United States Government Accountability Office

Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

FISCAL YEAR 2022 BUDGET REQUEST

U.S. Government Accountability Office

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Highlights

Background

GAO's mission is to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and ensure the accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people. We provide nonpartisan, objective, and reliable information to Congress, federal agencies, and to the public, and recommend improvements across the full breadth and scope of the federal government's responsibilities.

In fiscal year 2020. GAO issued 691 products, and 1,459 new recommendations. Congress used our work extensively to inform its decisions on key fiscal year 2020 and 2021 legislation. Since fiscal year 2000, GAO's work has resulted in over:

- $1.2 trillion dollars in financial benefits; and
- 25,328 program and operational benefits that helped to change laws, improve public services, and promote sound management throughout government.

As GAO recognizes 100 years of non-partisan, fact-based service, we remain committed to providing program and technical expertise to support Congress in overseeing the executive branch; evaluating government programs, operations and spending priorities; and assessing information from outside parties

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In fiscal year (FY) 2020, GAO's work yielded GAO's work yielded $77.6 billion in financial benefits, a return of about $114 for every dollar invested in GAO. We also identified 1,332 other benefits that led to improved services to the American people, strengthened public safety, and spurred program and operational improvements across the government. In addition, GAO reported on 35 areas designated as high risk due to their vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement or because they face economy, efficiency, or effectiveness challenges. In FY 2020 GAO's High Risk Series products resulted in 168 reports, 26 testimonies, $54.2 billion in financial benefits, and 606 other benefits.

In this year of GAO's centennial, GAO's FY 2022 budget request seeks to lay the foundation for the next 100 years to help Congress improve the performance of government, ensure transparency, and save taxpayer dollars. GAO's fiscal year (FY) 2022 budget requests $744.3 million in appropriated funds and uses $50.0 million in offsets and supplemental appropriations. These resources will support 3,400 full-time equivalents (FTEs). We will continue our hiring focus on boosting our Science and Technology and appropriations law capacity. GAO will also maintain entry-level and intern positions to address succession planning and to fill other skill gaps. These efforts will help ensure that GAO recruits and retains a talented and diverse workforce to meet the priority needs of the Congress.

In FY 2022, we will continue to support Congressional oversight across the wide array of government programs and operations. In particular, our science and technology (S&T) experts will continue to expand our focus on rapidly evolving (S&T) issues. Hallmarks of GAO's (S&T) work include: (1) conducting technology assessments at the request of the Congress; (2) providing technical assistance to Congress on science and technology matters; (3) continuing the development and use of technical guides to assess major federal acquisitions and technology programs in areas such as technology readiness, cost estimating, and schedule planning; and (4) supporting Congressional oversight of federal science programs.

With our requested funding, GAO will also bolster capacity to review the challenges of complex and growing cyber security developments. In addition, GAO will continue robust analyses of factors behind rising health care costs, including costs associated with the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic.

Internally, the funding requested will make possible priority investments in our information technology that include the ability to execute transformative plans to protect data and systems. In FY 2022 GAO will continue to implement efforts to increase our flexibility to evolve IT services as our mission needs change, strengthen information security, increase IT agility, and maintain compliance. We will increase speed and scalability to deliver capabilities and services to the agency.

This request will also help address building infrastructure, security requirements, as well as tackle long deferred maintenance, including installing equipment to help protect occupants from dangerous bacteria, viruses, and mold. As reported in our FY 2020 financial statements, GAO's backlog of deferred maintenance on its Headquarters Building had grown to over $82 million as of fiscal year-end.

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Chairman Ryan, Ranking Member Herrera Beutler, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss our fiscal year (FY) 2022 budget request. I greatly appreciate the subcommittee's support of our efforts to serve the Congress and improve the federal government's performance, accountability, and transparency.

For the past 100 years, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) has provided reliable, professional, fact-based, non-partisan information to Congress and the American people on a host of domestic and international challenges and priorities. In this year of GAO's centennial, and with an eye towards laying the foundation for the next 100 years, I am honored to present GAO's fiscal year (FY) 2022 budget request to help Congress improve the performance of government, ensure transparency, and save federal funds.

With this support, GAO has identified over $1 trillion dollars in financial benefits and more than 21,000 program and operational benefits since 2005. Our average return on investment for the past five years is $165 to $1. We also generated, on average, over 1,300 program and operational benefits to produce a more effective and efficient government during the same the period. Congress also responded to GAO's work through dozens of legislative changes to federal programs.

During the global pandemic we recognize the gravity of our responsibilities to provide Congress and the Nation real time auditing and timely reporting on a dynamic situation that impacts everyone. As such, we have issued five bimonthly reports on the pandemic that covers the entire government-wide response to the public health and economic crises. They include 48 recommendations (including four to Congress) since June 2020 to enhance the nation's response to ongoing challenges related to the pandemic. This month we are due to issue our sixth report, which will have additional recommendations.

Fiscal Year 2022 Request

To build on this success, for FY 2022, GAO is requesting $744.3 million in appropriated funds, a 12.6 percent increase, and authority to use $38.9 million in offsetting collections. We recognize that this comes at a time when there are increased concerns about the level of federal spending; however, as demonstrated above, GAO has a proven track record of delivering a sound return on investment. These past investments in GAO have helped profoundly improve federal government operations and routinely supported Congress in making well-informed decisions. Thus, I am fully confident that this fiscal year's investment will continue to enable

us to provide timely support to the Congress and help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government.

The chart below provides a summary by program for the FY 2022 request.

Table 1: FY 2020 – 2022 Summary of Resources by Program (dollars in thousands)

Program	Fiscal Year 2020 Actual		Fiscal Year 2021 Enacted		Fiscal Year 2022 Request		Net Change Fiscal Year 2021 / 2022	
	FTE	Amount	FTE	Amount	FTE	Amount	FTE	Amount
Human capital	3,178	$551,725	3,180	$579,872	3,400	$635,477	220	$55,605
Engagement support		$6,489		$9,711		$14,765		$5,054
Infrastructure operations		$97,537		$128,456		$141,975		$13,519
Center for Audit Excellence		$1,004		$2,100		$2,100		0
Total budget authority	**3,178**	**$656,755**	**3,180**	**$720,139**	**3,400**	**$794,317**	**220**	**$74,178**
Offsets[a]		($26,764)		($59,000)		($50,000)		$9,000
Appropriation		**$629,991**		**$661,139**		**$744,317**		**$83,178**

Source: GAO-21-407T

[a]Includes offsetting receipts and reimbursements from program and financial audits; rental income; training fees, collection of bid protest system user fees; supplemental funds for disaster audits; and for pandemic related audits.

GAO' requested FY 2022 funding level would enable GAO to continue to increase our capabilities to review the opportunities and challenges associated with evolving science and technology issues; complex and growing cyber security developments; and rising health care costs. Specifically

- **Science and Technology**. These resources will allow us to expand our science and technology capabilities in accordance with the 2019 plan provided to Congress to bolster our technology assessments and other science and technology (S&T) assistance to Congress, and help ensure that GAO has the bandwidth and expertise to support audits where this expertise is critical in addressing congressional priorities.

- **CyberSecurity**. GAO will continue to expand our expertise and ability to assess the cybersecurity challenges facing the Nation, including assessments of the implementation of the National Cyber Strategy, government global cyberspace strategies, and government and private sector efforts to address the impact of the SolarWinds intrusion; and

- **Health Care Spending**. GAO will continue to examine the sustainability and integrity of the Medicare and Medicaid programs and to oversee VA,

DOD, and Indian Health Service health care services. Health care spending now accounts for over 25 percent of the federal budget and is one of the fastest growing federal expenditures.

The FY 2022 budget also builds upon the planned investments in GAO's Information Technology Modernization efforts. This request prioritizes GAO's multi-year effort to ensure that it has the 21st century tools and technologies needed to support our workforce and achieve our mission, including enhanced cloud data management and storage solutions, and IT security upgrades to combat the ever-growing cybersecurity threats toward U.S. assets.

Further, this request supports significant investments in improving the health and safety environment of our facilities; enhanced building security requirements; and long deferred infrastructure maintenance needs in anticipation of our workforce returning to the workplace. The GAO workforce continues to be our most critical asset and it is imperative that GAO provide a safe and secure workplace.

Finally, I am looking beyond GAO's near-term and immediate needs. I am confident continued investments in GAO, coupled with the stellar talents of our diverse and professional workforce, will strengthen our ability to not only address today's highest priorities, but also provide Congress and the American public with timely insightful analysis on the future challenges facing the country.

Moving forward, GAO will continue to build on bodies of work related to our three broad strategic goals for supporting Congress and the Nation, to (1) address current and emerging challenges to the well-being and financial security of the American people; (2) help the Congress respond to changing security threats and the challenges of global interdependence; and (3) help transform the federal government to address national challenges.

Highlights from FY 2020 Results

GAO's mission is to support the Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities, and to help improve the performance and ensure the accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people. Our FY 2020 performance results demonstrate GAO's unwavering commitment to our role as the Congress' watchdog.

Financial Benefits

In FY 2020, we documented $77.6 billion in financial benefits for the government – a return of about $114 for every dollar invested in us.

Examples of financial benefits we are reporting for this year included those contributing to

- revisions to spending limits for Medicaid demonstration projects ($29.4 billion);

- termination of the Department of Energy's (DOE) Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility (MOX) project to dispose of plutonium (about $13.0 billion);

- reductions and rescissions made to DOD's accounts for the development and procurement of weapons (about $2.3 billion);

- changes in DOD's payment policy to cover only FDA-approved drugs for compounded drugs in the TRICARE program ($1 billion);

- reduced appropriations for certain under-obligated Department of State (State) accounts in FY 2019 ($950 million).

Legislative Impacts

The Congress continues to use GAO's work to inform key legislative decisions, some of which will result in billions in future financial savings. Examples linked directly to GAO's work include

Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (December 2020) and Joint Explanatory Statements included numerous actions based on GAO's work, including the Congress

- providing additional funding to continue the cleanup of the waste site of the radioactive and hazardous materials under the 324 Building at the Hanford site, and directing the implementation of a GAO recommendation for increased surveillance, maintenance, and risk reduction activities associated with legacy waste sites;

- requiring the Social Security Administration, to the extent feasible, to provide Treasury's Do Not Pay Working System access to its full death data for a three-year period, beginning in December 2023, to prevent improper payments;

- repealing a provision of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 mandating that the Federal Communications Commission auction the T-Band radio spectrum, allowing law-enforcement, fire officials, and Emergency Medical Services to continue using the T-Band spectrum to operate their radios for day-to-day life saving operations [Don't Break up the T-Band Act (December 2020)]; and

- directing IRS to report on progress toward implementing GAO's recommendations aimed at addressing the numerous deficiencies in the IRS's cyber controls that increased the risk that IRS's network devices

and systems could be used by unauthorized individuals to access sensitive taxpayer data.

The Fiscal Year 2021 **National Defense Authorization Act** (January 2021) and Joint Explanatory Statements included numerous actions based on GAO's work, including the Congress

- reviewing unobligated balances and reducing DOD's FY 2021 Operation and Maintenance Accounts;

- establishing the statutory National Cyber Director position in the Executive Office of the President with the authorities GAO identified;

- directing DOD take steps to assess its processes for dealing with contractors with violations of safety, health and fair labor standards; and

- directing DOD to clearly identify the associated goals, risks, and costs of re-designing the Autonomic Logistics Information System (ALIS), which is the information infrastructure used in the joint strike fighter.

The **Setting Every Community Up for Retirement Enhancement Act of 2019** (December 2020). Based on GAO's work, Congress expanded access to retirement plans for millions of long-term, part-time employees who previously were not eligible to save and invest in their employer-based retirement savings plans.

The **Federal Advance Contracts Enhancement (FACE) Act** (December 2020). Based on GAO's work, the Congress directed the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to (1) update its advance contracting strategy, (2) issue new guidance to its contracting workforce on the use of advance contracts, (3) promote advance contracts to local and state governments, and (4) improve the use of the agency's program to track major acquisitions.

The **Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020** (January 2021). Based on GAO's work, Congress required the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to develop a plan to address all the GAO-identified high-risk areas; report on progress in implementing open priority recommendations, and to take actions addressing timely access, and monitoring of medical examiners' training.

The **Secure Federal Leases from Espionage and Suspicious Entanglements Act** (December 2020). Based on GAO's work, required the government to identify who owns the office space it leases in order to prevent possible security threats.

The **STOP FGM Act of 2020** (January 2021). Based on GAO's work, the Act required certain federal agencies to report annually on, among other things, their efforts to educate and assist communities and key stakeholders about female genital mutilation.

Other Benefits

Many other benefits resulting from our work lead to program and operational improvements. In FY 2020, we recorded 1,332 of these other benefits.

For example, our work on public safety and security

- Led the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to take steps to improve its oversight of small unmanned aircraft systems (UAS or "drones")—to prevent these systems from endangering life and property—through better communication with its law enforcement partners about the information it needs on unsafe UAS operations; and

- Led several federal agencies to take steps to more fully establish key elements of a cybersecurity risk management program and/or conduct an agency-wide assessment of cyber risks to better safeguard their agencies from the growing number of cyber threats. These actions included updating key policies and procedures to ensure that they are identifying, assessing, and responding to cyber risks.

Similarly, our work related to vulnerable populations

- Prompted the FEMA to improve the services it provides to disaster survivors with disabilities by (1) using new registration-intake questions to better identify their needs, (2) establishing related objectives in its 2019-2022 Strategic Plan, and (3) seeking feedback on its new approach to service delivery;

- Led to agreement by Customs and Border Protection to improve the (1) guidance it uses to process and track family separations at the southwest border, and (2) oversight mechanisms for delivering medical care to those in its custody; and

Furthermore, our work in the area of agency operations

- Led to agreement by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to develop a solid business case for its mission to return U.S astronauts to the moon by 2024, and include a comprehensive plan and full cost estimate for this mission; and

	• Helped inform a Senate legislative proposal to build on progress made under the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990 to further improve federal financial management, such as preparing financial management plans and better linking cost to performance.
Building Bodies of Knowledge	Through the products issued this year, we continued to build on bodies of work related to our three broad strategic goals to (1) address current and emerging challenges to the well-being and financial security of the American people, (2) help the Congress respond to changing security threats and the challenges of global interdependence, and (3) help transform the federal government to address national challenges. Examples include • **Protection of children and students**. We reported on the need to (1) update or replace the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems in about 36,000 K-12 public schools, which is of heightened importance given COVID-19; and (2) address the physical barriers, such as accessible door hardware and steep ramps, that make it challenging for students, teachers, and others with disabilities to use public schools facilities. • **Veterans**. We reported on the need for (1) VA to improve how it tracks and analyzes the data on veteran suicides that occur on its campuses, such as medical facilities, to better understand and prevent such suicides; (2) VA to strengthen its oversight of the quality of state veterans homes, which provide skilled nursing and personal care to about half of eligible veterans—especially given COVID-19; (3) VA to take steps to more efficiently and effectively acquire medical and surgical supplies; and (4) the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and agencies to better leverage data to improve the retention of veterans in federal jobs, which is lower than the retention of similar non-veterans. • **Health care**. We reported on the need to (1) address infection control deficiencies in nursing homes to help safeguard residents from outbreaks like COVID-19; and (2) determine more precisely the magnitude of antibiotic resistance—which sickens about 2.8 million people annually—and strengthen federal efforts to minimize its effects. • **Science and Technology**. We reported on (1) COVID-19—Coronaviruses, Social Distancing During Pandemics, COVID-19 Modeling, COVID-19 Testing, COVID-19 Vaccine Development, Herd Immunity, and Contact Tracing Applications; (2) policy options for the use of Artificial Intelligence to deliver health care services; (3) data quality considerations for modeling and analysis of infectious diseases, such as COVID-19; (4) algorithms used in forensic science for federal law

enforcement, such as DNA, fingerprints, and facial recognition; and (5) irrigated agriculture technologies, practices, and implications for water scarcity. In addition, we reported on federal agencies' use of the Internet of Things (IoT) devices. We also expanded our use of Science and Tech Spotlights that distill complex issues into a 2-page summary on topics covering CRISPR gene editing; 5G wireless technologies; and quantum technologies. We have issued over 20 Science and Technology Spotlights since its inception in late 2019 including the most recent, in February, on Vaccine Safety.

- **COVID-19 Response and Recovery**. As required under the CARES Act GAO has conducted ongoing monitoring and oversight of the federal government's $2.9 trillion response to prepare for, respond to, and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes providing monthly briefings and reporting on a bimonthly basis until March 2021 and periodically thereafter. We are to report on, among other things, the effect of the pandemic on the public health, economy, and public and private institutions.

  As of January 15th, 27 of GAO's previous 31 COVID-19 recommendations remained unimplemented. These include such critical areas as vaccine distribution and communications plans, medical supply chains, and workplace safety. GAO is pleased that the Consolidated Appropriations Act passed by Congress in December required a number of actions that are consistent with several of our open recommendations and we will monitor the implementation of the Act's requirements.

  GAO highlighted key areas for improvement including vaccine rollout, testing, data collection, medical and drug chains, and strengthening program integrity and protecting against fraud. Implementing GAO's recommendations will be critical to improving the federal government's ability to effectively respond to this pandemic. We will continue to evaluate these actions moving forward and continue to monitor any further steps taken by the new administration and Congress.

- **Disaster Preparedness, Recovery, and Resilience**. In FY 2020 alone, we used supplemental disaster audit funding to issue 32 products and made 56 recommendations in four key areas: (1) National preparedness, including the need for FEMA to address national emergency management capabilities based on information known about states' and territories' response and recovery capabilities; (2) FEMA workforce, including its efforts to assess how it deploys its disaster workforce to meet mission needs; (3) Disaster loans, including the need to mitigate and identify risk—such as extended power outages—to disaster loan processing, and, (4) Survivor assistance, such as the need for FEMA to better explain its program information and eligibility decisions to

applicants. We also issued a Disaster Resilience Framework to help the federal government promote resilience to natural disasters.

Between November 2017 and January 2021, we issued 50 reports and identified three Matters for Congressional Consideration and 126 recommendations to 16 agencies, including FEMA, the U.S. Department of House and Urban Development (HUD), and SBA. As of the end of FY 2020, 26 percent of the recommendations made between FY 2018 and FY 2020 were implemented. Since implementing our recommendations, FEMA can better (1) identify survivors' disability-related needs; (2) estimate the number of staff needed to administer Public Assistance recovery efforts; and (3) help ensure that its contracting personnel know to reach out to state and local governments to create and use contacts before disasters hit.

While one of our Matters had been fully implemented by year end, which we will discuss later, we also provided the Congress with technical assistance on draft legislation in five areas: (1) potential reforms to the National Response Framework, (2) possible creation of a national disaster safety board, (3) loans to fund disaster resilience efforts, (4) reforms to federal advance contracts, and (5) permanently authorizing the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery program. As of January 2021, we had 19 disaster-related audits underway.

- **High risk areas**. In March 2021 we issued the biennial update of our High Risk Report to focus attention on government operations that are vulnerable to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement or need transformation—offering solutions to 36 high-risk problems (See Enclosure I). In most areas, progress since our last high risk update has been limited. In five areas the ratings declined, while in seven areas they improved. One area—DOD Support Infrastructure Management—improved to the point of removal from the list. Two new areas—National Efforts to Prevent, Respond to, and Recover from Drug Misuse, and Emergency Loans for Small Businesses—are being added to the list. Where progress has been made addressing high risk areas, the results have been substantial. For example, over the past 15 years (FY 2006 through FY 2020) financial benefits totaled nearly $575 billion, or an average of about $38 billion per year. Since our last update in 2019, we have recorded approximately $225 billion in financial benefits. In FY 2020 alone, our high-risk work yielded $54.2 billion in financial benefits, 606 other benefits, 168 reports, and 26 testimonies.

- **Fragmentation, overlap, and duplication**. In 2020, we issued our tenth annual report. It identified 168 new actions in 29 new areas (and 10 existing areas) that could reduce fragmentation, overlap, and duplication, or provide other cost savings and opportunities to enhance revenue

across the federal government. From 2011 to 2019, we identified 908 such actions. As of March 2020, the Congress and executive branch agencies had fully addressed 519 of these actions and partially addressed 202, yielding about $429 billion in financial benefits—$393 billion between 2010 and 2019, and $36 billion more projected in the future.

Serving Our Clients

In FY 2020, we received 550 requests for work from 90 percent of the standing committees of the Congress—supporting a broad range of congressional interests. We issued 586 reports and made 1,459 new recommendations. We were asked to testify 59 times before 43 separate committees or subcommittees on topics including COVID-19; disaster preparedness, response, and recovery; 2020 U.S. Census; the Chief Financial Officers Act; and the nation's fiscal health. GAO also delivered five member briefings, and we were asked to submit (1) four Statements for the Record in lieu of testifying; and (2) responses to 27 sets of Questions for the Record, which become part of the official hearing records. GAO executives also participated in seven roundtables sponsored by congressional committees, subcommittees, or working groups. Moreover, GAO's work was cited by Members of the Congress and witnesses in 79 hearings beyond those at which we testified.

The following, are examples of topics GAO addressed in testimony in FY 2020.

Figure 1: Selected GAO Fiscal Year 2020 Testimony Topics

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

- Meeting Growing Demand for Veterans' Long-Term Care
- Addressing Persistent Challenges with FDA Inspections of Foreign Drug Manufacturers
- Ensuring the Qualifications and Competence of VA Health Care Providers
- Improving the Accuracy of Medicaid's Enrollment Practices to Reduce Improper Payments
- Advancing FAA's Efforts to Promote a Robust, Diverse Workforce for Aviation Maintenance
- Reducing the Potential for Fraud in Recovery Homes for Substance Use Disorder
- Implementing Consumer Protections for Airline Passengers

- Improving Facility Security Assessments for Federal Land Management Agencies
- Improving Resilience to Climate Change Through Strategic Investment of Federal Resources
- Addressing Weaknesses That Limit Delivery of Federal Tribal Programs
- Using a Strategic Approach to Assess Federal Agencies' Environmental Justice Efforts
- Improving Oversight of Nursing Homes to Better Protect Residents from Abuse
- Improving DOD Oversight of its Exceptional Family Member Program
- Developing Needed Aviation-Preparedness Plan for Communicable Disease Outbreaks

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

- Improving Early Implementation of the Nation's Biodefense Strategy
- Addressing Remaining Challenges with Recent Disaster Recovery Efforts
- Managing VA's Supply Chain under COVID-19
- Improving Workforce Diversity at the State Department
- Enhancing the Transportation Security Administration's Efforts to Improve Airport Security Areas
- COVID-19: FEMA's Role in the Response and Related Challenges
- Improving CBP's Oversight of Funds, Medical Care, and Reporting of Deaths at the Southwest Border

- Learning from Past Efforts to Acquire Missile Defense Systems
- Addressing Challenges to the Coast Guard's Arctic Capabilities
- Improving NNSA's Efforts to Modernize the Nation's Nuclear Weapons Through Portfolio Management
- Addressing Challenges to Help DOD Sustain a Growing Fleet of F-35 Aircraft
- Strengthening DOD's Oversight of Privatized Military Housing
- Addressing Persistent and Substantial Delays in Ship and Submarine Maintenance

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

- Addressing Significant Challenges to Information Security at VA and Other Federal Agencies
- Improving SBA's Oversight of Tribal 8(a) Firms
- Addressing Challenges for the 2020 Census with Operations Underway
- Improving IT Management and Cybersecurity at OMB and Other Agencies
- Addressing Challenges to Better Ensure Equal Employment Opportunity in the DHS Workforce
- Providing Enhanced GAO Capabilities for Oversight, Insight, and Foresight on Science and Technology Issues

- Safeguarding Federal Employees Returning to the Workplace During Pandemics
- Addressing the Nation's Fiscal Health
- Building on Progress Made Under the CFO Act of 1990 to Improve Federal Financial Management
- Clearly Communicating Public Comment Posting Practices for Federal Rulemaking
- Using Established Transition Planning Practices for Telecommunications to Help Agencies Prevent Costly Delays
- COVID-19: Opportunities to Improve Federal Response and Recovery Efforts

Source: GAO | GAO-21-4SP

I continued to meet with the Chairs and Ranking Members of congressional committees to obtain their views on GAO's work, including their priorities, and to discuss opportunities and challenges facing our Nation. In addition, GAO continued to highlight the status of key

recommendations in our annual duplication, fragmentation, and overlap report–citing progress made and the benefits of full implementation.

In FY 2020, agencies implemented 77 percent of our recommendations against a target of 80 percent matching our 2019 performance. I also continued to send letters to the heads of most federal departments, recognizing their progress in implementing our priority recommendations and calling attention to those still requiring action. These letters were also sent to congressional committees of jurisdiction to inform their oversight and published on our website.

Supporting Our People

The hard work and dedication of our diverse and professional multidisciplinary staff positioned GAO to achieve a 93 percent on-time delivery of our products in FY 2020. Our performance also indicates that staff received the support needed to produce high-quality work. We met or exceeded the targets for six of our seven people measures exceeding our targets for, retention rates with and without retirements, staff development, staff utilization, effective leadership by supervisors, and organizational climate. For the people measure of how satisfied GAO employees are with their IT tools, we fell short of our goal of 80 percent by 11 percentage points, at 69 percent. Although we did not meet our goal in this area, we did experience a 13-percentage point satisfaction increase over fiscal year 2019 and continue to seek areas of IT improvement.

FY 2022 Resource Planning and Deployment

In planning our audit work for FY 2022, we are requesting resources that will lay the long-term foundation that allows GAO to continue to provide the Congress with the high quality products it has come to rely on that focus on both the longstanding as well as emerging issues that concern the Nation. A key focus will be increasing our current focus on science and technology areas. In addition we will also bolster resources for identifying government-wide cybersecurity risks and the increasing cyber threat to the nation's critical infrastructure. Another critical audit area this request will support are the challenges associated with growing health care costs.

In addition to these audit resources, GAO has internal needs to allow our auditors to better serve Congress. These internal investment needs include: accelerating IT modernization and cloud data management and storage solutions, as well as infrastructure enhancements and improvements to address remaining health and safety issues. Another internal high priority is to address the deferred maintenance backlog at GAO's HQ Building, which includes multiple HVAC replacements.

GAO's Science and Technology Program

GAO's newest unit—the Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics (STAA) team—helps address congressional science and technology needs in a variety of ways, including

- in-depth evaluation and oversight of federal science and technology programs;

- foresight on new and emerging technologies;

- evaluation of the effects and policy implications of science, technology, and innovation on society;

- innovating to support evidence-based policymaking through data analytics;

- exploring emerging technologies and supporting congressional modernization efforts;

- development of policy options that may help policymakers enhance the benefits and mitigate challenges of technologies; and

- proactive and on-demand technical assistance on science, technology, and innovation issues.

GAO's vision for STAA is to provide Congress with critical foresight, oversight, and insight of science and technology issues and harness the power of advanced analytics in order to ensure continued American security, innovation, and competitiveness in a rapidly changing world.

GAO continues to successfully conduct science and technology-related work, providing Members of Congress and their staffs with a variety of products and services. This has included issuing specialized reports known as technology assessments. In 2019, we committed to expanding resources to meet Congressional needs by establishing STAA, a team dedicated solely to S&T. Through our rigorous, fact-based foresight and oversight work, we can help Congress navigate the increasingly complex S&T advances it must oversee, including artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, infectious disease modeling, and rapid vaccine development and through our collaboration with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

In 2020, STAA devoted significant resources to address the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, it issued a Science & Tech Spotlight on coronaviruses in early March, providing a high-level overview of what they are and how they are transmitted. It followed this with six additional Spotlights on COVID-19 topics, including social distancing, testing, contact tracing apps, and herd immunity. STAA staff also contributed

significant S&T expertise to the CARES Act reports. Currently we have work underway on a Spotlight on vaccine safety, and a report on Operation Warp Speed (OWS) vaccine development and manufacturing was issued in mid-February.

STAA has played an important role in GAO's oversight of the federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic, further building our base of science and technology knowledge. Throughout the pandemic, STAA has provided Congress with technical assistance on COVID-19 on numerous occasions, on topics such as: how well face mask materials filter droplets and aerosols, differences among three prominent COVID-19 models, and the effectiveness of certain filtration systems in reducing respiratory disease transmission on airplanes. STAA also analyzed four COVID-19 vaccine developers' clinical trial protocols and reported in November on information the trials will provide and their limitations. STAA's work related to Operation Warp Speed features a first-of-its-kind digital dashboard to provide up-to-date details on vaccine technology development, manufacturing, and rollout.

Over the past year, STAA has also continued to expand its capacity to meet Congressional needs on other topics. STAA issued technology assessments on capabilities and challenges related to 5G wireless technology and artificial intelligence in health care, among other topics.

- *5G Wireless*. For the 5G wireless technology assessment (with key support from the National Academy of Sciences), GAO reported that new technologies will be needed to reach the full potential of 5G and noted several challenges, including that spectrum demand will likely continue to exceed supply and that 5G will exacerbate existing cybersecurity and privacy concerns.

- *Artificial Intelligence*. STAA partnered with the National Academy of Medicine to deliver a joint technology assessment focused on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to augment patient care, the second in a three-part series on AI in health care.[1] GAO assessed both clinical and administrative AI tools and found that they show promise for improving health outcomes, reducing provider burden, and using health resources more efficiently. However, there are several challenges to developing and deploying these tools, including difficulties with obtaining sufficient high-quality data to create effective algorithms; challenges with scaling up and

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[1] The first report in this series focused on the potential of Artificial Intelligence to expedite drug development (GAO-20-215SP; December 2019).

integrating these tools across different health care settings, such as rural vs. urban settings; and uncertainty over liability in the event of inaccurate results.

STAA also has additional technology assessments underway on topics including blockchain, AI in medical diagnostics, contact tracing apps, the use of forensic algorithms by law enforcement, quantum computing and communications, detection and remediation of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in drinking water, and technologies to provide military navigation capabilities in the absence of GPS. In addition, in FY 2021 STAA plans to begin technology assessments on topics including decarbonization technologies, forensic attribution of chemical weapons, gene editing and engineering, and the environmental and other effects of satellite constellations.

STAA also issued 17 Science & Tech Spotlights in 2020, on a broad range of topics, including nuclear microreactors, CRISPR gene editing, consumer electronics recycling, and deepfakes. Furthermore, STAA conducted numerous S&T-related performance audits on topics such as infectious disease modeling; antibiotic resistance; sexual harassment in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics ("STEM"); how the Patent and Trademark Office assists small businesses and inventors; and policies to address foreign influence in federal research. STAA also issued a new guide on best practices to assess the adoption and use of Agile software development and finalized a guide on using technology readiness assessments in complex technical acquisitions and projects such as the Navy's Columbia Class Nuclear Submarine program.

In additional to addressing numerous Committee or individual Member requests for on-demand technical assistance, we also provided services to Congress more broadly. In October, at the request of the House Committee on Administration, we hosted an S&T policy symposium for the House of Representatives to provide information to Members and staff on a range of topics, such as COVID-19, congressional modernization, and the innovation economy. The Committee included the symposium in the New Member Orientation Training that was provided to all incoming Representatives of the 117th Congress.

Another core area of STAA is the Innovation Lab, which aims to explore, pilot, and deploy new advanced analytic capabilities to enhance audit products. In 2020, the Lab initiated a first-of-its-kind collaborative effort across key agencies to enhance payment integrity. The Lab also implemented GAO's first advanced cloud infrastructure to support

leading-edge development of data science prototypes, with the goal of conducting GAO's work to more effectively support evidence-based policymaking. The Lab is developing a data literacy curriculum to use across the agency to enhance GAO's oversight work overall.

A final area of progress for STAA was further expansion of our network of S&T experts to increase the depth, breadth, and diversity of knowledge available to meet congressional needs. On October 15, 2020, we held our inaugural meeting of the newly established Polaris Council, a group of exceptional science, technology, and policy leaders and experts from many fields, to advise us on emerging S&T issues facing Congress and the nation. In addition, STAA participated in 210 external speaking events in 2020 to further broaden our expert networks.

To accomplish all of these contributions, STAA grew its S&T workforce in accordance with the plan provided to Congress in April 2019. At the beginning of fiscal year 2020, the STAA team included about 70 members, and as of January 2021 it was up to 104 members. These STAA staff had advanced degrees in a wide variety of fields, such as microbiology, quantum mechanics, public health, and chemical engineering.

Our FY 2022 request is based on our plans to continue and build on STAA's current pace of meeting congressional needs, and our plan to further grow STAA's staff. Our goals in doing so are to: 1) increase the number of technology assessments we conduct each year; 2) increase the number of short-to-medium turnaround products; 3) improve access to and absorption of our work through the use of a variety of digital publishing tools, such as online "dashboards;" and 4) pilot and deploy multiple advanced analytics prototypes to greatly enhance congressional oversight and support.

Sustaining our Focus on Cybersecurity

Cyber threats can have a serious, or even potentially catastrophic, impact on federal systems, the nation's critical infrastructure, and the privacy and safety of the general public. Since 2010, we have made over 3,300 recommendations to federal agencies aimed at addressing cybersecurity challenges facing the government. More than 750 of the recommendations had not been fully implemented as of December 2020. Until these shortcomings are addressed, federal IT systems and data will be increasingly susceptible to cyber threats. In FY 2020, our work in this area resulted in numerous recommendations to help agencies address cyber threats. For example, we

- recommended ways to better oversee the National Cyber Strategy and highlighted the need to clearly define a central leadership role to coordinate government cybersecurity efforts;

- made 15 recommendations to four agencies to strengthen the cybersecurity of DHS's continuous diagnostics modernization program;[2] and

- assessed the progress that FCC made in addressing 136 technical recommendations that we made to improve the agency's cybersecurity posture.

- examined government-wide IT supply chain risks and made a total of 145 recommendations to 23 agencies, which were directly related to vulnerabilities that led to the SolarWinds intrusion (December 2020).

More recent high-profile and widespread cyberattacks on federal agencies and national infrastructure have further highlighted the urgent need to address the long-standing cybersecurity challenges facing the nation. For example, in December 2020 DHS's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) reported that an advanced persistent threat actor, likely of Russian origin, inserted a "backdoor" into a genuine version of a network management software product developed by SolarWinds.[3] The malicious actor used this backdoor, among other techniques, to initiate a cyberattack campaign against U.S. government agencies, critical infrastructure entities, and private-sector organizations that use the compromised network management software product. According to CISA, this threat poses a grave risk to the federal agencies and our nation's critical infrastructure, among others.[4]

Congress continues to turn to GAO for insightful analysis and advice to address these cybersecurity challenges. Moreover, it has shown strong

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[2] The continuous diagnostics modernization program provides agencies with the tools that identify the hardware and software on their networks and check for vulnerabilities and insecure configurations.

[3] A "backdoor" is a malicious program that can potentially give an intruder remote access to an infected computer.

[4] Critical infrastructure includes systems and assets so vital to the United States that incapacitating or destroying them would have a debilitating effect on national security. These critical infrastructures are grouped by the following 16 industries or "sectors": 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 (IT); nuclear reactors, materials, and waste; transportation systems; and water and wastewater systems.

bicameral interest in learning more about the SolarWinds attack. Thus, recruiting top-tier cyber talent to augment our current audit workforce is critical. GAO plans to continue to recruit talent with specialized cybersecurity knowledge, skills, and expertise to augment our Information Technology and Cyber Security Team's capabilities, including within our Center for Enhanced Cybersecurity. This center is responsible for performing technical cybersecurity reviews, including vulnerability assessments and system configuration reviews of complex networks and systems.

Using our cadre of cybersecurity experts, we plan to continue our focus on four major challenges of our cyber High Risk area: (1) establishing a comprehensive cybersecurity strategy and performing effective oversight, (2) ensuring the security of federal information systems, (3) protecting cyber critical infrastructure, and (4) protecting privacy and sensitive data. Over the next 2 years, our planned efforts include assessing the

- federal response to the significant cyber incident, discovered in December 2020 and involving a supply chain compromise of the Solar Winds network management software, that was carried out against federal agencies and critical infrastructure entities;

- federal oversight, coordination, and implementation of the National Cyber Strategy;

- strategy for global cyberspace, such as global cybercrime and cyber diplomacy; and

- federal government's role in strengthening the nation's cybersecurity, including addressing ransomware activity.

Assisting Congress with Health Care Challenges

The COVID 19 pandemic has underscored the importance of effective administration and oversight of the federal government's health care programs and spending. In response to the pandemic, the government launched new programs and directed hundreds of billions of dollars to new and existing health care programs and providers.

In addition to our work on the pandemic, we continued to provide robust and timely analysis of other critical health care issues. In particular, in April 2020, we identified the federal government's efforts to address drug misuse as a high risk issue, noting at the time that this issue required immediate attention and action as the pandemic could further exacerbate the alarming drug misuse trends. In December 2020, CDC issued an alert indicating that provisional data show that drug overdoses have accelerated during the pandemic. We have ongoing work that will

continue to examine the effects of the pandemic on behavioral health, including substance abuse, as well as the federal government's funding for efforts to combat opioid misuse and abuse and the scheduling of fentanyl-related substances.

Last year we also shed light on important FDA oversight issues, including the agency's oversight of federal high-containment laboratories—those that conduct research on hazardous biological agents and operate under specific safety protocols—and overseas drug manufacturing. As of August 2020, nearly 60 percent of the 4,200 establishments that manufactured drugs for the U.S. market were located overseas. More than one-third of the foreign establishments supplying the U.S. market were in China and India. We testified before the Senate Committee on Finance on the challenges that FDA faces in trying to provide effective oversight of these establishments, and we continue this work to explore how these challenges can be addressed.

We have also continued to examine health care spending, which accounts for more than 25 percent of the federal budget. Putting the nation on a sustainable fiscal path requires that we better understand and restrain the growth in health care spending, including spending on prescription drugs. In January 2021, we issued a report that provides a comprehensive look at how drug prices compare across Medicare and VA and the drivers of the observed price differences. We also have forthcoming reports that examine prescription drug prices in the U.S. compared to those in other countries and how direct-to-consumer advertising may affect federal health care spending.

In FY 2021, we will also continue to examine the sustainability and integrity of the Medicare and Medicaid programs, which together accounted for over one trillion dollars in expenditures and an estimated $129 billion in improper payments in FY 2020. In addition to eroding public trust, the scope of improper payments in these programs jeopardize the government's ability to provide care for those who most need it in the future. We have ongoing work examining how recent federal actions, such as the various telehealth and other flexibilities made available to providers, has affected the sustainability, administration, and integrity of the Medicare and Medicaid programs. In addition, we have ongoing work examining the efficiency of certain Medicare payment policy issues and how market structures, such as private equity ownership of nursing homes, affect the delivery of services.

Finally, we will continue to provide oversight of VA, DOD, and the Indian Health Service (IHS) health care services. For example

- In September 2020, we made recommendations to VA how it could improve the budget estimates for its community care program—through which a growing proportion of veterans are receiving care— to better inform decision-making and planning. Our report in February 2021 also exposed vulnerabilities in the credentialing and privileging processes for VA community care providers that could put veterans at risk, and we made recommendations to address this risk. We plan to continue to review different aspects of the care provided through this program, including the quality, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness.

- In October 2020, we issued a report that found VA's data on on-campus suicides were unreliable and recommended that VA improve this data, noting that such data are key to understanding and addressing this disturbing trend. We have ongoing work that further examines VA suicide prevention efforts as well as work examining DOD's efforts to prevent suicide among service members.

- In November 2020, we recommended that IHS address issues we found with lack of consistent, agency-wide oversight processes that resulted in limited and inconsistent oversight of health care facilities' decisions about the use of funds. We also have work planned or underway examining a range of quality of care issues at IHS, including how it determines current and projected health care needs, and the extent that IHS relies on outside providers for treatment of certain diseases.

Managing Our Internal Operations

In FY 2020, GAO again received an unmodified or "clean" opinion from independent auditors on our financial statements for FY 2020 and our internal control over financial reporting. There was no reportable noncompliance with provisions of applicable laws, regulations, contracts, and grant agreements tested. We demonstrated that all detailed performance and financial information is complete and reliable in order to achieve high standards for accuracy and transparency.

We also continued efforts to support our fourth strategic goal to maximize our value by enabling quality, timely service to the Congress and being a leading practices federal agency. We made progress addressing our three internal management challenges: managing a quality workforce; improving the efficiency of our engagements; and ensuring the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of GAO's information technology services. With this budget request, we are planning to achieve and maintain 3,400 FTE in FY 2022.

In FY 2021 GAO completed deployment of our platform to edit, fact check and distribute our reports (New Blue). New Blue will streamline the publishing processes to enable efficient and scalable publication of products in a responsive web-based format to accommodate demand for content that is accessible on mobile devices. As such, Congressional staff and users on the go can quickly and easily navigate through our reports. GAO leveraged this platform for all our CARES Act bimonthly reports and will utilize it to republish previously issued products—thus making our key reports more accessible.

GAO's Information Technology Resources

GAO has made great strides in our IT modernization efforts. In fact, the work completed in FY 2019 and FY 2020 positioned the agency well for an immediate and smooth transition to maximum telework during the COVID-19 pandemic. Valuable operations to support auditing, evaluation, and investigative services for the Congress have continued without interruption. However, IT requires continued investment and nurturing to stay current, and even more, to stay ahead of the ever-changing and evolving world of technology. I am confident this budget request keeps GAO on the right path.

For FY 2022, GAO is requesting funds to continue implementing efforts identified in our IT modernization plan to increase GAO's flexibility to evolve IT services as GAO mission needs change, strengthen information security, increase IT agility, and maintain compliance. We will increase speed and scalability to deliver capabilities and services to the agency, create a more predictable and consistent ISTS budget, and adhere to the GAO-adopted government Cloud Smart policy in planning for its enterprise IT architecture.

Major FY 2022 planned efforts

- *Cloud Smart Migration Plan*. GAO's Cloud Smart Migration Plan will help reduce our reliance on a physical IT infrastructure; reduce capital investment spending spikes; and increase flexibility to support business requirements more responsively. GAO will begin execution of multi-phased GAO Cloud Smart migration plan. The implementation of the migration plan will enable GAO to progressively move data center capabilities to the cloud such as virtual desktop infrastructure, databases, storage, failover, development / test environments, and other required computing resources.

- *Enterprise Content Management (ECM) Solution*. GAO will acquire and implement a cloud-based modern Enterprise Content Management (ECM) solution that will enable retirement of GAO's legacy document and

records management system. The ECM system will also provide support for additional content types (e.g., multimedia), data encryption, workflow automation, enhanced search capabilities, and enable better content reuse.

- *Modern Devices and Hardware*. GAO staff rely on a variety of computer devices (e.g., towers, laptops, zero clients, and associated peripherals) to conduct work whether in-office, remote, or mobile. The vast majority of GAO computers are now several years well beyond their supported normal life cycle which causes problems with system reliability and performance. The FY 2022 request will allow GAO to put new devices into the hands of GAO staff so they have modern, secure, and reliable equipment to conduct GAO business.

- *New Blue enhancements*. GAO's New Blue solution enables digital distribution of audit reports in a mobile friendly web-based format that can be read on-line by any computer or mobile device. Additional funding will allow GAO to enhance New Blue to enable additional GAO product types, support for multi-media, and provide improved capabilities to enforce business rules and quality controls to the content creation process.

- *Enterprise Project Management Tools*. GAO staff execute thousands of projects a year. Additional use of automated tools is needed to improve project management practices. The FY 2022 requested funding level will enable GAO to continue to implement and expand the use of Enterprise Project Management Tools to help GAO staff plan and manage work in a more standardized manner.

- *IT Portfolio Management Solution*. GAO's largest funding category outside of personnel costs are for information technology. The current methods to plan, project, and track IT operations and investment costs are reliant on manual processes and disparate data sources. Requested funding supports investments in an automated portfolio management solution which automates processes and data management associated with IT portfolio management across the IT investment lifecycle.

- *Cybersecurity*. GAO must protect data collected from other agencies. Security threats are dynamic in nature and change quickly. GAO will use funding to enhance security monitoring for both on premise and cloud based assets through implementation of new tools, services, and enhanced processes.

- *Government-wide Shared Solutions*. GAO seeks to continue to add improved automated solutions to support its financial management functions. With the requested funding, GAO will be able to adopt Government Invoicing and integrated Asset Management solutions. The

Treasury Department provides software to allow federal agencies to improve the quality and efficiency of intragovernmental billing and collection transactions via its G-invoicing software. This software replaces the current Inter Governmental Billing and Collections (IPAC) process and will be mandated for agencies. In addition GAO seeks to modernize its legacy asset management system with a modern asset management system integrated with the Momentum financial management system.

With these planned improvements we will enhance GAO's work agency-wide. GAO will execute transformative plans to protect data and systems while maximizing the use of cloud computing and minimizing risks associated with customized software. We will continually assess our technical architecture and services to identify opportunities for automating manual processes and reducing duplicative and outdated solutions, as well as leveraging more standard and government-wide shared solutions.

GAO's Facilities, Building, and Security

GAO's building and security services program includes funds to support the management of GAO-owned and leased facilities as well as the safety and security of occupants and visitors.

Budget constraints in recent years have necessitated the deferral of reinvestment in certain elements of our building's infrastructure and have prevented us from maximizing efficiencies. The requested increase will allow GAO to move forward with critical headquarters building initiatives that have been deferred over several years.

In FYs 2021 and 2022, GAO plans to:

- Begin a multi-year project to replace air handlers installed in the 1950s with new units that includes HEPA filtration to filter out bacteria and many viruses, and UV light to prevent dangerous mold growth on cooling coils and potentially kill additional viruses. As the headquarters building of two federal agencies (GAO and the Army Corps of Engineers), and as a backup site for Congressional operations if Capitol Hill Buildings are shut down, it is critically important for government continuity of operations that the GAO Building have modern, safe air handling equipment that will protect GAO staff its tenants.

- Begin making critical repairs and/or replacements to end-of-life building systems. As identified in its FY 2020 financial statements, GAO has a growing backlog of deferred, but necessary, maintenance at its headquarters building, which currently totals over $82 million. GAO has begun a multi-year effort to reduce the backlog of maintenance to ensure

the reliability and safety of the headquarters building for staff and tenants. In addition to multiple heating and air-conditioning projects, other initiatives include: the fourth floor consolidation; the STAA Innovation Lab; the parking garage structural study and design; and the asset management plan update.

- Continue work to relocate the Chicago field office into a federally-owned space. Work is underway to relocate the Huntsville field office to a permanent location, and the Dallas field office renovation will resume once the site is reopened post-pandemic. We are also working on identifying and planning relocation field sites for Atlanta, Los Angeles, Norfolk, and Seattle.

During FY 2021, GAO will also continue to implement recommendations from the agency-wide security risk assessment that was completed in FY 2018, to include the completion of the electronic security system installations in Seattle, Chicago, and Huntsville as well as continue upgrading the system at the headquarters building. GAO also plans to replace its aging security radio system to better ensure effective operations and compatibility with other agencies.

GAO continues to receive an increasing number of statutory mandates and congressional requests that result in engagements that rely heavily on classified and sensitive information. To that end, in FY 2021 GAO will continue to evaluate and enhance the resources available to staff who are responsible for conducting these audits. GAO will begin the construction of several Secure Video Teleconference (S-VTC) rooms at strategically chosen GAO field offices. These S-VTCs will enhance the ability of field and HQ staff to collaborate securely across multiple GAO locations as well as with other federal agencies.

Legal Work Update

Our Office of the General Counsel (OGC) handled over 2,100 bid protests and issued more than 500 decisions on the merits. With respect to our appropriations law function, in testimony before the House Committee on the Budget, the General Counsel explained how our role in providing information and legal analysis on appropriations law matters ensures respect for the Congress's constitutional power of the purse, and discussed legislative proposals that would help us continue to advance and protect such power. Following this testimony, we continued to demonstrate how we protect the Congress's constitutional prerogatives by notifying the Congress of four violations of the Anti-deficiency Act for which the agencies failed to make the legally required report. We also issued a number of decisions addressing significant, novel legal issues

arising from federal agencies' use of appropriated funds during the partial government shutdown that occurred in FY 2019.

During FY 2019 and FY 2020, OGC increased the number of attorneys assigned to the appropriations law team as encouraged by Congress, and this effort is continuing in FY 2021. The additional funding requested for FY 2022 will allow GAO to further enhance the resources allocated to its important appropriations law functions.

Strategic Planning

GAO's most recent Strategic Plan for Serving the Congress and the Nation – FYs 2018 to 2023. As the nation confronts a series of both new and long-standing challenges, this plan describes our goals and strategies to support the Congress to identify cost savings and other financial opportunities; to make government more accountable, efficient and effective; and ultimately to improve the safety, security, and well-being of the American people. GAO's Strategic Plan provides a comprehensive roadmap for how the agency will support the most important priorities of Congress and the Nation.

This plan reflects the full scope of the federal government's operations, as well as emerging and future trends that may affect government and society. As part of our strategic planning process, we emphasize foresight, continuous environmental scanning, and trend analysis as essential to helping inform our decision-making and long-term planning.

The plan is comprised of three sections: strategic goals and objectives; key efforts; and trends that provide overall context supporting our long-range planning. There are eight trend areas in GAO's 2018 – 2023 plan including

1. Domestic and Global Security: Global conditions affecting U.S. and international security;

2. Fiscal Outlook and the Debt: The federal government's long-term unsustainable fiscal path;

3. Economics and Trade: Global response to challenges posed by divergent economic growth;

4. Jobs and Education: Technological advances and their impact on preparing the workforce of the future;

5. Demographics and Society: Demographic changes and their implications for U.S. society and economy;

6. Science and Technology: Five emerging technologies and scientific advances that could potentially transform society (Genome Editing; Artificial Intelligence and Automation; Quantum Information Science; Brain/Augmented Reality; and Cryptocurrencies and Blockchain);

7. Government and Governance: Increasingly complex governance relationships and practices; and

8. Environment and Sustainability: Balancing competing natural resource and sustainability needs.

The current strategic plan framework (Enclosure II) summarizes these global trends affecting government and society, as well as the strategic goals and objectives that guide our work. We plan to issue an updated GAO strategic framework in FY 2022.

Center for Audit Excellence

The Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, enacted in December 2014, authorized GAO to establish a Center for Audit Excellence (CAE) to build institutional auditing capacity and promote good governance by providing training and assistance to federal, state, local and other national audit offices around the world. The Center uses former senior-level GAO executives and auditors on an intermittent basis to provide a wide range of training and technical assistance services to audit organizations and is authorized to charge fees for its services which are used to offset Center operating costs.

In FY 2020, despite the impact of the global pandemic which curtailed travel and in-person training classes for the last half of the year, the Center collected more than $800 thousand in fees and provided technical assistance or training to 11 domestic accountability organizations and audit organizations in six countries. The Center has reached nearly every region of the world—providing custom training courses, mentorship and coaching, institutional capacity building, and needs assessments.

Moving forward the Center seeks to bolster its operations as demand for its services continues to expand, particularly with international organizations. Building the capacity of National Audit Organizations across the globe helps produce high-quality auditing functions which can improve oversight of U.S. foreign assistance and hold governments accountable for using public funds efficiently and effectively and deterring and identifying corruption.

Following the onset of the pandemic, the Center began offering virtual training classes in lieu of in-person classes. In FY 2021 and FY 2022, the

Center plans to significantly expand the number of virtual training classes. This initiative will enable the Center to offer domestic and international organizations a range of service delivery options during and beyond the pandemic.

Examples of Working with International Organizations

- Currently, with USAID support, the Center is helping to improve the capacity of national audit institutions in five countries including the Philippines, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Armenia and Georgia. For example, the Center is helping to enhance the Philippine national audit office's capacity to conduct performance audits via a multi-year $1.5 million agreement. The Center will also be providing training and technical assistance services to audit organizations in Ethiopia and Armenia under multi-year agreements valued at $1.3 million and $1 million, respectively.

- With World Bank support, the Center is helping to conduct a capacity building needs assessment of a national audit organization in Europe.

Examples of Working with Domestic Organizations

- The Center continues to provide high quality training to federal inspectors general as well as multiple state and local audit organizations.

- The Center recently acquired an online registration system and the capability to offer virtual classes for federal, state and local auditors using a software platform.

Concluding Remarks

We value the opportunity to provide Congress and the nation with timely, insightful analysis on the challenges facing the country. Our FY 2022 budget request provides a foundation to ensure that GAO is well-positioned and prepared to address both emerging and long-term priorities of the Congress.

Our request will allow us to continue building our staffing level for critical audit arenas and provide our people with the appropriate resources and support needed to serve the Congress effectively. This funding level will also allow us to continue efforts to promote operational efficiency and address long-deferred investments and maintenance. Also of great importance, our proposed FY 2022 budget helps us ensure the health and safety of all GAO employees while they work on GAO premises.

As is our standard practice, we will continue to explore opportunities to generate revenue to help offset our costs.

I appreciate, as always, your careful consideration of our budget and your continued support. I look forward to discussing our FY 2022 budget request with you.

Enclosure I: GAO's High Risk List as of March 2021

GAO's 2021 High-Risk List

Strengthening the Foundation for Efficiency and Effectiveness
- Strategic Human Capital Management
- Managing Federal Real Property
- Funding the Nation's Surface Transportation System[a]
- Modernizing the U.S. Financial Regulatory System[a]
- Resolving the Federal Role in Housing Finance[a]
- USPS Financial Viability[a]
- Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources
- Limiting the Federal Government's Fiscal Exposure by Better Managing Climate Change Risks[a]
- Improving the Management of IT Acquisitions and Operations
- Improving Federal Management of Programs That Serve Tribes and Their Members
- Decennial Census
- U.S. Government's Environmental Liability[a]
- Emergency Loans for Small Businesses (*new*)

Transforming DOD Program Management
- DOD Weapon Systems Acquisition
- DOD Financial Management
- DOD Business Systems Modernization
- DOD Approach to Business Transformation

Ensuring Public Safety and Security
- Government-wide Personnel Security Clearance Process[a]
- Ensuring the Cybersecurity of the Nation[a]
- Strengthening Department of Homeland Security Management Functions
- Ensuring the Effective Protection of Technologies Critical to U.S. National Security Interests
- Improving Federal Oversight of Food Safety[a]
- Protecting Public Health through Enhanced Oversight of Medical Products
- Transforming EPA's Process for Assessing and Controlling Toxic Chemicals
- National Efforts to Prevent, Respond to, and Recover from Drug Misuse (*new*)

Managing Federal Contracting More Effectively
- VA Acquisition Management
- DOE's Contract and Project Management for the National Nuclear Security Administration and Office of Environmental Management
- NASA Acquisition Management
- DOD Contract Management

Assessing the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Tax Law Administration
- Enforcement of Tax Laws[a]

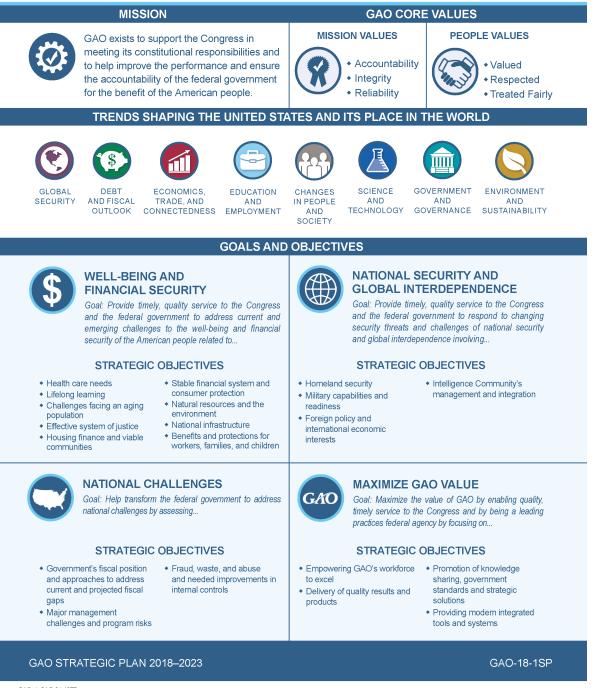**Modernizing and Safeguarding Insurance and Benefit Programs**

- Medicare Program & Improper Payments
- Strengthening Medicaid Program Integrity[a]
- Improving and Modernizing Federal Disability Programs
- Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation Insurance Programs[a]
- National Flood Insurance Program[a]
- Managing Risks and Improving VA Health Care[a]

Source: GAO-21-119SP. | GAO-21-407T

[a]Legislation is likely to be necessary in order to effectively address this area.

GAO'S STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

MISSION	GAO CORE VALUES	
GAO exists to support the Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and ensure the accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people.	**MISSION VALUES** ◆ Accountability ◆ Integrity ◆ Reliability	**PEOPLE VALUES** ◆ Valued ◆ Respected ◆ Treated Fairly

TRENDS SHAPING THE UNITED STATES AND ITS PLACE IN THE WORLD

GLOBAL SECURITY   DEBT AND FISCAL OUTLOOK   ECONOMICS, TRADE, AND CONNECTEDNESS   EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT   CHANGES IN PEOPLE AND SOCIETY   SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY   GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE   ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

WELL-BEING AND FINANCIAL SECURITY

Goal: Provide timely, quality service to the Congress and the federal government to address current and emerging challenges to the well-being and financial security of the American people related to...

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Health care needs
- Lifelong learning
- Challenges facing an aging population
- Effective system of justice
- Housing finance and viable communities
- Stable financial system and consumer protection
- Natural resources and the environment
- National infrastructure
- Benefits and protections for workers, families, and children

NATIONAL SECURITY AND GLOBAL INTERDEPENDENCE

Goal: Provide timely, quality service to the Congress and the federal government to respond to changing security threats and challenges of national security and global interdependence involving...

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Homeland security
- Military capabilities and readiness
- Foreign policy and international economic interests
- Intelligence Community's management and integration

NATIONAL CHALLENGES

Goal: Help transform the federal government to address national challenges by assessing...

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Government's fiscal position and approaches to address current and projected fiscal gaps
- Major management challenges and program risks
- Fraud, waste, and abuse and needed improvements in internal controls

MAXIMIZE GAO VALUE

Goal: Maximize the value of GAO by enabling quality, timely service to the Congress and by being a leading practices federal agency by focusing on...

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Empowering GAO's workforce to excel
- Delivery of quality results and products
- Promotion of knowledge sharing, government standards and strategic solutions
- Providing modern integrated tools and systems

GAO STRATEGIC PLAN 2018–2023   GAO-18-1SP

Source: GAO. | GAO-21-407T