get requests to go longer than a year, we have to have a conversation, you know. In the 1980's, you know, when we had many more people, we had many more detailees.

Chairwoman BICE. Yes.

Mr. DODARO. That is an area that can be discussed—

Chairwoman BICE. OK.

Mr. DODARO [continuing]. and it is very important. The perception is what we try to do is balance it because, on Committees, if you put one on one side of the aisle, you have to probably do it on the other side.

Chairwoman BICE. Absolutely, OK.

Mr. DODARO. You do not have that perception of trying to tip, you know, the balance of resources that is determined by the majority and the minority—

Chairwoman BICE. Got it.

Mr. DODARO [continuing]. rules of the Congress.

Chairwoman BICE. My time has expired, so I am going to wrap up there.

I am going to recognize Ranking Member Kilmer for 5 minutes.

Mr. KILMER. Thanks, Madam Chair.

When we were walking in, we were talking about unusual times here in the Nation's Capitol. I am just curious, what happens to your agency in the event of a Government shutdown?

Mr. DODARO. You know, we keep a core group of people—historically, we keep a core group of people here to help Congress make the final decisions they need to make to get the Government back open. That includes our appropriation law people who render legal decisions on what is appropriate and not appropriate to do during a shutdown.

By and large, we stop the work. I mean, there is only two exceptions to the Antideficiency Act. One is to protect life, and the other is to protect property. We protect our property.

Now, this year, we have some money that is multiyear money, and so, like, to oversee accountability of the money being sent to the Ukraine. We still have coronavirus money, pandemic money for that program and Infrastructure Investment Inflation Reduction Act. We will be able to continue some selective audits but only because we have multiyear money—

Mr. KILMER. Yes.

Mr. DODARO [continuing]. and not 1-year money. Everything else gets shut down.

Now, if Congress holds a hearing, we would bring people back. We would bring the teams back. We react to what Congress' needs are. Other than that—and we have to be careful because we are the ones who render legal decisions on whether other agencies across the entire Federal Government follow the law—

Mr. KILMER. Right.

Mr. DODARO [continuing]. during a shutdown practice.

Mr. KILMER. OK. Well, I like that \$145 return per dollar invested. I hope we keep you running.

You know, one of the things we have talked a bit about both on the Modernization Committee and on this Subcommittee is artificial intelligence and its potential to help Members and staff and support agency staff do their job more efficiently and effectively.

One topic that I guess came up in our CRS (Congressional Research Service) hearing is having AI generate bill summaries; then having a human check to ensure nonpartisan summaries exist for all of the bills Congress considers that might reduce some of the workload.

Can you just share with the Committee about how GAO sees the potential for AI in terms of the expertise it can offer Congress, how the agency is using AI itself in its own day-to-day work?

Mr. DODARO. Yes, yes. It has a lot of potential, but, like, with a lot of things, it has risks. You know, new technologies have risks associated with them as well, both legal, ethical and, you know, accuracy kind of risk.

Mr. KILMER. Yes.

Mr. DODARO. We are—we have an innovation lab that we created as part of our science, technology, analytics work. They are doing two things: One, to help us figure out how to audit AI in other agencies. We are looking now across Government—of the use of AI across the Government. We have done a lot of work at DOD, for example, as they try to ramp up to meet competition from China and other areas.

They have created an accountability framework of how we can look at governance, data performance, and monitoring issues. We have criteria now so that we can audit AI.

We are also looking at how we can use AI within GAO. We have vast amounts of information, to make it more accessible both to GAO people, and once we can demonstrate the use, we have a large language model that we brought in right now. We are looking at loading all of GAO reports. I mean, we have thousands of reports over the years. You know, that information could be queried in a

much more sophisticated way. Then, once we demonstrate the ability to do that, that we are satisfied that it is accurate, making that available to the Congress and all of the staff in the Congress so they could query, you know, questions and go directly to that data base of GAO that would not be populated by other things. You know, all of our information is reliable and accurate and verified.

Those are a couple of applications. I think there are other things that could be done where we could use AI to improve how we audit. Mostly I am also preparing for what we audit.

Mr. KILMER. Yes.

Mr. DODARO. That is important as well so we can give the Congress—we are also providing—that is an area we are providing technical assistance in the development of legislation. Part of regulating it is first defining it, and there is a definition that is in the NDAA from 2019, but it is pretty broad, and so we have been giving a lot of assistance to the Congress.

In our lab, we have technologists. We have data science people, and then we also have people who have worked in actually developing AI models in the private sector or maybe elsewhere in the Government.

Mr. KILMER. Super.

Thanks, Madam Chair. I yield back.

Chairwoman BICE. Thank you.

We want to give you a huge thank you for being with us this morning. I appreciate your testimony and your time and look forward to continuing to working with you in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Dodaro.

At this time, we will pause to move to our second panel of witnesses.

Mr. DODARO. Thank you very much.

Chairwoman BICE. Excellent. I will now introduce the second panel of witnesses.

Our first witness, Dr. Tim Persons, served as the GAO's chief scientist and as a co-director of the Science, Technology, Assessment, and Analytics Team until his departure in 2023. Dr. Persons provides knowledge and expertise of how STAA was created, its successes, and how GAO could be enhanced moving forward.

Dr. Persons is a partner with PricewaterhouseCoopers, where he leads the development of innovative assurance solutions for clients in artificial intelligence and machine learning, data, algorithms, and other digital transformations.

Welcome.

Next, we welcome Mr. James-Christian Blockwood, who formerly served as the managing director of the Strategic Planning and External Liaison Office at GAO. During his tenure, Mr. Blockwood was responsible for creating GAO's strategic plan and helped GAO identify future trends that might be of interest to Congress.

Currently, Mr. Blockwood serves as the executive vice president of the Partnership for Public Service.

Finally, we welcome Mr. Dan Lips, who currently serves as head of policy for the Foundation for American Innovation, an organization focused on developing technology, talent, and ideas that support a better, freer, and more abundant future. Mr. Lips' research

focuses on improving governance, addressing national security risks, and promoting innovation.

Thank you to our second panel of witnesses for being with us today.

Please remember to press the button on the microphone in front of you so that the green light is on. When you speak, the timer will begin. After 4 minutes, the timer will turn yellow. When the red light comes on, your 5 minutes have expired, and we would ask you to kindly wrap up.

Now, at this time, I recognize Dr. Tim Persons for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENTS OF TIM PERSONS, PRINCIPAL, PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS LLP; JAMES-CHRISTIAN BLOCKWOOD, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE; AND DAN LIPS, HEAD OF POLICY, FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN INNOVATION (FAI)**

#### **STATEMENT OF TIM PERSONS**

Mr. PERSONS. Thank you, Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Kilmer, and Members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today about the modernization of GAO and the legislative support agencies, as well as the importance of building science and technology capacity and capabilities for the Congress.

The GAO has been a vital institution, as you know, for over a century, strengthening congressional oversight, ensuring efficiency and accountability in Government operations. Its commitment to accountability, integrity, and reliability have made it one of the most trusted public sector brands in the world.

My remarks this morning are strictly my own and based upon my 14.5 years as GAO's chief scientist, the highest regard I have for both GAO and Congress, and my three decades of experience in AI, digital technologies, and innovation.

We are currently witnessing an unprecedented acceleration in the impacts of S&T. In just the past 36 months, we have experienced some of the fastest and most powerful technology revolutions in human history, Messenger RNA, fusion ignition, and generative AI are just some examples. ChatGBT itself, which has come up earlier in the discussions, is reshaping business, society, the Government, and doing it at an unprecedented rate. It reached 100 million users in a mere 60 days.

These are just a few examples illustrating the need for the shift in the clock speed of GAO and the legislative support agencies, the concept referring to the rate at which change may occur within an industry or organization to avoid obsolescence.

GAO's recent track record in innovation is encouraging, reestablishing technology assessment, creating 2-page S&T Spotlights delivered in weeks, establishing the STAA and the innovation lab within it. There is much to commend as part of its mission to be a leading practices Federal agency.

Nevertheless, to quote the inside GAO joke about the standard pattern of every one of its reports, is progress made but more could be done.

In this era of digital disruption, it is imperative the GAO and our legislative support agencies modernize processes, technologies,

skills, and cultures not merely to keep pace with the rapidly evolving landscape but rather to transform with nimbleness and agility to deliver their increasingly important professional services in an anticipatory, content-centric, user-experience-focused manner.

The centrality of digital and data to GAO's mission and others cannot be overstated. To ensure their success, it is crucial that they develop and deploy state-of-the-art data governance and digitally driven capability transformations with decisive alacrity.

Evolutionary or half-step measures, those seemingly safer, are not and will not be enough to keep the major risks of irrelevance and obsolescence at bay. They must transform in accordance with their distinct missions yet with a serious reexamination of their content-generation operations and delivery systems, their current authorities, their investment plans, human resourcing, and training strategies.

Moreover, the ever-increasing volume and complexity of data will likely require regular updates to data policies and statutes and the establishment of key partnerships with entities like the congressional Data Task Force. They must also be provided with the necessary leadership and innovation oxygen to succeed in their campaigns, all to provide content and analysis at depth and at speed in support of the desired evidence-based policymaking or EBP ecosystem for the Congress. Imagine, for example, a digital dashboard tool where a large language model technology might support just-in-time content and insight for EBP based on data and content provided in part by the GAO and other agencies.

Just today an article is being published in "Nature" describing how GPTs may be used to produce high-quality first drafts of policy briefs, like Spotlights, ones that can be customized for particular jurisdictions or Members and delivered in minutes and hours versus days and weeks. It is related exactly to what Mr. Kilmer asked earlier.

Digital technology-driven modernization transformation and increased S&T capacity are not possible without the necessary staff to envision, design, implement, and manage the desired changes. Thus, in addition to authorizing the STAA in recognition of the expanding services it provides, I endorse the implementation of option 3 of the 2019 NAPA report, which recommends the establishment of the Office of the congressional S&T Advisor. This development would provide a powerful framework for collaboration and coordination in the legislative branch in support of S&T issues in solving what is the core challenge, namely, the need for greater absorption in that.

To conclude, many thanks are due to this Committee for its continued efforts to modernize GAO and the legislative branch. Now is the time for decisive business transformation in digital, including data governance, in support of EBP. Authorizing STAA and establishing the OCSTA can ensure that Congress is supported by best available rapidly and organically integrated S&T personnel and insights.

Thank you. I will be happy to answer questions.

[The prepared statement of Tim Persons follows:]

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF TIM PERSONS**

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*Testimony of Dr. Timothy M. Persons<sup>1</sup> Before the U.S. House  
Committee on Administration, Subcommittee on Modernization*

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September 27, 2023

Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Kilmer, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me today to discuss Legislative Branch Advancement with a specific focus on the recent past and potential future modernization of the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) and legislative support agencies as well as the ongoing efforts to build science and technology (S&T) capacity and capabilities for the Congress. As you know, for over 100 years, the GAO has strengthened congressional oversight and provided invaluable services to Congress, the Nation, and taxpayers. This ensures efficiency and accountability in government operations. It is considered the premier public sector auditing agency, and deservedly so. It has built one of the most trusted public sector brands in the world by living out the three words that summarize its values: accountability, integrity, and reliability.

GAO consistently demonstrates a strong return on investment. In fiscal year 2022, GAO's work yielded about \$55.6 billion in financial benefits for the federal government, which is a return of approximately \$74 for every dollar invested<sup>2</sup>. In fiscal year 2021, GAO's work generated \$66.2 billion in financial benefits for Congress and the American people. The average return on investment for GAO over the past 5 years is between \$145 to \$158 for every dollar invested. These figures highlight the significant value that GAO provides in its role of helping the government save money and work more effectively.

As you also know, the U.S. and the world are experiencing an accelerating trend in the impacts of science, technology, and innovation on our society, the environment, and the economy. Within just the past 36 months, we have witnessed some of the fastest and most powerful technological revolutions in human history. For example, messenger RNA (mRNA) – which saved an estimated tens of millions of lives through the pandemic - went from stage one clinical trials to large-scale production and distribution in a mere ten months. Compare this to the normal vaccine development and licensure timeline of about ten years. Another example is fusion ignition – *i.e.*, the generation of more energy produced than the amount put in – which has now been realized, fulfilling the decades-long hopes for a clean energy future. A final example is generative AI<sup>3</sup> – an outcome of decades of digital research and development – which is currently reshaping the business, societal, and governmental landscapes at an

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<sup>1</sup> The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in this work belong solely to the author, and not necessarily to the author's employer, organization, committee or other group or individual.

<sup>2</sup> GAO Performance and Accountability Report, Fiscal Year 2022, GAO-23-900398, Nov 15, 2022

<sup>3</sup> Artificial intelligence (AI) is the science and engineering of creating machines and systems that can perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as perception, reasoning, learning, decision making, and natural language processing. AI has been advancing at an exponential rate in recent years, thanks to the availability of massive amounts of data, powerful computing resources, and increasingly sophisticated algorithms.

All of the legislative support agencies have been operating according to this schematic whether they realize it or not. The key question is the extent to which they've considered their respective mission in the context of data being the foundation – *i.e.*, does the organization treat data as a core asset, and to what extent has it built its business architecture around it – especially in today's cloud-powered, digital environment? Building a data governance strategy that plans, monitors, and enforces policies, standards, and procedures – but ones that reinforce the idea of data as an asset vs. data as a liability – is a critical first step...one that needs to serve the idea of a digitally-powered, agile, flexible knowledge-building, wisdom-delivering business operation to increase and maintain competitive advantage (*i.e.*, clockspeed). The Congressional Data Task Force (formerly Bulk Data Task Force) is already working along these lines. Reinforcing and further enabling their work would be beneficial to the ideas presented here.

Once a robust data governance strategy is developed and implemented, agencies can then ask themselves how they might best leverage things technologies such as data analytics, AI, digital ledger technologies, and zero-trust architectures to deliver sustainable value to clients in today's fast-changing world (*i.e.*, dramatically reduce service delivery time from years/months to months/weeks or even months/weeks to days/hours – without sacrificing quality, compromising data, and remaining ethical and legal). I believe the legislative support agencies can and should be modernized in this way so that they can be best positioned to continue their respective legacies of success in delivering value to Congress.

### III. Perspective on certain recommendations from the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress

Regarding my view on legislative support agency-related recommendations of the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, I agree with them in part if not the whole, and will focus my remarks on #135, #139, #140, #141, and #142

Regarding #135:

*135. Enhancing the customer experience at GAO: GAO should boost initiatives to meet Congress's information needs and assess member and staff awareness of and satisfaction with its products and services.*

As an alumnus of GAO and a long-time reviewer, producer, and consumer of its high-quality information and insight, I firmly believe in the importance of GAO's outreach to Members and staff. As noted in the FY24 Legislative Branch Appropriations report, it is crucial that legislative support agencies like GAO adapt their products, services, and outreach to meet the evolving needs of Congress and to enhance the awareness, absorptive capacity, and satisfaction of its products and services.<sup>17</sup> By expanding their outreach, they can better inform Congress about the valuable products and services they provide. This proactive approach will not only enhance congressional understanding of GAO's work but also improve

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<sup>17</sup> The FY24 Legislative Branch Act language notes the following: "Outreach to Congressional Staff: The Committee requests that legislative support agencies take steps to ensure that their products, services, and outreach are designed to adapt and meet the customer needs of an evolving Congress. As such, the Committee requests that GAO expand its outreach to better inform Congress of the products and services the agency provides."

its ability to make informed decisions, ultimately leading to a more effective and accountable federal government for the American people.

Related to my earlier remarks on digital innovation, client user experience should be a key design element of any digital-oriented transformation campaign.

Regarding #139:

*139. Legislative and support agency staff directory: Congress and congressional support agencies should establish a shared staff directory to enhance the exchange of information and improve collaboration.*

Establishing shared staff directories between Congress and congressional support agencies is a vital step towards enhancing the exchange of information and fostering collaboration. Shared directories facilitate clear communication, leading to efficient information exchange. They also promote enhanced collaboration by enabling staff members to easily identify and connect with their counterparts in other agencies. Importantly, such directories would increase efficiency by eliminating time-consuming searches for contact information, allowing staff to focus more on their substantive work.

Regarding #140 and #142:

*140. Modernize the congressional support agencies: The committees of jurisdiction should examine support agency authorities and determine if they need to be updated.*

*142. Congressional Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking: Congress should establish a bipartisan, bicameral Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking to encourage and facilitate better use of data in the legislative process.*

The examination and potential update of the authorities of legislative branch support agencies by congressional committees of jurisdiction is crucial, particularly in relation to data access, storage, and processing-related policies and statutes – especially considering their centrality to the data governance and modernization campaigns each legislative support agency should undertake. The rapid pace of technological advancements will also necessitate regular and routine updates to data policies and statutes going forward. Such updates should provide “innovation oxygen” to their respective digital and S&T teams to ensure these agencies can innovate and succeed in any current or future digital transformation campaigns. Furthermore, with the increasing volume and complexity of data, robust data storage and processing policies that are updated and contextualized considering the emergent world of cloud, AI, analytics, and other emerging technologies, are essential for ensuring data security.

Modernizing the support agencies in both authorities and toward more digital operations provides the foundation for the desired future of evidence-based policymaking (EBP) for Congress. Such a commission could provide invaluable cross-sectoral perspectives, support the construction and curation of a shared vision for EBP, and provide insights and recommendations in EBP for congressional policymaking, policy evaluation, and oversight roles. Moreover, the commission could incorporate outcomes measurement, and rigorous impact analysis – including analysis pertaining to outcomes from the legislative support agencies – and could also advise on how Congress can utilize real-time, structured, and machine-readable data in the lawmaking process.



Additionally, the commission could assess the desirability or necessity for a Congressional Chief Data Officer, their potential responsibilities, and whether they should be situated within an existing agency or a new office. This includes consideration of how such an office would collaborate with current data and information units in the House. The commission should also explore methods to enhance data expertise in Congress by incorporating technologists, data scientists, and engineers to assist in policy evaluation and legislative drafting. This new ecosystem could build on the foundational work in data science and analytics already established by the Innovation Lab within STAA and the GAO Chief Data Scientist – especially as it pertains to future oversight whereby executive branch agencies could be required to provide evidence on the effectiveness of significant new programs and reauthorizations.

Regarding #141:

*141. Authorize STAA and make it a permanent part of GAO: The Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics program at GAO should be authorized and made permanent by Congress.*

Option Three of the 2019 NAPA report<sup>18</sup> entitled: “Enhance Existing Entities and Create an Advisory Office” states the following:

*Both enhance existing entities and create an S&T advisory office, led by a Congressional S&T Advisor, which focuses on strengthening the capacity of Congress to absorb and utilize science and technology policy information provided by GAO, CRS, and other sources.*

*GAO should further develop the capability of its Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics mission team to meet some of the supply gaps identified in the NAPA report, including the need for technology assessments, and make appropriate changes in its organization and operating policies to accommodate the distinctive features of technology assessments and other foresight products.*

*CRS should enhance and expand its quick-turnaround and consultative services in S&T-related policy issues.*

*Congress should create an Office of the Congressional S&T Advisor (OCSTA), which would focus on efforts to build the absorptive capacity of Congress, to include supporting the recruitment and hiring of S&T advisors for House and Senate committees with major S&T oversight responsibilities. OCSTA would also be responsible for horizon scanning.*

*Congress should create a Coordinating Council to be led by the Advisor that includes representatives from CRS and GAO’s STAA, and a National Academies ex officio member with the objective to limit duplication and coordinate available resources to most benefit the Congress.*

The 2019 NAPA report identifies the most significant challenge to congressional activities related to Science and Technology (S&T) as absorptive capacity, defined as Congress’s ability to effectively understand and utilize S&T information. The report outlines that this information can come from various sources, including legislative support agencies, science societies, academia, S&T literature, S&T think tanks, and science-advising peers worldwide.

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<sup>18</sup> NAPA, Science and Technology Policy Assessment: A Congressionally Directed Review, October 2019, p. 9.

Beyond merely sifting and sorting quality, timely, reliable, and accessible S&T information, NAPA emphasizes the need for in-house S&T advisors and external technical advisory groups. It also highlights the importance of expanding fellowships and federal detailees and attracting and retaining congressional staff in more permanent roles with the necessary S&T skills and experience to assist Congress in fulfilling its Article I responsibilities under the Constitution.

The report argues that a more effective and sustainable congressional S&T support function would require quick-turnaround support, networking, consultative support, detailed studies, including horizon-scanning reports. Quick-turnaround support would provide immediate answers to questions requiring facts, figures, and descriptions. Networking would offer access to a wide range of external S&T experts from academia, industry, and non-profit sectors. Consultative support would provide consistent consultation with experts who can offer personalized assistance to Members and staff and provide clear recommendations when asked. Detailed studies and analyses of S&T trends would allow for prompt addressing of critical issues. Horizon-scanning reports would identify emerging S&T trends and potential future opportunities and challenges.

Therefore, NAPA recommends creating an Office of the Congressional S&T Advisor (OCSTA) to focus on building Congress's absorptive capacity, including supporting the recruitment and hiring of S&T advisors for major committees. The OCSTA would liaise with various stakeholders, serve as Congress's S&T ombudsman, assist congressional committees in recruiting and hiring their own S&T advisors, and conduct ongoing S&T horizon scans for Congress. The report also suggests that Congress should establish a Congressional Science and Technology Coordinating Council to coordinate legislative S&T support efforts and avoid duplication of work. The Council should be led by the OCSTA and include representatives from STAA, the CRS, and *ex officio* member from the National Academies.

Although having a more expanded line of service offerings (*i.e.*, technology assessments, audits, S&T Spotlights, and other technical services) than a standard GAO team, the STAA is not designed to meet the demands of absorptive capacity at the scale and speed necessary to address today's S&T challenges. Furthermore, GAO's necessary independence rules prohibit it from being a practical solution to the absorptive capacity challenge as articulated by NAPA. Therefore, the authorization of STAA as part of GAO is a crucial step toward sustaining and enhancing congressional S&T support. This action would ensure that Congress continues to have consistent access to unbiased, high-quality S&T information necessary for decision-making.

Moreover, the Office of the Congressional S&T Advisor (OCSTA), with its focused mission on building Congress's S&T absorptive capacity - including supporting the recruitment and hiring of externally-hired scientists and engineers for major committees - would be better positioned to meet the critical S&T needs of today and tomorrow at a higher clockspeed than any of the legislative support agencies by themselves. Therefore, the OCSTA should be established according to the following design criteria:

- A semiautonomous governance structure seen in other places in the federal government such as CRS' relationship to with the Library of Congress or other examples;<sup>19</sup>
- A unique budgetary identity with oversight from the requisite committees;

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<sup>19</sup> See for example, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, and National Academy of Public Administration. 2020. Governance and Management of the Nuclear Security Enterprise. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25933>.

- The Congressional Science Advisor could be term limited, be a Senate-confirmed position, and screened for nonpartisanship, cross-sectoral expertise, and interdisciplinary training;
- Granted hiring authorities including those under the Intergovernmental Personnel Mobility Act, ability to host or place S&T fellows from nonprofit institutions, direct and/or special hires;
- Preserve GAO and STAA independence to continue its work in S&T oversight, insight, and foresight; and
- Work with authorizing and appropriations committees to create or adapt congressional protocols.

Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Kilmer, and Members of the Committee, this completes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

Chairwoman BICE. You saw me about to drop the gavel, didn't you?

Mr. PERSONS. Yes.

Chairwoman BICE. Thank you, Dr. Persons. Appreciate it.

Next it is my honor to welcome Mr. James-Christian Blockwood for 5 minutes of testimony. You are recognized.

#### **STATEMENT OF JAMES-CHRISTIAN BLOCKWOOD**

Mr. BLOCKWOOD. Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Kilmer, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to participate in today's hearing.

As the Chairwoman mentioned, I am the executive vice president of the Partnership for Public Service, a nonpartisan, nonprofit dedicated to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Federal Government. I will also offer a perspective during my time when I was at GAO as a senior executive.

There is a declining trust in Government and institutions more broadly, and our Nation is sharply divided along partisan lines, unfortunately. GAO is one of Congress' greatest tools for fostering an agile, effective, trusted, and transparent Government ready to face future challenges. I applaud the ongoing efforts of this Subcommittee to ensure our legislative branch agencies are prepared and equipped to respond.

As I discuss in more detail in my written statement, there are several areas of consideration as this Subcommittee seeks to support GAO in its efforts to provide more modern solutions and services.

First and foremost, GAO must continue to uphold a nonpartisan approach to its work and organizational culture. GAO serves all Members of Congress and must always be a stronghold for credible analysis and findings, protect its independence, and avoid even the appearance of impropriety or favor. This function cannot succeed without a full commitment to nonpartisanship.

Looking forward, Congress and the administration should prioritize an unwavering commitment to nonpartisanship in the candidate for Comptroller General when they next appoint and confirm this position.

Second, the Subcommittee should explore investing in and expanding the authorities and capabilities of GAO. Given growing Government spending, complexity of management challenges, high risk of fraud, and recent passage of multibillion dollar legislation, Congress should, one, increase the size and capacity of GAO's fo-

rensic audits and investigative service and help agencies adopt a fraud-prevention culture; second, consider an appropriation for GAO's Center for Audit Excellence to provide greater accountability for Federal funds dispersed across the country, as well as abroad; and, third, strengthen GAO's ability to ensure follow up of open recommendations by authority and through a dynamic interactive dashboard or other platform.

A third area of investment in GAO's capacity to address emerging issues is strategic foresight. Strategic foresight helps improve understanding of an organization's external environment, mitigate risk, and take advantage of opportunities ahead. GAO has already created several offices and functions to engage in this work. However, more investment may be required to advance its trend monitoring, strategic foresight, and science and technology capacity, particularly as it relates to better understanding generative AI, highlighting policy implications of AI to lawmakers, and auditing the Federal use of AI.

Fourth, GAO should invest in customer experience. A key tenet of a modernized organization is understanding its customers and how they experience services. Customer service is a direct and immediate interaction between a customer and the service provider. Customer experience reflects the holistic journey of the customer within the organization and focuses on fostering engagement. As such, GAO should look to best practices in customer experience to build on its voice of the client work and more explicitly expand its view of its customer to include the American public. It should ensure greater investment in IT and digital technologies to help make reports more accessible, as well as innovative, visual, and digestible; explore and actually go beyond that and commit to its onsite presence within congressional office buildings to provide Congress with greater access to needed expertise.

Fifth, Congress should consider the development of coordinated, consolidated, and curated information. GAO and other legislative branch agencies serve as the in-house experts on virtually every topic Congress may need to consider on all of those topics. However, this information is not curated and can overlap and often contains gaps. Congress should explore formally merging some of these capabilities or whether GAO is positioned to serve as a clearinghouse and coordinator for reports and information from across the legislative branch.

Finally, GAO must have access to the full range of data necessary to do its work. Agencies may not always provide GAO with complete access to data. Congress must ensure readily and open access for GAO through additional authorities or guidance to agencies. With enhanced access to data, GAO can explore real-time audit capability and gain insight from an agency perspective.

The future calls for greater transparency, accountability, and modernization across Government. GAO is a leading practices agency with a proven return on investment. Focusing on investments and modernizing the work that GAO already does well will help it continue to serve Congress, agencies, and the American people.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and I look forward to continuing the conversation on Government effectiveness and modernization.

[The prepared statement of James-Christian Blockwood follows:]

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAMES-CHRISTIAN BLOCKWOOD**



**James-Christian Blockwood  
Executive Vice President  
Partnership for Public Service**

**Written Testimony  
for**

**The House Administration Committee  
Subcommittee on Modernization**

**Hearing on Legislative Branch Advancement: GAO Modernization**

**September 27, 2023**

Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Kilmer and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to participate in today's hearing on Government Accountability Office (GAO) modernization. The Partnership for Public Service is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring future generations toward public service and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the federal government. We support both the legislative and executive branches so they can meet their duty to the American public to deliver excellent services, efficiently use taxpayer dollars and modernize to respond to new and existing challenges.

Our nation, unfortunately, is sharply divided, with growing uncertainty each day as to whether we can restore any sense of unity or reverse waning trust in government. We are facing the looming possibility of a government shutdown, a trust deficit between the American people and government and heated debate regarding the role public servants should play in administering the rules and policies of our elected leaders. The GAO is one of Congress' greatest tools for fostering an effective and transparent government ready to face future challenges. The American people and Congress expect and deserve an agile and effective government, and I applaud the ongoing efforts of this subcommittee to ensure our legislative branch agencies are prepared and equipped to respond.

As you know, GAO serves a unique function for Congress. It provides nonpartisan, evidence-based, expert audit, evaluation, investigation and research capacity on critical issues facing government and society. This work should be seen as an integral part of strategic planning, performance management and modernization by executive branch agency heads as well as Members of Congress. GAO has a strong track record of success and in many respects serves as a model for other federal agencies. As a best practices organization, GAO itself must continue to build on the many services it provides to ensure it will meet the evolving needs of Congress well into the future.

#### **The Importance of a Nonpartisan Audit Function**

Well-run organizations use the audit function as a critical management tool to identify risks, review processes and performance and adjust or change practices to address findings. Through its biennial High Risk List, reports on certain government functions and technical explainers, GAO provides oversight, insight and foresight into government-wide and agency specific programs, processes and policies. This function cannot succeed without a full commitment to nonpartisanship.

Partnership for Public Service research shows just four in ten people trust the federal government to do what is right at least some of the time.<sup>1</sup> According to Pew research, Americans view negative statements as better descriptors of the U.S. political system than positive ones.<sup>2</sup> Gallup reports increased polarization and a widening gap between Republicans and Democrats on many policy issues.<sup>3</sup> We are in an era where

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<sup>1</sup> Partnership for Public Service and Freedman Consulting, LLC, "Trust in Government: A Close Look at Public Perceptions of the Federal Government and Its Employees," March 2022, 1. Available at <https://ourpublicservice.org/publications/trust-in-government>.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center, "The biggest problems and greatest strengths of the U.S. political system." Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/the-biggest-problems-and-greatest-strengths-of-the-u-s-political-system>.

<sup>3</sup> Gallup, "Update: Partisan Gaps Expand Most on Government Power, Climate," August 2023. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/509129/update-partisan-gaps-expand-government-power-climate.aspx>.

alternative facts and disinformation are rising, and it is harder to recognize and easier to obfuscate the truth.

GAO doggedly guards its reputation as a nonpartisan organization through protocols, culture and leadership. The organization serves all Members of Congress, relies on experts and evidence and uses a rigorous methodological approach to identify agency performance deficiencies, risks, mismanagement or outright fraud. GAO must always be a stronghold for credible analysis and findings, protect its independence and avoid even the appearance of impropriety or favor. It must always remain an unassailable place for trusted information. Audits should not be seen as partisan, burdensome or just obligatory, but rather as a critical tool that agencies fully embrace as a normal course of doing business. Looking forward, Congress and the Administration should prioritize an unwavering commitment to nonpartisanship by the candidate for Comptroller General when they next appoint and confirm this position in two years.

#### **Investment in Expanding Authorities and Capabilities**

GAO has a proven track record of return on investment. In FY2022, the GAO returned \$74 to the government for every dollar invested, and nearly twice that on average for the prior 5 years.<sup>4</sup> Under its current Comptroller General, GAO has concentrated on employee engagement and invested in the development and care of its staff as a management tool to recruit and retain highly qualified experts and provide strong customer service to Congress. This commitment is highlighted in its continued presence at the top of the Partnership's Best Places to Work in Federal Government<sup>®</sup> rankings.<sup>5</sup>

Seemingly, the GAO is limited more by finances than leadership, talent or ability to reimagine or innovate. During FY2022, the GAO received work requests from 90% of the standing committees in Congress.<sup>6</sup> GAO yields impressive results and is an exemplar of storied evolution – starting as a primarily voucher processing organization and transforming to a best-in-class audit organization admired around the globe for its standard setting, knowledge and capability. While funding in these constrained times must be appropriated prudently and responsibly, GAO would benefit from additional support to ensure it continues to meet Congressional needs.

Given growing government spending, complexity of management challenges, high risk of fraud and recent passage of multi-billion-dollar legislation, Congress should ensure GAO has sufficient resources to fully staff or even expand its Forensic Audits and Investigative Services function. Similarly, Congress should consider ways to strengthen GAO's ability to incentivize and ensure follow-up of open recommendations. This could be accomplished through a dynamic, interactive dashboard or other platform to provide data, status updates and recommendations highlighting where additional follow up is needed. On that point, thank you, Ranking Member Kilmer, for leading enactment of the bipartisan Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act, which was signed into law as part of last year's defense authorization bill.<sup>7</sup> Under

<sup>4</sup> Government Accountability Office, "GAO's Work Led to Over \$55 Billion in Financial Benefits for the Federal Government in FY22," November 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/press-release/gaos-work-led-over-55-billion-financial-benefits-federal-government-fy22>.

<sup>5</sup> Partnership for Public Service and Boston Consulting Group, "Best Places to Work in the Federal Government." Available at <https://bestplacetowork.org/rankings/detail/?c=GAO0>.

<sup>6</sup> Government Accountability Office, "Fiscal Year 2024 Performance Plan," GAO-23-900466, July 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-900466>.

<sup>7</sup> "Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act," P.L. 117-263, 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2022.

this new law, GAO will consolidate open priority recommendations by policy topic and help Congress better understand ways in which it can help agencies implement those recommendations.

Additionally, building off GAO's support to domestic and national audit entities and helping to strengthen global accountability (a U.S. interest and benefit to American taxpayers), Congress should consider an appropriation for GAO's Center for Audit Excellence. This is currently a fee-for-service function within GAO and a shift to a different funding model would ensure it has necessary resources and retains its intentional firewall to its operations to protect GAO's independence and prevent conflicts.

#### **Capacity to Address Emerging Issues**

GAO has a robust strategic planning function with a dedicated office that reports directly to the U.S. Comptroller General. This office includes a strategic foresight capability, conducts multiyear planning, expansively studies nearly all conceivable trend areas policymakers may contend with and involves expert external stakeholders in and outside government and around the world.

This function allows GAO to consider and evaluate rapid and unpredictable change as well as complex interaction among emerging trends to ensure our government is prepared to respond to growing risks and threats, as well as seek competitive advantages and seize opportunities. Strategic foresight is one of the strongest antidotes for mitigating uncertainty and thinking about ways to shape or influence preferred outcomes. It is a leadership competency that when done well improves understanding of changing environments and enhances decision-making. GAO has invested heavily in this capability, dedicating resources for continuous environmental scanning, providing training to its senior executives, embedding foresight practices across teams and publishing an authoritative resource on trends.<sup>8</sup>

One emerging trend in need of additional focus is the science and technology sector. GAO has not historically prioritized one specific area of work over others, and GAO has science and technology capability across its teams. However, GAO recently shifted to enable specific focus on science and technology in response to its trend monitoring, increased Congressional requests related to this area, and growing evidence of the impact of disruptive technologies. In 2019 GAO created the Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics (STAA) Team, which has increased the depth and breadth of GAO's capacities to provide research and policy analysis on current and emerging issues in science and technology. In recent years, GAO has published short-form futures-oriented assessments to provide explainers on emerging technologies. Additionally, it established an Innovation Lab as an incubator and experimental unit to bolster advanced analytic capabilities, created the Polaris Council of external interdisciplinary experts, launched a Center for Strategic Foresight to stay abreast of changes in the external environment and has grown its workforce to include more PhD researchers, scientists, engineers and technical staff. All of these are efforts to be commended, and more investment may be required as this field grows along with the related need to provide understanding and recommendations to Congress.

One such investment is in its understanding and capability around Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is a disruptive technology that will continue to have far-reaching and increasingly unknown impacts on government and society. AI, like many emerging trends and technologies, is still being explored for use and governance. Congress, as well as the American public, need to be better informed of AI's implications.

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<sup>8</sup> Government Accountability Office, "Trends Affecting Government and Society," GAO-22-3SP, March 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-3sp>.



Building on GAO's first technology assessment on AI<sup>9</sup> in March 2018 and expanding on its June 2021 AI Accountability Framework,<sup>10</sup> GAO must stand ready to audit agencies' responsible, ethical, reliable, and equitable use of AI and provide areas for Congress to consider in legislation and appropriations.

To build on recent advancements, Congress should support GAO efforts to strengthen its foresight capability and the role it can play across government. It should also ensure GAO has the resources to better understand and audit AI algorithms as well as advise Congress on legislation regarding proliferation, regulation and use of AI. GAO and Congress should also consider whether GAO should expand its view of its customer to include the American public and educating them on the implications of key emerging trends and technologies.

#### **Creating a More Robust Customer Experience Function**

In addition to modern technology and modern ways of working, a key tenet of a modernized organization is understanding its customers and how they experience services. Across the federal government and private sector, organizations are increasingly investing in building capacity not only for delivering robust customer service but also for ensuring an enhanced customer experience.

The Partnership has long called for this type of work to be prioritized and resourced. Customer service, at its core, is the direct and immediate interaction between a customer and the service provider, concentrating on addressing questions and resolving any issues promptly. Customer service usually starts with and focuses on solving problems of the moment. In contrast, customer experience (CX) is a broader concept that reflects the journey, or the sum of all interactions, of the customer within the organization and focuses on fostering engagement. CX involves a comprehensive understanding of customer needs, analyzing every touchpoint, evaluating interactions and measuring the effectiveness of products and services across the entire organization. This distinction underscores the importance of attending to both immediate interactions through customer service, and the broader holistic journey through customer experience.<sup>11</sup>

The Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress recommended that congressional support agencies improve customer service.<sup>12</sup> GAO has a long history of providing strong customer service to Congress. Customer experience is the next iteration of customer service. Customer experience requires specific skillsets and practitioners, leadership support to ensure buy-in across an agency and integration of this focus throughout all teams and their work. Organizations that integrate a customer experience focus into their work understand the needs of each type of customer, engage with customers to deliver services and continuously receive feedback to drive improvements. The Department of Veterans Affairs

<sup>9</sup> Government Accountability Office, "Technology Assessment: Artificial Intelligence: Emerging Opportunities, Challenges, and Implications," GAO-18-142SP, March 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-18-142sp>.

<sup>10</sup> Government Accountability Office, "Artificial Intelligence: An Accountability Framework for Federal Agencies and Other Entities," GAO-21-519SP, June 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-519sp>.

<sup>11</sup> Partnership for Public Service and Accenture Federal Services, "Designing A Government for the People: Collaborative Approaches to Federal Customer Experience," December 2022. Available at <https://ourpublicservice.org/publications/designing-a-government-for-the-people>.

<sup>12</sup> "Recommendations on Improving Congressional Operations, Pathways to Congressional Service, and the Future of Congressional Modernization," December 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.congress.gov/117/crpt/hrpt659/CRPT-117hrpt659.pdf>.

Veterans Experience Office offers a model<sup>13</sup> which GAO and this subcommittee might consider in exploring how to best resource this function, and advance GAO's Voice of Client efforts.

Focusing on customer experience still requires GAO to provide exemplary customer service to congressional staff and committees who rely upon its expertise to better inform their work. GAO already meets with individual staff and committees but should focus on additional ways to ensure staff are aware of its services and that the ways in which it provides expert advice and guidance fit with the needs of staff.

GAO has staff located and working across the country and the world as it conducts audits. Managing in-person, remote or a hybrid workforce has become increasingly complex. As such, GAO should work with House Administration to explore whether an onsite presence within congressional office buildings would be helpful. GAO's ability to staff such an office while not taking away from existing work is important. The Defense Department provides a model of employee development where employees on rotation are placed on central billets, so offices do not lose full time employee positions. GAO could use these rotations as a leadership development opportunity – in this case working at the onsite office would also ensure that GAO staff is gaining a deeper understanding of its customers on the Hill, creating strong relationships with Members and staff, and bringing greater awareness to the services it provides to Congress. This type of presence on the Hill would build on GAO's existing practice of detailing GAO analysts to congressional committees, which has been highly beneficial in providing Congress with needed expertise while increasing GAO's understanding of congressional day-to-day activities on oversight, legislation, and appropriations.

#### **Coordination, Consolidation and Curation of Information**

GAO and other legislative branch agencies serve as the in-house, nonpartisan experts, researchers and thought leaders on virtually every topic Congress may need to consider. As you know, CRS provides legislative research and analysis, CBO produces analysis on budgetary and economics issues as well as estimates on legislation, and GAO distinctly provides audits or some of the same or complementary information. However, this information can be disparate, overlapping, come in different formats and at different times, and Congress may not always be aware of all the information on a particular topic. Congress should have timely, reliable and coordinated information to assist with its oversight and policymaking responsibilities. Congress should explore formally merging some of these capabilities or whether GAO is positioned to serve as a clearinghouse and coordinator for reports and information from GAO, CRS and CBO. This consolidation of information could decrease duplication of requests on similar topics, increase research efficiency as staff could identify reports from each support agency by topic, and give staff an initial place to look for reports and recommendations before having to make new requests.

Communicating, collaborating and coordinating information leads to a better-informed Congress and more effective and efficient lawmaking. The manner (format and medium) in which information is presented is equally important. Absorption of information should be a focus in addition to collection of it. With increased resources and technology support, GAO could serve as a first point of contact and clearing house for critical information and help synthesize and consolidate information or refer to other experts should requests be better addressed elsewhere. Congress receives information in many different ways

<sup>13</sup> Partnership for Public Service and Medallia, "The Good Government Connection: Linking the Federal Employee and Customer Experiences," May 2023. Available at <https://ourpublicservice.org/publications/the-good-government-connection>.

and from a variety of sources. In order to achieve maximum efficiency, Congress should ensure increased coordination and easier access to recommendations or reports across legislative agencies. This includes providing additional resources for GAO to explore innovative, interactive and visual ways to make its audits and reports, as well as any curated information, more accessible and digestible. Congress should also consider requesting an independent organization, like the National Academy of Public Administration, to study potential ways to achieve these objectives.

#### **Changing Landscape of Data and Information**

We are living in data-rich, data-ubiquitous world. The volume of data or information created, captured, copied or consumed has exponentially increased worldwide, and continues to grow rapidly. While many are concerned about access and equity, governments globally should also be concerned about accuracy, verifiability, and transparency. Congress and the legislative branch entities that support it will need trusted data to conduct work.

GAO relies on data from federal agencies and other sources to conduct audits. If there are delays, undue barriers or other restrictions to data, GAO audits can be slowed or incomplete. Data must be made available following law and agreed upon protocols, and GAO must have access to requested data. This includes raw or unstructured data as well as information obtained from documents, interviews or other means of discovery.

GAO has well-established statutory authority to access agency information (which it has an excellent record in safeguarding) in order to conduct audits and evaluations. Agencies, whether intentionally or not, may not always provide complete access to data. From information needed to complete a financial audit of entities as complex as the Defense Department, access to sensitive and national security protected information from parts of the Intelligence Community, or the ability to interview government officials at specific agencies, Congress must ensure readily and open access for GAO. This may entail additional authorities for GAO or guidance to agencies to ensure they are meeting this obligation.

Given growth in proliferation of data and concerns over its use, the American people will increasingly expect greater transparency and disclosure by the government. The Select Committee's recommendation on support agencies reporting on challenges and potential solutions for accessing federal data is critical and will help fully realize the Open Data Government Act and offer greater access to information.<sup>14</sup>

With the recent appointment of its first Chief Data Officer, GAO is better positioned to enhance its ability to conduct more real-time audits, serve Congress with greater speed, and potentially provide insight from an agency rather than purely audit perspective. Congress should ensure GAO has the resources to support its Chief Data Officer and Innovation Lab capabilities, while also increasing penalties for agencies not complying with furnishing required data. While GAO already has data analytics and data visualization capabilities, these are becoming more necessary to ensure products are clear, accessible and digestible.

#### **Conclusion**

There is no shortage of hardship or crisis in our country—from responding to natural disasters, managing U.S. engagement in conflicts abroad, navigating the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, securing the homeland, and preparing for issues on the horizon such as economic recession. Congress must be

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

prepared to address what is immediately in front of it as well as what is ahead. Our nation's grandest challenges will generally come down to three things: people (do we have skilled talent and empowering leadership), money (do we have resources and effective stewardship and accountability) and things (do we have the services and technology to achieve the best outcomes).

GAO is a model agency in employee engagement, supporting its employees and developing leaders – all of which has helped it be a strong partner to Congress. For the last 3 years GAO has been ranked the top midsize agency in the Best Places to Work in Federal Government Rankings and has consistently been in the top 4 for the last 15 years. As with any organization, remaining at the top takes intentional leadership and employee engagement to drive improvements and ensure strong customer experience. GAO is more than an audit and report writing organization and must continue its modernization efforts to ensure it is meeting the evolving needs of Congress.

The future calls for greater transparency, accountability and modernization across government, and Congress must be able to rely on GAO to help it meet its oversight responsibilities. In summary, to ensure Congress is ready, GAO must continue delivering on its mission with exceptional results and be supported in the following ways:

- Advance its strategic foresight capacity to ensure continuous emerging trend scanning capability particularly helping GAO prepare better understand generative AI, be able to audit federal use of AI and highlight policy implications of AI to lawmakers;
- Reinforce and strengthen access to data and information with an aim to conduct more real-time auditing, gain greater insight into agency operations, and help mitigate data access challenges;
- Make innovative, dynamic and virtual sources of information more accessible and digestible to Congress and the American public;
- Increase the size and capacity of GAO's Forensic Audits and Investigative Service to complement Congress and accountability community efforts to identify fraud and help agencies adopt a fraud prevention culture;
- Ensure GAO's long held and vital nonpartisan stance and approach to conducting work, including when the next nominee for Comptroller General is considered;
- Consider an appropriation for GAO's Center for Audit Excellence to help build capacity of other audit organizations and strengthen global accountability and transparency to improve state, local and foreign government's use of federal taxpayer funds;
- Advance Select Committee recommendations on encouraging better use of data in the legislative process, creation of a support agencies directory, enhancing customer experience at GAO;
- Support GAO's ability to enhance customer experience to better understand the needs of Congress and the American public; and
- Increase coordination and access to recommendations or reports across legislative agencies and consider requesting a study on potential ways to enhance coordination or curation of information in Congress that might reduce any duplication or overlap of requests.

Thank you again for holding this hearing, and thank you, Chairwoman Bice and Ranking Member Kilmer, for your leadership and commitment on ways to help modernize the Legislative Branch. On these and many other issues you are considering, the Partnership for Public Service stands ready to help find

nonpartisan, commonsense solutions to the major management challenges facing the federal government.

Chairwoman BICE. Thank you very much, Mr. Blockwood. I would love to put you in charge of some agencies that need help. Anyway, at this time, it is my honor to recognize Mr. Dan Lips for 5 minutes of his testimony. Mr. Lips.

#### STATEMENT OF DAN LIPS

Mr. LIPS. Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Kilmer, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

As the Chairwoman mentioned, my name is Dan Lips. I am the head of policy at the Foundation for American Innovation. I previously served on the staff of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

My testimony will focus on opportunities to increase GAO's return on investment, improve Government efficiency, and achieve taxpayer savings.

Over the past 20 years, as we have heard today, GAO's work has resulted in \$1.3 trillion in savings. With less than \$12 billion in appropriations during that time, that means that every dollar that Congress has provided to GAO has resulted in more than \$100 in savings. This is a really impressive track record, but given the \$33 trillion national debt and the challenging fiscal outlook, Congress and this Subcommittee should be considering ways to increase GAO's ROI.

Last year GAO reported that 77 percent of its recommendations were implemented within 4 years. We are slightly below its target of 80 percent. Today, GAO reports that there are 5,000 open recommendations, and about a quarter of these recommendations were made more than 4 years ago. This is important because, according to GAO, recommendations not made within 4 years are less likely to be implemented.

Congress and the Subcommittee I think need to ask two questions. First, how can Congress help the hardworking people at GAO increase their ROI by making sure their nonpartisan reform recommendations are addressed in a timely manner? Second, what could the Government save if all of GAO's recommendations, open recommendations, were implemented?

Thanks to the Modernization Committee, Congress enacted a law in December raising these issues. The Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act, sponsored by Representative Kilmer and Representative Timmons, requires GAO to streamline its open recommendations for Congress, describe additional oversight and legislative actions that are needed, and, importantly, estimate potential cost savings of unimplemented priority recommendations.

In addition, report language accompanying the Fiscal Year 2023 omnibus required GAO to estimate the potential savings that could be achieved if all open GAO recommendations were implemented. This year GAO answered these new congressional mandates with two reports. The first explained that, based on a statistical analysis, implementing the 5,000 open recommendations would save between \$92 billion and \$182 billion.

In this report, GAO also excited a single open recommendation that could save \$141 billion. The Comptroller General discussed this in his questioning. Including this in this report, asking for a summary of what could be saved across the board, suggests that the potential savings from answering all open recommendations would be much greater than the upper bound estimate of \$182 billion.

The second report answering the Kilmer-Timmons bill consolidated open matters for congressional consideration and provided some limited examples of potential cost savings that could be achieved. Now, these are valuable reports, but GAO did not detail all of the open recommendations that could achieve cost savings or offer new recommendations for legislative and oversight actions.

Building on the Modernization Committee's enacted recommendations in the 117th, Congress should consider new ways to increase GAO's ROI.

In my written testimony, I offered six recommendations, but I will highlight three for the Subcommittee here. First, Congress should require GAO to fully answer the Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act. While GAO will likely be unable to provide estimates for each open recommendation, specifically identifying all open recommendations that could achieve cost savings and providing more options for Congress to implement them would be a win for American taxpayers.

Second, Congress should require GAO to include target completion dates or deadlines when issuing new recommendations. Deloitte analysts actually recommended this change back in a 2015 report. Setting deadlines would improve transparency, strengthen accountability, and help GAO increase its 4-year implementation rate and ROI.

Third, Congress should better leverage GAO's ongoing oversight of Federal misspending. Federal agencies made \$247 billion in improper payments last year, including roughly \$200 billion in overpayments. Recent Appropriations Committee report language required GAO to report quarterly on improper payments. Congress should hold hearings and work with GAO to force Federal agencies to end the Federal Government's misspending.

To close, I urge Congress and the Modernization Subcommittee to reauthorize GAO, consistent with the Select Committee's recommendations to reauthorize congressional support agencies. Reauthorizing GAO would allow Congress and its watchdog to work together to give GAO the necessary authorities it needs, ensure that GAO's work aligns with congressional priorities, and improve Government efficiency for American taxpayers.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

[The prepared statement of Dan Lips follows:]

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAN LIPS**

September 29, 2023

**Dan Lips, Head of Policy, Foundation for American Innovation  
Written Testimony for U.S. House of Representatives,  
Committee on Administration, Modernization Subcommittee  
“Legislative Branch Advancement: GAO Modernization”**

Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Kilmer, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Dan Lips. I am Head of Policy at the Foundation for American Innovation (FAI), a think tank focused on developing technology, talent, and ideas that support a better, freer, and more abundant future. From 2011 to 2019, I served on the staff of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, including as Homeland Security Director and Policy Director. In my work as a Senate staffer, including working for former Senator Tom Coburn, I saw firsthand how GAO's critical work informs the congressional oversight and legislative process to make government work better.

In my testimony, I will discuss the value that the Government Accountability Office provides Congress, how nonpartisan oversight can advance congressional modernization, and ways that Congress can strengthen and leverage GAO to meet the nation's fiscal and governance challenges.

**Appreciating GAO's Return on Investment for Congress and American Taxpayers**

For more than a century, GAO has worked to ensure that the American people's tax dollars are spent appropriately.<sup>1</sup> In the twenty-first century, GAO's mission has expanded to ensuring that the government is accountable to Congress and the American people through its performance audits, identifying significant and emerging problems across the government, and improving congressional science and technology capacity and congressional regulatory oversight capacity. Today, Congress and the Modernization Subcommittee have an opportunity to further strengthen GAO and increase its impact to meet the nation's fiscal and governance challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert R. Trask, *Defender of the Public Interest: The General Accounting Office, 1921-1966*, General Accounting Office, Washington, DC, 1996.

Over the past quarter century, GAO has provided significant value to Congress by successfully executing this expanded mission. Since 1999, GAO has been reporting its annual return on investment for American taxpayers by estimating the financial benefits, including government savings, yielded from its work. According to the FY2022 performance and accountability report, since 2002, GAO's work "has resulted in \$1.31 trillion in financial benefits and over 27,000 program and operational benefits that have helped change laws, improve public safety and other services, and promote better management throughout the government."<sup>2</sup> During this period, GAO received \$11.7 billion from Congress.<sup>3</sup> This means that GAO's work has yielded more than \$100 dollars in financial benefits for each dollar provided by Congress. Beyond these financial accomplishments, GAO's valuable work has helped Congress improve government performance and strengthen national security by identifying high-risk areas and other critical challenges that must be addressed through oversight and legislation.

For these reasons, I have written publicly since 2020 urging Congress to recognize GAO's value and return on investment and to increase appropriations for the watchdog agency. In a 2020 report, I analyzed GAO's publicly reported estimates of financial benefits to improve public understanding of how the watchdog's work helps Congress and improves governance.<sup>4</sup> In a 2021 report, I analyzed nonpublic data from GAO detailing all of its financial accomplishments (including those that were not detailed in its annual reports) to improve public understanding of what areas of GAO's work have resulted in the most financial benefits.<sup>5</sup> In addition, I have submitted public witness testimony to Congressional Appropriations committees for each of the past four fiscal years encouraging Congress to provide additional resources to GAO to leverage the watchdog agency's valuable work and increase its return on investment.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-23-900398, *Performances and Accountability Report Fiscal Year 2022*, 2022, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-900398.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Dan Lips, *Leveraging the U.S. Government Accountability Office's Nonpartisan Oversight: An Analysis of 21 Years of Annual Performance and Accountability Reports*, Lincoln Network, 2020, [https://lincolnpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/GAO\\_Paper\\_Edited2-1.pdf](https://lincolnpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/GAO_Paper_Edited2-1.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Dan Lips, *Reviewing the Data: How GAO Saves Taxpayer Dollars*, Lincoln Network, 2021, <https://www.thefai.org/posts/reviewing-the-data-how-gao-saves-taxpayer-dollars>.

<sup>6</sup> Dan Lips, Testimony Before the U.S. House of Representatives, Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee, March 4, 2020, <https://lincolnpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/HHRG-116-AP24-Wstate-LipsD-20200304.pdf>; Dan Lips,



### 5,000 Open Recommendations for Improving the Federal Government

While Congress should celebrate GAO's financial accomplishments over the past 20 years, lawmakers also have a responsibility to consider the potential savings that are left on the table by federal agencies failing to answer GAO's recommendations in a timely manner.

In his most recent performance and accountability report, the Comptroller General reported that 77 percent of GAO's recommendations were implemented within four years, or slightly below GAO's target of 80 percent.<sup>7</sup> Just half of GAO's recommendations made in FY2018 were implemented within two years. This four-year implementation rate is important, because as GAO explains, "[o]ur experience indicates that recommendations remaining open after a 4-year [*sic*] period are less likely to be implemented in subsequent years." In other words, one out of five of GAO's recommendations are not implemented within four years and may never be acted upon by Congress and federal agencies.<sup>8</sup>

As of September 19th, GAO reports that there are 5,001 open recommendations, including 525 "priority recommendations."<sup>9</sup> More than 1,300 of these open recommendations were made more than four years ago.<sup>10</sup> More than 100 were made more than a decade ago.<sup>11</sup> According to GAO's own assessment, these recommendations are "less likely" to be implemented and may in fact never be acted upon by Congress.

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Public Witness Testimony, U.S. House of Representatives, Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee, <https://www.thefai.org/posts/testimony-of-dan-lips-to-the-us-house-of-representatives-legislative-branch-appropriations>, May 13, 2021; Dan Lips, Public Witness Testimony, U.S. House of Representatives, Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee, May 19, 2022, <https://www.thefai.org/posts/testimony-of-dan-lips-to-the-us-house-of-representatives-legislative-branch-appropriations-subcommittee>; Dan Lips, Public Witness Testimony, U.S. House of Representatives, Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee, March 17, 2023, <https://www.thefai.org/posts/testimony-to-u-s-house-of-representatives-committee-on-appropriations-subcommittee-on>.

<sup>7</sup> GAO, *Performances and Accountability Report Fiscal Year 2022*.

<sup>8</sup> As Congress conducts oversight of GAO and considers a potential reauthorization, lawmakers should consider the role that the implementation rate and related metrics play in GAO's internal performance reviews.

<sup>9</sup> GAO, "Recommendations Database," <https://www.gao.gov/reports-testimonies/recommendations-database>.

<sup>10</sup> My analysis of open recommendations listed on a spreadsheet download from GAO's recommendation database.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

### **Modernization Committee Recommendations and Appropriations Committee Report Language**

With the \$33 trillion national debt and Congressional Budget Office projecting large deficits over the next decade, Congress has a responsibility to consider the cost of the government not acting upon GAO's recommendations in a timely manner. The American people should be encouraged by recent bipartisan actions by Congress, including the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, to focus more attention on GAO's open recommendations, the potential for additional cost savings if recommendations were closed in a timely manner, and legislative and oversight opportunities to enact GAO recommendations. For example, in 2019, Congress passed a law, the GAO-IG Act, which requires federal agencies to include information about open GAO and Inspector General recommendations in their annual congressional budget justification reports.<sup>12</sup>

During the 117th Congress, the Select Modernization Committee passed two recommendations, later passed into law, focused on improving the way that Congress works with GAO to address open, unimplemented recommendations. The first recommendation stated, "GAO should report annually on the estimated cost savings of its unimplemented recommendations."<sup>13</sup> The second recommendation states, "GAO should annually report to Congress on legislative options to address open priority recommendations."<sup>14</sup>

Following the passage of these recommendations, Select Committee Chair Derek Kilmer (D-WA) and Rep. William Timmons (R-SC) introduced the Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act.<sup>15</sup> Language based on this bipartisan bill was included in the FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act that became law in December 2023.<sup>16</sup> In addition to consolidating "matters for Congressional Consideration from the Government Accountability Office" in one report, the law requires GAO to "identify any additional congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement" unimplemented

<sup>12</sup> Public Law 115–414—Jan. 3, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ414/PLAW-115publ414.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Chair Derek Kilmer and Vice Chair William Timmons, *Final Report, Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress*, December 2022, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRPT-117hrpt646/pdf/GPO-CRPT-117hrpt646.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> H.R. 7331, The Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act, 117th Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/117th-congress/house-bill/7331/text>.

<sup>16</sup> Pub. Law 117–263.

priority recommendations and “publish any known costs of unimplemented priority recommendations, if applicable.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition, the Congressional Appropriations Committee included language in the text accompanying the FY2023 omnibus appropriations bill requiring a separate report focusing on the cost savings that could be achieved if unimplemented GAO recommendations were closed:

Within 180 days of enactment of this Act, GAO shall publish on its website and provide to the Committees on Appropriations, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and the House Committee on Oversight and Reform a report estimating the cost savings that could be achieved if agencies acted on GAO's recommendations organized by agency.<sup>18</sup>

Together, the Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act and the appropriations accompanying text language demonstrate Congress's bipartisan interest in working with GAO to improve government efficiency and achieve taxpayer savings by closing GAO's open recommendations.

#### **GAO's Reports in Response to the NDAA and Appropriations Report Language**

In 2023, GAO released reports answering these new congressional mandates established by the 117th Congress. In June, GAO released a report answering the appropriations report language estimating the potential cost savings that could be achieved if all open recommendations were closed. The report stated:

Implementing all of those recommendations and matters could produce \$92 billion to \$182 billion of measurable, future financial benefits, according to a simulation model GAO developed. Eighty percent of the total simulated financial benefits fell in this range. The model produced a median simulated value of approximately \$131 billion.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> “Division I—Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, 2023,” Senate Committee on Appropriations, 117th Congress, <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Division%20I%20-%20Leg%20Statement%20FY23.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-23-106598, *Potential Financial Benefits: Estimating the Value of Implementing Open GAO Recommendations*, 2023,

However, GAO's report included qualifying language to suggest that this estimate, which was based on a statistical analysis, was just a ballpark estimate that likely understates the potential savings that could be achieved. GAO gave several reasons for why it is difficult to make precise estimates, including that a lack of data and other information "make it difficult or impossible to measure financial benefits."<sup>20</sup> Importantly, GAO noted that this does not include specific cost savings estimates that could be achieved if specific recommendations were closed, such as a recommendation for equalizing Medicare payment rates that could achieve \$141 billion, according to CBO.

In July, GAO issued a report in response to the Improving Government for American Taxpayers Act. The report answered the congressional mandate by providing a consolidated list of open matters for Congressional Consideration.<sup>21</sup> The report noted that 281 such matters remain open, and pointed out that 37 percent of these recommendations have been open for less than four years.<sup>22</sup> The report highlighted examples of open recommendations and matters for congressional consideration that could achieve substantial cost savings; however, it did not provide a breakdown of potential cost savings that could be achieved by implementing priority recommendations.<sup>23</sup>

These new reports provide valuable information for Congress. However, in my opinion, they do not sufficiently answer the implicit question raised by Congress in the Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act or the appropriations report language. While detailing the potential cost savings that could be achieved if all of the 525 open priority recommendations or nearly 5,000 open recommendations may be a difficult or even impossible task, GAO could have provided list of unimplemented recommendations with explanations or whether such an estimate could be made and, if so, what potential savings could be achieved. Such an estimate, even if made with uncertainty and qualifications, could help Congress improve government efficiency and increase GAO's return on investment by prioritizing legislative and oversight actions.

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<https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-106598>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-23-106837, *Open Matters for Congressional Consideration: Action Can Produce Billions of Dollars in Financial and Other Benefits for the Nation*, 2023, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-106837.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

### **The 2010 Coburn Amendment and Annual Duplication Reports as a Model**

There is a precedent for a congressional mandate for annual GAO reporting achieving substantial taxpayer savings. In 2010, former Senator Tom Coburn (my boss from 2011 through 2015) passed an amendment to legislation increasing the federal debt limit by a vote of 94-0.<sup>24</sup> The amendment required GAO to conduct routine investigation to:

identify programs, agencies, offices, and initiatives with duplicative goals and activities within Departments and governmentwide and report annually to Congress on the findings, including the cost of such duplication and with recommendations for consolidation and elimination to reduce duplication identifying specific rescissions.<sup>25</sup>

In June, the Comptroller General released the 13th annual report responding to this Congressional mandate. The report explained that “Congressional and agency action in these areas has yielded about \$600 billion in cost savings and revenue increases,” to date and that addressing open matters and recommendations “could save tens of billions more dollars and improve government services.”<sup>26</sup>

Comptroller General Gene Dodaro has described Senator Coburn’s amendment and the congressional mandate it established as “the gift that keeps on giving, and it will for a long time.”<sup>27</sup> The \$600 billion in estimated financial benefits associated with the annual duplication report accounts for nearly half of GAO’s self-reported financial benefits achieved since 2012. However, Congress should be aware that, at the time, GAO was reluctant to do this project, according to former staff for Senator Coburn involved with discussions with GAO at the time, which is why he offered the amendment to establish the reporting requirement in law. In this way, Senator Coburn’s 2010 amendment and these

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Coburn’s Statement on New GAO Duplication Report, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate, April 8, 2014,

<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/media/reps/dr-coburns-statement-on-new-gao-duplication-report/>.

<sup>25</sup> Congressional Record—Senate, January 22, 2010,

<https://www.congress.gov/111/crec/2010/01/22/CREC-2010-01-22-pt1-PgS156-2.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-23-106089, *2023 Annual Report: Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Billions of Dollars in Financial Benefits*, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-106089>.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Dinan, “Former Sen. Tom Coburn, Washington’s Top Waste Watcher, Dead at 72,” *Washington Times*, March 28, 2020, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/mar/28/former-sen-tom-coburn-dies-washingtons-top-wastewa/>.

mandated reports provide an example for current lawmakers about both the opportunity to achieve cost savings through mandated reporting and the need to directly mandate GAO's work through law to ensure that their work aligns with Congressional objectives.

### **Recommendations for Congress to Strengthen GAO and Advance Congressional Modernization**

The subcommittee and Congress have significant opportunities to strengthen GAO, improve government efficiency and achieve taxpayer savings, and to advance the broader objective of modernizing Congress. I respectfully ask the subcommittee and Congress to consider the following recommendations:

#### **1. Increase funding for the Government Accountability Office**

GAO requested \$860 million in funding for FY2024, or an increase of approximately \$69 million.<sup>28</sup> Recognizing that Congress faces a challenging fiscal and macroeconomic environment, I respectfully urge Congress to provide GAO with these resources. Based on GAO's track record of achieving substantial savings for each dollar provided by Congress, Congress should be confident that fully funding the Comptroller General's request would be a win for American taxpayers. In addition, Congress should consider directing GAO to use additional resources to upgrade its information technology systems to improve the efficiency of its work and to hire additional economists (to assist with the development of estimates for potential cost savings of unimplemented recommendations or to address potential congressional regulatory oversight needs).

#### **2. Extend and strengthen the annual reporting requirements to identify potential cost savings that could be achieved if federal agencies answered open recommendations and priority recommendations.**

The 117th Congress prudently established a new reporting requirement through the Improving Government for American Taxpayers Act and the accompanying text of the omnibus. Moving forward, Congress should extend and strengthen these reporting requirements, including by directing GAO to provide estimates of potential cost savings for

<sup>28</sup> Gene L. Dodaro, Comptroller General, Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request Government Accountability Office, Testimony Before the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate, March 15, 2023, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-900494.pdf>.

each open recommendation (and priority recommendations). Since GAO reports that estimating potential cost savings may be difficult or impossible in many cases, Congress could instruct GAO to inform Congress if an estimate is not possible. However, establishing a detailed list of potential cost savings for each recommendation could provide Congress with ways to prioritize legislative and oversight actions.

**3. Require GAO to set target completion dates for new recommendations to improve the timeliness of implementation.**

In a 2015 report, Deloitte experts analyzed 26 years of GAO reports and identified opportunities to increase GAO's impact. They recommended that GAO set "target completion dates for implementing each recommendation and then making real-time data available to the public showing how long it is taking each agency to implement GAO recommendations."<sup>29</sup> The experts reasoned that setting deadlines "could motivate agencies to more quickly address GAO recommendations and realize the benefits they deliver to the public." Congress could heed this recommendation to require target completion dates for new recommendations and help GAO increase its four-year implementation rate. In addition, Congress could consider ways to create incentives for federal agencies to enact GAO recommendations in a timely manner, including through the appropriations process.

**4. Collaborate with GAO on increased oversight of federal improper payments to improve payment integrity.**

Congress has an opportunity to achieve substantial taxpayer savings by collaborating with GAO to reduce improper payments. In March, GAO reported that federal agencies made an estimated \$247 billion in improper payments in FY2022 with overpayments accounting for \$200 billion of this amount.<sup>30</sup> GAO's report noted that this was likely an underestimate, since this total does not include estimates for certain "risky" programs.<sup>31</sup> A 2022 House Appropriations report accompanying the funding bill for the legislative branch required

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Byler, Steve Berman, William D. Eggers, "Accountability Quantified: What 26 Years of GAO Reports Can Teach Us about Government Management," Deloitte, 2015, <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/analytics/text-analytics-and-gao-reports.html>.

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-23-106285, *Improper Payments: Fiscal Year 2022 Estimates and Opportunities for Improvement*, 2023, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-106285>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

GAO to conduct quarterly reporting on improper payments, which is a prudent step to increase oversight of this costly area of government waste. Looking forward, Congress should collaborate with GAO to do additional oversight in this area. For example, House leadership could urge Committees to hold annual hearings examining improper payments, including GAO experts to testify, to focus federal agency leadership attention on preventing misspending.

**5. Support GAO's efforts to strengthen congressional science and technology capacity and harness the power of new technologies to modernize Congressional oversight.**

With congressional support, GAO has taken productive steps to increase congressional science and technology capacity, including by establishing the Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics (STAA) team to assume the mission of the former Office of Technology Assessment.<sup>32</sup> Since 2019, this office has been a valuable source of S&T advice to Congress. However, as one of many mission teams in GAO, it has not had the necessary bureaucratic independence or flexibility to flourish.<sup>33</sup> Consistent with the Select Modernization Committee's recommendation, Congress should separately "authorize STAA" and bring in more structural features of OTA.<sup>34</sup> In addition to providing foresight and helping Congress understand complicated science and technology developments, Congress has an opportunity to leverage STAA's data science capabilities to improve the timeliness and impact of its audits of key areas, including federal improper payments. This can include transitioning to real-time auditing, including by drawing best practices from the private sector.

**6. Establish and fund a new mission team within GAO to strengthen congressional regulatory oversight capacity.**

One of the Select Committee's recommendations was to "identify how increased regulatory and legal resources could help strengthen the role of the legislative branch," which the

<sup>32</sup> Importantly, STAA also houses the Innovation Lab and other functions.

<sup>33</sup> While it has produced quality work, most of its reports have been undertaken on the Comptroller General's authority rather than originating with Members. Under the weight of an audit-focused bureaucracy, it has struggled to directly engage with Members and their staff.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., the proposal from Reps. Rush Holt and Amo Houghton for an OTA-like office in GAO: <https://github.com/zachgraves/futurecongress/blob/master/CSTA%20GAO%20revision%202004%20w:o%20mark%20up.pdf>.



Committee advanced by requiring GAO review the matter in 2021.<sup>35</sup> In 2022 alone, agencies issued more than 3,000 administrative publications that could properly be thought of as regulatory, including 265 “significant rules,” with an estimated cost of over \$117 billion in total.<sup>36</sup> Estimates of the cost of regulation approach \$2 trillion.<sup>37</sup> Congress has not established the necessary legislative powers, expertise, and staff resources to adequately oversee federal regulations. Several scholars have recommended a Congressional Regulation Office modeled after CBO. An incremental approach for Congress would be to establish a regulatory review mission team within GAO to provide nonpartisan cost-estimates of federal regulations, building on GAO’s existing authorities under the Congressional Review Act.<sup>38</sup> In 2000, Congress passed a law, the Truth in Regulating Act, that established a three-year pilot project to require GAO to require GAO to report to Congress on economically significant rules proposed by federal agencies.<sup>39</sup> However, this pilot project was not funded and Congress did not exercise this authority.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, it provides a precedent as Congress explores new ways to improve its ability to oversee federal regulations and the administrative state.

## Conclusion

To close, thank you again for the opportunity to testify. The Select Committee and the new Modernization Subcommittee are providing historic, bipartisan leadership to make Congress and the legislative branch work better for the American people. The Government Accountability Office already provides a valuable service. But Congress should consider ways to make GAO work more effectively.

To address these and other recommendations, Congress should consider reauthorizing the Government Accountability Office, consistent with the Modernization Committee’s

<sup>35</sup> Chair Derek Kilmer and Vice Chair William Timmons, Final Report, Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, December 2022,

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRPT-117hrpt646/pdf/GPO-CRPT-117hrpt646.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Satya Thallam and Dan Lips, “Empowering Regulatory Oversight: How Congress Can Hold the Administrative State Accountable,” Foundation for American Innovation, 2023,

<https://www.thefai.org/posts/empowering-regulatory-oversight-how-congress-can-hold-the-administrative-state-accountable>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> “Congressional Review Act,” U.S. Government Accountability Office, accessed April 6, 2023, <https://www.gao.gov/legal/other-legal-work/congressional-review-act>.

<sup>39</sup> Pub. Law 106-312 (2000).

<sup>40</sup> David M. Walker, “Letter to Tom Davis,” June 7, 2006, Government Accountability Office, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/b-302705.pdf>.

recommendation to reauthorize all Congressional support agencies. Reauthorizing GAO would allow Congress and the watchdog agencies to work together to ensure that GAO has the necessary authorities, including access to information and electronic records, to answer Congress's requests and to ensure that GAO's work aligns with congressional priorities.

Chairwoman BICE. Thank you, Mr. Lips.

At this time, we will now question the witnesses, beginning with myself, followed by the Ranking Member, and we will alternate back and forth. Any Member wishing to be recognized should signal their request to the chair.

Now I recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Again, I want to thank you all for being with us this morning.

Dr. Persons, I want to start with you. You know, we talked a little bit about statutory authorities within the GAO, and there is a conversation happening around giving—I am sorry—recommending that they authorize STAA. Can you talk a little bit about that and why you think that is so important?

Mr. PERSONS. Yes. Thanks, Chairwoman Bice.

The main reason is that the STAA, as it has evolved—and it has been established, but the missions and the functions—it continues to have added expanded mission space to it starting with technology assessments in addition to the audits that it does. It has a widening spectrum. Now, especially inclusive of the innovation lab, which you heard the Comptroller General mention that they are moving things forward, but there is, I think, a need for those resources to be expanded and recognized as special.

Part of this just is informed by the fact that every year that I was chief scientist there, the Congress had language in the conference report or others usually about pushing more and more technology assessments, science and technology, et cetera.

It is really about the establishment of the more and the broader spectrum of things. It also gives the team an identity of where it can avoid jurisdictional issues. For example, STAA does things that are technology focused, sometimes involving IT. We also have an IT and cybersecurity team, as the Comptroller General alluded to, that we want to make sure that STAA would be able to do things that allow the ITC Team at GAO to do its work in cybersecurity in an oversight capacity primarily but then also to be able to do other work.

It really is about more and the broader spectrum of work that they need to do.

Chairwoman BICE. Thank you.

Mr. Blockwood, let me move to you. You mentioned in your testimony, you talked about a clearinghouse for reports. Can you maybe expound on that a little bit more? I know, you know, we are sort of looking at all of the functions across support agencies as a whole and trying to determine is there overlap; is there duplicity; are there ways that we can streamline?

You know, do we need a clearinghouse? Do we need to maybe combine agencies? Tell me a little bit more about your thought process on that.

Mr. BLOCKWOOD. Yes, thank you for the question.

I mean, I think there are two ways to look at this. You know, at first, I would start with the context of, you know, Congress is one of the most advised bodies in the world or anywhere and receives a lot of information from a lot of different inputs. You have information coming from the legislative branch agencies. You have external experts. As you go to look for information or recommendations, you would want to be able to do that in a singular place, and that can happen potentially through a dashboard or a way of compiling information.

One way that I would respond to your question is, you know, you could create a dashboard or a platform that puts customers first and Congress first, thinking about what it needs. It could work iteratively so that it can change over time to think about what those changes might—what those needs might be when it changes. It could look at data quality and what you are actually receiving, and it could focus on really the outcome and not necessarily the process. It is not the data base itself, but it is what is in it and how Congress uses it.

The second thing is to look at all the different or potential overlap that the different agencies have. CRS may provide information to individual Members, may provide things at a speed to which is necessary in a fast-moving environment. GAO may provide information that is longer in depth, may be more evidence based, and has a more rigor and methodological approach to it.

CBO might provide estimates on particular legislation or economic outcomes.

Chairwoman BICE. Do you think that it would be—that Congress should take under consideration combining some of these entities and collapsing them?

Mr. BLOCKWOOD. I would certainly recommend exploring whether merging agencies or collapsing certain capabilities would make sense, and I think looking at an external entity like the National Academy of Public Administration to do a study as to what those benefits to Congress might be would certainly be encouraged.

Chairwoman BICE. Excellent.

At this time, I am going to throw it over to Mr. Lips.

Your recent article published in The Hill critiques the GAO's implementation of two modernization recommendations. How do you think the GAO could do a better job of implementation in the future?

Mr. LIPS. I think the big key would be to fully answer the mandates in the Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act and specifically to break out all of those open recommendations, 5,000 in the case of the appropriations report language requirement, around 500 in the case of the Kilmer-Timmons bill, and go through them and estimate where the cost savings will be the biggest. Where can Congress get the biggest bang for the buck? They may not be able to provide an estimate, as we heard today, for all of them, but they can provide them for some.

From my experience, my former boss, Senator Tom Coburn, passed the mandate that established the annual report on duplication. That work, as we have heard, has been—resulted in \$600 billion in savings over the past 12 years.

It is important to know—according to his former staff, I was not working with him at the same time—GAO did not want to do that work until they were mandated by law. They were asked to do it. They did not want to do it, and so he passed an amendment to a debt ceiling bill, and since then, Comptroller General Dodaro has called that reporting requirement the gift that keeps on giving.

I think they need to be pushed sometimes to deliver what Congress wants.

Chairwoman BICE. Thank you for mentioning the late Dr. Coburn, who I had the pleasure of getting to know briefly before his passing.

At this time, I will yield 5 minutes to my colleague and Ranking Member, Mr. Kilmer.

Mr. KILMER. Thanks, Madam Chair.

Mr. Lips, I do not know if you want to add anything further about additional actions that need to be taken as we are trying to get more of these recommendations closed out and specifically making sure that GAO implements the law we just passed.

Mr. LIPS. I think that it would be valuable. Thank you for the question and for your leadership of that important bill and the recommendations from the Select Committee.

I think that one of the really great things about that bill is that it asked for additional guidance for Congress to pursue legislative and oversight actions, really pressing them to provide that, pressing for that list, as I mentioned, of where the real savings could be. It is a case of Congress wanting to help GAO help itself, so the more pressure that you can apply and to really get them to respond could be a great win for American taxpayers.

Mr. KILMER. I want to ask Mr. Blockwood. You know, we have heard about GAO being consistently rated one of the best Federal agencies at which to work. Why do you think that is the case? Are there any strategies that GAO is using that we should think about encouraging other support agencies to use or even Congress to use?

Mr. BLOCKWOOD. Yes, thank you. I mean, there is no secret that GAO has been No. 1 in its category for the last 3 years and the top five for the last 15, and a driver of that is employee engagement. It does not happen on accident. It is very intentional. Increasing employee engagement and involving them in decision-making, having continuous and really effective communication, creating time and space for innovation for employees, creating interpersonal relationships, and, very specifically, looking at different subsets of the employee and hearing what their needs might be, and, importantly, leadership. AI would recognize the current Comptroller General, Gene Dodaro, and his leadership for employee engagement, as well as the Executive Committee and all the senior executives across GAO, really foster an environment that allow for that employee engagement.

That is the main driver of why they are best places to work and a leading best practice agency.

Mr. KILMER. Is there anything systematically that—you know, as a Committee that has passed recommendations encouraging support agencies to do X, Y, and Z, is there anything specific, if you were asked, you would say, hey, we ought to encourage all agencies, or even Congress itself, to do X, Y, or Z?

Mr. BLOCKWOOD. You know, I might offer two recommendations there.

Mr. KILMER. Sure.

Mr. BLOCKWOOD. One is in the leadership of those agencies: when they are selected, how they are selected, and making sure you have the commitment up front.

Then, two, making sure that there is follow up. The Partnership for Public Service certainly has our best places to work in Federal Government rankings. We offer briefings on how to improve some of that employee engagement for agencies that may not be meeting the mark, and we also offer bright spots and promising practices for those that are doing really well and encouraging those agencies to work with the Partnership for Public Service, as well as other agencies, and leading OPM officials to understand how they can better engage public servants.

Mr. KILMER. I want to just invite—you know, obviously, our Committee, our Subcommittee is focused on modernization. Are there any particular challenges that you see facing GAO in the coming years in terms of building its capacity? Anything you think we ought to be thinking about, and specifically with regard to modernizing GAO so it is ready to take on the next challenges?

Mr. PERSONS. Yes. Thank you, sir.

I think that a lot of the focus on—if we are thinking about digital transformation and data modernization sort of things, we really do have to think about at least having a look at the authorities that are there with respect to usage of data, especially as you are collecting data in sort of a longitudinal sense, how it is used, how you protect things like PII (Personal Identifiable Information), and then the various legal statutes and things like that, the various departments and agencies that GAO oversees—think of Health and Human Services or Department of Defense, et cetera—that have their own special handling.

It is not an easy task, but it needs to be done in order to amplify and get to the future of EBP that we want to get. I think it just has—it is warranted a look, a serious and deep look at what can GAO do with data, how might its access authorities be enhanced to include long-term usage, compilation of, et cetera, to be able to do its job and deliver that kind of—the findings, content, and so on that it is so well-known for doing.

Mr. KILMER. This is why we introduce the Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, right, to actually get Congress thinking about these things with regard to GAO and with regard to everything else. If we are going to have evidence-based policymaking, to your point, understanding how data is used, how it ought to be used is really important.

Thank you for your answer. I promise, I did not put him up to answering it that way. Thank you.

Mr. PERSONS. My pleasure.

Chairwoman BICE. Thank you, Ranking Member.

At this time, I recognize Mr. Morelle for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. MORELLE. Thank you, Madam Chair. I am sorry I came in the middle of this, so I apologize. Unlike my friends, I am probably

further behind in learning about some of these issues, but I really appreciated the testimony.

One thing that I wanted to just follow up on was a question I think Chairwoman Bice asked of you, Mr. Blockwood. That is I am really sort of intrigued by the idea of creating sort of this dashboard where Congress could access different pieces of information and help educate us and our staff about important issues. You suggested near the end that maybe the consolidation of those might be helpful.

I wonder, not to push back but to sort of question, whether or not—I guess I would worry a little bit if it ended up being, instead of a range of different places you could get information from and different perspectives, if a consolidation would somehow lead to less diversity in terms of thought. I just wonder. I am certainly happy to have any of you respond to it, but we want to make sure that we are equipped with really good information that is helpful to us, that helps us do analysis, helps us share information, help to ultimately come to the right decision. We want to get to the right place.

I do not know the answer to this question. I do not have a perspective. I would just be curious to just delve into that a little further.

Mr. BLOCKWOOD. Great. Thank you for the question.

I would say, one, it is certainly worth exploring to better understand what the implications might be, what the opportunities might be there.

Two, I would say, when you talk about merging, I would say—or when I talk about merging I mean certain capabilities, certain units. It may not have to be wholesale, or maybe it does, but that exploration would help define that.

When I mention dashboard, I am saying a place where recommendations and information can be provided and you can see where that is. When I think about the different agencies, you know, there are unique offerings there, and I think, you know, really one of the other things that I would consider is whether GAO or another entity can play a coordinating, consolidating, and curating role.

You are not actually losing that diversity of inputs and information. You are actually gaining quicker, better access, more digestible, to that information, which we all know you, as Members of Congress, time is of the essence when you need to make decisions.

Mr. MORELLE. Especially when you have 5 minutes to be able to query people. Time is of the essence.

I do not know if others had—

Mr. PERSONS. Yes, thanks.

I just wanted to add that it is an excellent question, and there is good news in that. If you take the lens of the view of like a legislative support agency like GAO from a report-centric one and turn it into content, the technology is such that even with a GPT or transformer-based system, you can feed it. You can control what I call the data nutrition of what goes in there.

If you are having—if you have and you have a wealth of non-partisan fact-based nonideological information in all GAO reports, you have CRS, you have CBO, those things can be amalgamated

in a way and sourced or indexed to where they are coming from so you can know where that is. It is not just like opening up to the entire open world where disinformation risk is just going to come in.

It is a very valid point, but you can control for that and design a system to help provide these issue dashboards and do just-in-time policies.

Mr. MORELLE. Did you have anything to add?

You know, every so often you come across something, and it sort of opens your eyes to certain things. I had this experience this past week. I picked up a volume—book called “Recoding America,” Jennifer—I think it is Pahlka is how you say the last name. I am reading it. I am only, you know, about two-thirds of the way through, but it is really fascinating because it centers a lot about data. It centers a lot about how the Government does it.

I was struck again, Mr. Blockwood, when you had mentioned about—I do not know if you used this term—but human-centered design, which is essentially building for the user and the end person and making sure the implementation is helpful to them but also consistent with policy.

I wonder if any of you have had a chance to come across the volume, if you had any thoughts about it, because it is something I want to dig further into, but I am just curious if anybody has had a chance to look at it. If not, I would recommend it, and I would love to come back and then ask your thoughts about it.

Anyone?

Mr. PERSONS. I have not but I will. I would be happy to.

Mr. MORELLE. OK.

This is not like a test to see how well read you are. I apologize. I am just wondering if you are familiar with it.

Mr. BLOCKWOOD. Sir, I will say the Partnership for Public Service did actually have an event and a conversation with Jennifer Pahlka. If you allow me, there is one thing that I would probably draw from the comments that I would like to highlight—

Mr. MORELLE. Sure.

Mr. BLOCKWOOD [continuing]. which is customer experience. It is nothing unfamiliar to this Committee, but really that is a growing field, and I think what you are getting to is really the evolution of that and moving from customer service to customer experience, and there are ways to do that with a level of efficiency and effectiveness that I think agencies should adopt. GAO has some practices that it could also benefit from.

Mr. MORELLE. Thank you.

Madam Chair, I apologize, but I yield back. Thank you.

Chairwoman BICE. Thank you, Mr. Morelle.

I recognize myself for an additional couple of questions, and this is really open.

Dr. Persons, you kind of alluded to this when we talked about the STAA statutory authority, but I want to open this up to the rest and ask what other statutory authorities do you think should be given to GAO to help them maybe more effectively do their work?

I believe earlier in the first panel Mr. Dodaro sort of alluded to the fact that he did not feel like there is necessarily anything spe-

cific that was necessary, but I am curious, having been part of the entity or a user of it, do you feel differently, that there are some things that could be identified to offer up?

Mr. LIPS. Thank you for the question.

I would second the recommendation or endorsement of authorizing STAA as its own entity. I think it needs independence. I think that there could be some stronger authorities to establish more direct reporting to congressional requests. I think that would fill some of the gap that was left by the OTA and the need for enhancing congressional science and technical capacity and expertise.

One, I think GAO sometimes is reluctant to say they do not have the authorities that they need because that puts them in a bind when they are trying to negotiate with agencies for those authorities. From my experience, I think they can get benefit from Congress re-endorsing that they have these authorities.

There was a bill that moved through the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee and became law in 2019 that clarified some of their access to information that would be useful, clarifying that. In the future, if Congress were to require agencies to provide information and data in an electronic and accessible format, that might help GAO be able to provide more timely information.

I think also clarifying their ability to do work on oversight within the intelligence community and national security community has been an area that GAO has, from my perspective, been trying to do but sometimes struggles. I think there would be a real benefit to doing a reauthorization.

Mr. BLOCKWOOD. As we kind of all discussed here, you know, GAO is a model agency. It is a leading practices agency. Clearly what it is doing under its current leadership is working well, and GAO itself would say, by nature of being an audit organization, all organizations can, obviously, get better and improve.

Seemingly, though, with GAO, it seems like most of its issues would be centered around resources and finances. You have agency leadership committed to improvement, committed to understanding where it needs to improve, and I think that is a really good first start for any agency.

You know, one of the things that I would share is that I think there are going to be no shortages of challenges, and in my view, it is always going to come down to about three things. One is people. Do you have the skill, talent, and the empowering leadership needed to work toward the most critical issues?

The second is money. Do you have the resources, and do you have the accountability and transparency around that to effectively execute on your mission?

Then the third is just things. Do you have the services and the technology to deliver, in this case, on behalf of the American public?

I think GAO has those three elements, and as you look, obviously, where it can improve, I think you would see some agreement and some immediate reaction from GAO to try to do that. Of course, they would also agree that exploring where additional authorities or where additional help from Congress might be needed, that they would certainly welcome it, I would assume.



Mr. PERSONS. Madam Chair, all I would add is that in the absence of the NAPA report's recommendation for a science—or that office, then the question is, how do we solve the problem of the absorptive capacity for S&T? A lot of that involves people.

I noted your question earlier about how many detailees. There is only so many that are there. It may require a look at authorities in terms of hiring and how to—as the Comptroller General's warning, it is about preserving GAO's independence. It must be preserved. How can it or how might we imagine taking a human resource that is there to help to just explain to the Congress to do things, to push forward, to achieve that vision of the better user experience as it were for the Congress.

I think there is something to look at there depending on the options that the Committee pursues.

Chairwoman BICE. Perfect.

Well, that concludes questioning. I want to thank the witnesses for their time this morning.

Members of the Subcommittee may have some additional questions for you, and we would ask you to please submit those questions in writing.

If there is no further business, I thank the Members for their participation.

Without objection, the Committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

## QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD



October 16, 2023

**Dan Lips, Head of Policy, Foundation for American Innovation**  
**Questions for the Record Responses**  
**U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on House Administration**  
**Subcommittee on Modernization**  
**Legislative Branch Advancement: GAO Modernization**

- 1. During the hearing, you discussed how GAO's annual reports on duplication, overlap, government fragmentation, and cost savings opportunities have yielded incredible cost savings since their first publication in 2011. How have these reports empowered GAO and Congress to achieve greater cost savings for the American taxpayer?**
  - a. In your perspective as a former congressional staffer, what other products or services have best enhanced GAO's return on investment?**
  - b. Are there any other products or services that GAO could provide in the future to enhance the agency or Congress?**

In 2010, Senator Tom Coburn passed legislation requiring GAO's annual reports on duplication. He passed the law creating this mandate after GAO denied his office's request to do this review. According to GAO's 2023 report, this work has resulted in approximately \$600 billion in financial benefits since 2011, including \$46.8 billion last year.<sup>1</sup> This mandated work likely increased GAO's return on investment. Between 2002 and 2010, GAO's annual ROI averaged \$92 for each dollar it received from Congress. From 2011 to 2022, GAO's annual ROI averaged \$125 to \$1. (Even if we exclude GAO's unusually large ROI of \$338 in 2019, GAO averaged an ROI of \$106 between 2011 and 2022, or about 15 percent higher than its ROI from 2002 to 2010.) It is reasonable for Congress to assume that some of the financial benefits achieved by GAO's work would not have happened without Senator Coburn's mandate.

From my perspective as a former congressional staffer, GAO's work provides significant value for Congress and the federal government. GAO's recommendations provide a nonpartisan starting point for bipartisan legislation and oversight, as well as valuable

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-23-106089, *2023 Annual Report: Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Billions of Dollars in Financial Benefits*, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-106089>.

guidance for executive branch leaders to improve the efficiency and operations. Beyond the duplication reports, GAO's high-risk list and related work helps Congress focus oversight and legislative actions on key challenges facing the federal government. In addition, GAO's work related to certain departments has yielded more financial benefits than others. My 2021 analysis of nonpublic data from GAO found that, from 2002 and 2019, GAO's recommendations for the Defense and HHS Departments, for example, resulted in \$420 billion and \$185 billion in savings, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

In the future, GAO could help Congress in several ways. First, GAO could set deadlines or target completion dates for their recommendations. This would improve transparency and public accountability, allowing Congress and the executive branch to monitor federal agencies' progress implementing GAO's recommendations. Second, GAO could provide Congress with additional recommendations for congressional consideration (as well as new legislative and oversight options) that could be taken to enact GAO's unimplemented recommendations or unimplemented priority recommendations. For example, Congress could direct GAO to provide draft legislative language to each authorizing committee annually or at the beginning of a new Congress to enact GAO's recommendations. Third, Congress could require GAO to provide information about any delays that the nonpartisan watchdog agency experiences requesting information from the executive branch, which could allow Congress to help GAO receive information in a timely manner and improve the timeliness of their reports.

**2. You have supported the idea of re-examining and reauthorizing GAO's statutory authorities. In your view, what statutory revisions or updates would benefit GAO and Congress?**

Congress should re-examine and reauthorize GAO to ensure that its watchdog agency is independent, effective, and meeting the needs of Congress.

One important revision that Congress could consider would be changing the current process for nominating and confirming the Comptroller General. Law currently requires the president to nominate the Comptroller General and Deputy Comptroller General. Congress could revise the statute to give the legislative branch the authority to nominate

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<sup>2</sup> Dan Lips, *Reviewing the Data: How GAO Saves Taxpayer Dollars*, Lincoln Network, 2021, <https://www.thefai.org/posts/reviewing-the-data-how-gao-saves-taxpayer-dollars>.

and confirm the Comptroller General through a bipartisan process involving the leaders of the House and Senate.

Congress could also authorize GAO's Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics team to strengthen congressional science and technology capacity. Congress could grant the head of the STAA team additional hiring and acquisitions authorities.<sup>3</sup>

Congress could also establish new requirements for GAO's reporting to Congress, including requirements for GAO to provide "target completion dates" for recommendations, estimates of financial benefits for implementing recommendations if appropriate, and additional matters for congressional consideration to help Congress enact GAO's nonpartisan recommendations in a timely manner.

While the Comptroller General stated at the hearing that GAO did not need additional authorities to access information, it is possible that Congress could help GAO improve their ability to conduct oversight of the executive branch by establishing statutory authorities for GAO to obtain information in a timely manner. For example, Congress passed the GAO Access and Oversight Act of 2017, a law that ensured GAO access to certain information under the Social Security Act.<sup>4</sup> Congress could work with GAO to establish additional statutory authorities to ensure that GAO has timely access to information, including information in an electronic format, to improve the timeliness of GAO's work.

Congress could also reestablish authorities for GAO that were created by the Truth in Regulating Act of 2000, which created a pilot project for GAO to conduct independent regulatory analysis of "economically significant" agency rules.<sup>5</sup> While this pilot project was not funded and expired, authorizing and establishing new independent regulatory analysis and review capabilities within GAO would help Congress better oversee federal regulations and the administrative state.

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<sup>3</sup> Zach Graves, Testimony, House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, U.S. House of Representatives, 2021, <https://www.thefai.org/posts/testimony-of-zach-graves-to-the-us-house-of-representatives-select-committee-on-the-modernization-of-congress>.

<sup>4</sup> Pub. Law 115-3 (2017).

<sup>5</sup> Pub. Law 106-312 (2000).

**3. Your testimony highlighted the need for GAO to improve its reported responses to the provisions in the Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act. What specific improvements in GAO's implementation of the law would best equip GAO and Congress to close open recommendations?**

The bipartisan Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act established new reporting requirements for GAO to consolidate its open matters for congressional consideration, identify any additional congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement unimplemented priority recommendations, and publish any known costs of unimplemented priority recommendations. While GAO's report responding to the Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act provided additional information about open matters for congressional consideration, it did not highlight additional legislative or oversight actions that Congress could take or provide an estimate of potential savings that could be achieved for unimplemented priority recommendations.

Fully answering the requirements of the Improving Government for America's Taxpayers Act would help Congress close open recommendations. First, providing additional legislative and oversight recommendations would enable bipartisan legislation and oversight actions, which would allow Congress to ensure that GAO's open recommendations are closed in a timely manner. Faster closure of GAO's open recommendations would improve government efficiency and likely increase GAO's return on investment. Second, providing estimates of potential cost savings or financial benefits that could be achieved from specific unimplemented priority recommendations would help Congress prioritize potential legislative and oversight actions to achieve taxpayer savings. Congress could direct GAO to provide information to Congress about each unimplemented priority recommendation, including whether implementing it will yield financial benefits and, if so, estimating the potential cost savings that could be achieved. While GAO could provide context and uncertainties about the estimates where necessary, providing Congress with a basic estimate of cost savings could enable bipartisan legislative or oversight work to reduce the federal government's deficit.



October 16, 2023

**Post-Hearing Question for the Record Submitted to Mr. James-Christian Blockwood from the House Committee on Administration Subcommittee on Modernization**

**“Legislative Branch Advancement: GAO Modernization”**

**Question:** In your testimony, you discuss multiple areas for improvement and strengthening GAO. In your view, what statutory revisions or updates would benefit GAO and Congress?

**Answer:** Thank you for the opportunity to provide additional information on the statutory updates that would benefit the Government Accountability Office (GAO) or Congress. In my written testimony I noted that GAO already has well-established statutory authority that provides it with broad access to agencies to conduct its audits and evaluations. While these authorities underpin GAO’s work, it is the practices around the authorities that may need additional consideration and adjustment. Areas for further exploration include:

- **Provide GAO with the authority to synthesize and curate recommendations from across the accountability community.** This includes not only the Congressional Research Service (CRS) and Congressional Budget Office (CBO), but also could include findings from executive branch inspectors general (IG). GAO routinely coordinates with IGs in agencies. However, to ensure better coordination and avoid duplication, this could be advanced with the goal of formally identifying trends and practices noted across, not just within, agencies. This would provide Congress, and agencies, the ability to take an enterprise view to findings and remedies, especially on issues that are cross-cutting, such as human capital. While this may not require a statutory change, if necessary, it could be considered for placement in 31 U.S.C. § 717.
- **Strengthen incentives/penalties for agencies not ensuring timely recommendation follow up or fully furnishing data necessary for an audit.** While current statute (31 U.S.C. § 716) provides GAO some remedies for ensuring agency compliance with audits and evaluations, the nature of these remedies may make it less likely that GAO can ensure, in a timely manner, data access and recommendation closeout. While GAO already reports to Congress as needed on any access issues, it may be helpful to consider additional ways to ensure Congress continues to receive these reports and to formalize how this information is captured and what actions can be taken. One option may be further providing a range of penalties beyond what’s already in statute to give GAO additional tools to ensure that it gets the information it needs for audits and evaluations, and that the work it does identifying areas of focus are remedied.
- **Enable a robust customer experience (CX) function within GAO.** To identify the practices, skills, and authorities (statutory or otherwise) that GAO might need to achieve this, this subcommittee might consider how other agencies are building CX functions through dedicated delivery teams, designated CX senior officials, and governance structures. Additionally, there are several

bipartisan bills already introduced in Congress that might be instructive to this consideration. S. 2866 and H.R. 5887 are two examples of recently introduced CX legislation and we expect more to be introduced in the future. These bills start a more robust conversation about the needs of agencies and how best to start embedding CX at an agency and enterprise level. GAO is already a model agency in many ways and robust CX would allow it to continue to meet Congress' and the public's needs.

- **Strengthen GAO's orientation efforts for Congress and newly appointed executive branch leaders.** GAO already has practices in place to reach out to new Cabinet officials following a Presidential transition to introduce its role and share open recommendations. Across administrations, there is continuous turnover among senior political appointees and a constant need to ensure they are aware of the critical role that GAO provides, its statutory authority to collect information, best practices and responsibilities of agencies in working effectively with GAO, and recommendations to address areas raised in audits and evaluations, particularly from the High Risk List. This reimagining of orientation to GAO's work likely does not need statutory changes, however it requires potential changes to how the current statute is implemented. GAO should continue its efforts to meet with agency secretaries and deputy secretaries to discuss priorities and data sharing, especially for cross-cutting issues such as the High Risk List. GAO might also consider more regular interaction with the chief officer councils (e.g., CFO Council, CIO Council) to engage them on enterprise data sharing, best practices and closing out recommendations from GAO. GAO could also use these outreach opportunities to highlight GAO's Open Recommendations database and reporting requirements on closing out recommendations.

This Subcommittee might also consider ways to ensure agencies meet their statutory obligation to provide GAO with data and access (and what types of data that means). This may be beneficial in helping GAO push forward on its efforts to encourage agencies to close out open recommendations.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, provide additional context and continue working with you on modernizing legislative branch agencies. I look forward to additional discussion and would also like to offer up our teams at the Partnership for Public Service to provide the Subcommittee with additional conversations, resources and/or briefings. These could include our [Best Places to Work in the Federal Government](#) data, employee engagement trends and best practices, and a deeper dive into customer experience practice and policy options.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MODERNIZATION HEARING  
 “LEGISLATIVE BRANCH ADVANCEMENT: GAO MODERNIZATION”  
 September 27, 2023

**Questions for Dr. Tim Persons, Principal, Digital Assurance and Transparency,  
 PricewaterhouseCoopers**

1. In your testimony, you explain how the rapid evolution of science, technology, and data governance demands innovation and statutory updates. In your view, what statutory revisions or updates would benefit GAO and Congress, especially in the fields of science and technology?

TMP: The statutory revisions or updates I believe would benefit GAO and Congress, especially in the fields of science and technology are as follows:

**Regarding digital innovation toward EBP:**

In my view, the GAO Audit Act (a.k.a. the Good Accounting Obligation in Government Act (GAO-IG Act) of 2019 should be updated several ways as follows:

1. ***It should be updated with a special provision or section to authorize and recognize the GAO Innovation Lab within STAA***; an entity created to meet the evidence-based policymaking (EBP) needs of the Congress by exploring, building, and deploying scaled digital solutions involving advanced data analytics, AI, and other emerging technologies.
2. ***The EBP needs of Congress should drive expanded data and information access and retention authorities for GAO – particularly for the Innovation Lab – for data and information of all types.*** While the language should reiterate/uphold data governance principles based on existing statutory requirements, it should also empower the GAO (and the Innovation Lab in particular) to have more expansive and enduring access to data to bring the congressional EBP agenda to life (*i.e.*, imagine the power of longitudinal data access to track program/project/department/agency performance over time to drive deeper and more incisive insights for legislators beyond the normal one-year budget cycles)
3. ***It should grant special hiring, acquisition, data management, and external partnerships authorities to the Innovation Lab*** in recognition of its innovation mission, and special capabilities/needs to deliver EBP to GAO and the Congress (*i.e.*, think the 18F equivalent of the Legislative Branch)
4. For a bolder and more decisive step, it should be retitled the “Congressional Innovation Lab” to better reflect a broader purpose than supporting GAO Audits. EBP needs are clear and present and the congressional demand signal has been high. This could be a profoundly important step toward bringing nonpartisan, fact-based, nonideological EBP to the bipartisan client base on the Hill. The ideal legislative authorities would grant such an entity the access powers of GAO, but the flexibility of action of the Congress itself. I



realize that this would, legislatively speaking, be more work than clarifications of the GAO-IG Act, however I do believe this is the right answer to bring a meaningful, sustainable, accountable, and effective EBP ecosystem to life.

**Regarding S&T in general:**

Adding depth to my answer to Chairwoman Bice's question during the hearing about why I believe authorizing STAA is a recommended policy action, this recommendation is underscored by it having a unique mandate to conduct technology assessments and produce Science & Technology (S&T) Spotlights in addition to GAO's conventional oversight work (i.e., S&T audits). Just as GAO itself needs independence, so STAA requires a high degree of research independence within the Agency to ensure the integrity and credibility of their findings as well as an ability to deliver S&T services to the Congress in an agile manner. For instance, in 2021, the STAA team attempted to produce an S&T Spotlight on ransomware in response to a request from the Committee on House Administration (CHA) following the Colonial Pipeline attack. However, this effort was internally blocked since, topically speaking, it was declared to be outside the jurisdiction of STAA's remit. The committee was ultimately supported with information, but did not get what it (reasonably) asked for – specifically, an S&T Spotlight on ransomware. This incident highlights the potential for internal dynamics to impede STAA's ability to respond swiftly and independently to pressing technological issues. By granting STAA the status of an authorized entity within GAO, it would ensure that it has the operational independence necessary to carry out its important work without undue interference., would enhance the quality and timeliness of STAA's output, and would strengthen GAO's overall capacity to provide Congress with reliable and unbiased technology assessments.