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## Walker to GAO: Nonpartisanship to Remain Byword of Agency

"Despite an increasing amount of combativeness within the political arena over the past several years, GAO must be an island of professionalism irrespective of the degree of partisanship inside the Beltway," Comptroller General designate David M. Walker said last week in his first remarks to a GAO audience, delivered at the October 27 opening session of GAO's 11th technical conference.

Walker's comments came less than a week after he was confirmed by the Senate as GAO's seventh chief executive. He will officially take office after he takes the oath of office in early November (see **Management News**, October 26-30, 1998). Walker reiterated the three primary goals for GAO that he set forth in his October 7 confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs: To be a world-class organization that leads by example and serves as a best practices model for government; to play a major role in improving the efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, and integrity of government; and to act in a way that improves the public's respect for and confidence in their government (see **Management News**, October 12-16, 1998)

"In order for us to accomplish [these goals], the acronym GAO must be synonymous with the concept of good government. In this regard, while the Congress is our primary client, the American people are our beneficial client. As a result, we must keep the interests of both in the forefront of our minds when we are doing our jobs," he said.

GAO must take a "candid but constructive" approach to its oversight and audit activities, providing the Congress with timely, accurate, and useful information on current, emerging, and longer-range government operational and program issues, he said.

GAO's work must be fact-based. "The facts are what they are, and they may or may not be consistent with the requester's desires or expectations. We must be 'call it as we see it' and be fair enough to give the organizations that we review an opportunity to comment before we publicize our findings." To be fair to requesters, he added, GAO must also have mechanisms in avoid surprising requesters with the results of their commissioned reviews.

### Getting to Know You

Walker plans to take a cautious approach during the impending leadership transition. Expressing his appreciation for the work of Acting Comptroller General Jim Hinchman and the GAO leadership team over the past two years, he said he wanted to take time to get to know GAO and consult others, inside and outside the agency, before making any changes "Fortunately, with a 15-year term, I'll have time to do an appropriate amount of due diligence in order to make an informed and reasonable judgment. As a person with significant fiduciary experience, that has been my style in the past and I expect that it will continue to be so at GAO."

But it's just as important for GAOers to get to know me as well, he added. To this end, he has asked that a special "From the CG" page be established on GAO's internal Internet site, where material prepared for his confirmation hearing regarding his background and vision for GAO will be posted. Additional information, such as the text of relevant speeches and answers to questions from GAO staff members, will be posted in the future.

Walker's first remarks to a GAO audience were delivered at the October 21 opening session of GAO's 11th technical conference. He spoke before an overflow crowd of conference attendees in the GAO auditorium. His remarks were also broadcast over the headquarters closed-circuit television system, with special viewing rooms set up in the Training Institute and in various conference rooms. Audio or video tapes were also transmitted to the field offices.

The prepared text of Walker's speech is reprinted below. It has also been posted on the comptroller general's page on GAO's internal Internet site (accessible at the Netscape icon).

## Remarks by David Walker at GAO's Technical Conference

Good morning. It is truly a pleasure for me to be with you today. As many of you know, after a process which spanned over sixteen months, I have now been confirmed by the Senate as comptroller general of the United States. I have not, however, taken the official oath of office yet, although I plan to do so in early November. Technically, I'm on vacation and still with Arthur Andersen. Those of you who know Arthur Andersen know that this is somewhat of a typical Andersen vacation--you may not be working at Andersen's office but you're still working. I suspect that some GAO vacations are much the same.

While I'm not official yet, I want to take advantage of this opportunity to speak to the many GAO staff gathered for this annual technical conference and those participating via teleconference. Training and knowledge sharing is what these next three days are all about. You may be interested to know that Andersen is also recognized as a global leader in training. I additionally recognize the critical importance of quality training programs to professional service organizations like GAO.

First and foremost, I am truly honored to be part of the GAO team. As a CPA, a former head of two other federal agencies and a former public trustee of social security and Medicare, I have had the opportunity to interact with GAO in the past. I have always found GAO employees to be professional, objective, and constructive in their approach to issues.

GAO's professionalism is also evident in the commendable job that Jim Hinchman has done during the past two years as acting comptroller general. Jim and the GAO leadership team managed to make progress on a number of important issues during the period since Chuck Bowsher's departure. I would like to thank Jim and the current GAO team for their past efforts. I look forward to working with Jim, other key GAO management officials, and each of you to make additional progress in the coming years. I would also like to thank Jim, Helen Hsing, Bob Murphy, and their respective teams for all of their efforts during my "fast track" confirmation process. While it took a while to get the nomination to the Senate, it moved at "warp speed" once it got there and this team was always there to do what needed to be done.

## Sharing Information

Let me now turn to the impending leadership transition. I realize that when any organization gets a new CEO there are a lot of questions and some uncertainty on the minds of the existing personnel, especially when the CEO comes from outside the organization. Inevitably, there is speculation as to what type of person the new CEO is and whether that person has any preconceived plans for the organization. Such speculation is both normal and understandable. As a result, I am taking certain steps to try and help provide all GAO employees with a range of information. I want you to make up your own minds rather than relying on the proverbial "rumor mill." Specifically, my confirmation statement and bio have already been distributed on the LAN as part of **Management News**. I have also asked that all of my relevant responses to the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee's questions be posted to our intranet as soon as possible. In addition, I also plan to share additional information in the future. For example, I will periodically solicit and respond to questions from GAO personnel, just as I did for the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee. I also plan to post selected speeches, including my remarks this morning, and other items that would be of interest to GAO personnel on our intranet.

With regard to my personal style, I have a track record in both the federal government and the private sector. I am proud of my record and I know that a number of GAO professionals have already made calls to "check me out" with selected DOL and PBGC career officials. I expect that those who did so might have heard words like energetic, results-oriented, innovative, open, honest, determined, friendly, and fair. Fortunately, you don't have to rely on the opinions of others since you will have plenty of time to make up your own mind over the next 15 years.

## Three Primary Goals

What about preconceived notions--do I have any? The answer is yes and no. As I stated during my confirmation hearing I have three primary goals for the GAO. First, I believe that the GAO needs to be a "world class" organization that "leads by example" and serves as a "best practices" model for all of government in every major operational area (e.g., strategic planning, financial affairs, information technology, human capital practices, customer service). Second, I believe that GAO has a major role to play in helping to continuously improve the efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, and integrity of the federal government. And finally, I believe that GAO's actions and activities can and should be designed to improve the public's respect for and confidence in their government.

While the above represent my three primary goals at the outset of my term, I do not have a predetermined game plan regarding how best to achieve these goals. While I have plenty of ideas, I will undertake an active and ongoing outreach program to tap the ideas of others at the GAO, on the Hill, within the government and in the private sector before making any major decisions. Candidly, I need some time to get to know the GAO organization, our people, technology, priorities, processes, and protocols before taking any major actions. Fortunately, with a 15-year term, I'll have time to do an

appropriate amount of due diligence in order to make an informed and reasoned judgment. As a person with significant fiduciary experience, that has been my style in the past and I expect that it will continue to be so at GAO.

In order for us to accomplish the three primary goals that I presented to the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, the acronym GAO must be synonymous with the concept of "good government." In this regard, while the Congress is our primary client, the American people are our beneficial client. As a result, we must keep the interests of both in the forefront of our minds when we are doing our jobs.

### **"Island of Professionalism"**

Despite an increasing amount of combativeness with the political arena over the past several years, GAO must be an "island of professionalism" irrespective of the degree of partisanship inside the Beltway. To do so, GAO must conduct all of its affairs in a professional, objective, fact-based, and strictly non-partisan manner, both in reality and perception. These are some of GAO's core values and they are critical to our effectiveness and credibility. GAO must also take a candid but constructive approach to its audit and oversight activities of the executive branch. After all, while reasonable people can differ, we all have the same common goal to improve government and make it work more effectively for the American people. In addition, GAO must provide the Congress with timely, accurate, and useful information on a range of current, emerging, and longer-range government operational and program issues. In this regard, GAO needs to help Congress get the facts, understand the options, and assess the relative need for action in connection with a variety of important issues.

Let me stress the importance of a fact-based and strictly non-partisan approach to all GAO activities. When I say that GAO needs to get the facts, that is exactly what I mean. The facts are what they are, and they may or may not be consistent with the requesters' desires or expectations. We must "call it as we see it" and be fair enough to give organizations that we review an opportunity to comment before we publicize our findings. In addition, our requesters should "let the chips fall where they may" when they commission a project and we agree to undertake it. At the same time, in order to be an effective "honest broker," we must have mechanisms in place to minimize any related "expectation gaps" and avoid surprises in connection with both requesters and those being reviewed.

With regard to the importance of a non-partisan approach, every GAO employee needs to "check their political views at the door" when they come to work each day. Specifically, irrespective of party preference or affiliation, every GAO employee must employ a strictly non-partisan approach both in fact and appearance when they are acting on behalf of the agency. Doing otherwise would be highly inappropriate and very counterproductive to both the individual and our institution. It would also be inconsistent with the concept of "good government" to which I referred earlier. Believe me, I know that GAO's commitment to a strictly non-partisan approach can be tough at times, especially given the fact that our clients have inherent political affiliations and interests. We must, however, continue to make this a top priority for the agency.

From a personal perspective, I have been both a registered Democrat and a registered Republican at times in the past, although not at the same time. I have consistently supported qualified candidates from both major political parties for many years. However, last fall, when it became clear that I was a serious candidate for appointment as comptroller general, I became an independent in both form and substance and ceased all political affiliations. I will continue to employ this policy throughout my term as comptroller general. Regardless of my past party affiliations, I take pride in having always employed a professional, objective, and non-partisan approach to dealing with important government operational, program, and policy issues both in my prior government positions and in connection with the many commissions and task forces on which I have served. As a result, despite some concerns regarding the appointment process, I was fortunate to have strong bipartisan and bicameral support for my appointment as comptroller general. That support was broadened and strengthened as a result of my hearing, meetings with numerous senators, and other activities that occurred during the Senate confirmation process. This included a very constructive meeting with Senator John McCain, who had not met with a comptroller general in over 17 years. I hope this will prove to be beneficial to GAO as we move forward.

### **A Personal Commitment**

In closing, I pledge to fully and faithfully work with the Congress, selected executive branch officials, the over 3,000 professionals at GAO, and other interested parties in a professional, objective, constructive, and strictly non-partisan manner to help assure that the three primary goals that I articulated previously are fully realized. In doing so, I commit to each of you that I will discharge my responsibilities with energy, innovation, and integrity at all times. I look forward to working with each of you to make sure that these goals become a reality and to make a meaningful and lasting difference for our country.

While time does not allow for me to take questions this morning, as I mentioned earlier, I will be taking questions on a periodic basis from all GAO personnel. In addition, I will be meeting individually with a number of our top managers and touring both the GAO headquarters and the several of the field offices over the coming months.

Thank you for your time and attention.

## **Site-Seeing**

### **New Features, Reorganization Make GAO's Intranet Site More User-Friendly**

Click on the Netscape icon and you'll find a newly expanded and reorganized internal home page for GAO, filled with material of interest to every GAO staff member.

OIMC's Information Services Center, which maintains both GAO's internal and external Internet sites used the establishment of the special section devoted to information from Comptroller General designate David M. Walker to introduce other new features, according to Sallee Garner, who oversees the sites.

Under the heading "GAO Information," you'll find the texts of Walker's remarks at the technical conference as well as direct links to **Management News** articles on his appointment and confirmation. There are also direct links to **Management News** archives from 1994 to the present and a week's worth of GAO Clippings, both new features. Other news you can use includes updates on the computer network, the "Suite Times" home page on the technology transition project, travel and financial management news, and the latest performance report. You can research and order GAO reports and decisions, review GAO policy guidance and operational orders, and obtain information on training, job opportunities, and personnel matters, among other things.

The "Research Tools" section links you to library resources in GAO and outside, as well as myriad sources of information relevant to GAO issues. The "Legislation, Regulations, and Laws" section is a virtual law library, with access to online sources of information about federal rules and regs, including the text of the recently enacted omnibus appropriation bill for fiscal year 1999.

Need information about a specific government agency? There are links to Internet sites maintained by federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as international sources of information.

GAO's internal homepage is not available to the general public; it is accessible only through GAO's network. For more information, contact Sallee Garner by e-mail or by phone, 202-512-2655.

## **Mark Your Calendar**

### **Get Acquainted with GAO's Counseling, Career Development Services at Open House**

Get acquainted--or reacquainted--with the wide range of personal and professional counseling resources and services available from GAO's Office of Counseling and Career Development, at an open house scheduled for Wednesday, November 4, noon-1:30 p.m., in Room 3153.

You'll have an opportunity to meet OCCD's staff of counselors; visit the Career Resource Center, with books and other materials on career strategies, job search approaches, teamwork, and communications; and the Work and Family Life Center, with information on how you can strike a balance between personal and professional responsibilities.

The open house was designed with GAO's new employees in mind, but veteran GAO staffers are welcome to reacquire themselves with OCCD's services, according to Dave Hackett. For more information about the open house or about OCCD services, call 202-512-8992.

### **The Clock Is Ticking: Briefing to Help You Make Decision About CSRS-FERS Switch**

Still haven't decided whether to switch to FERS? Need more information? Be sure to attend a briefing by Dave Redden of the National Institute for Transition Planning, Thursday, November 5, 8:30-11:30 a.m., in the auditorium, where experts will provide you with information comparing the Civil Service Retirement System and the Federal Employees Retirement System, focusing on retirement eligibility, civil service annuities, social security benefits, and thrift savings plan provisions.

The briefing is part of Personnel's efforts to help GAO staff members currently covered by CSRS decide whether to switch to FERS during the special six-month open season, which runs through December 31. CSRS, which covers employees hired before 1984, is a stand-alone pension program that provides an annuity determined by a formula. FERS, which covers employees hired since January 1, 1984 and those who transferred from CSRS during a 1987 open