

Opening Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs

**“GAO’s Role in Supporting Congressional Oversight:
An Overview of Past Work and
Future Challenges and Opportunities”**

March 21, 2007

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**Mr. Chairman, for more than 85 years, the
Government Accountability Office has worked with
Congress, and for the American people, to make
federal agencies and programs more accountable and
more effective.**

**The “watchdog of Congress” has served us well
as auditor, overseer, investigator, and evaluator. I
look forward to hearing from the Comptroller
General today, as the Committee considers GAO’s
work, its results, and its challenges.**

Let me say at the outset how much I appreciate the work of the GAO. Not only does the Office perform yeoman service in research, analysis, and evaluation, but it presents its work in compact, coherent, and accessible form – and in conscientiously non-partisan tone. GAO reports are authoritative and invaluable tools for lawmakers and for our staff. The professionals at GAO are entitled to feel a sense of pride in their work.

Simply noting the range of recent GAO reports for this Committee suggests the value they represent: border security, Hurricane Katrina, homeland security grants, interagency contracting, immigration services, human capital reform, and the High-Risk List of government agencies or programs.

I was, of course, pleased that the postal-reform legislation that Senator Carper and I sponsored in the last session of Congress helped remove the U.S. Postal Service from the new high-risk list.

I hope the list may have another success story soon. Senate Bill 680, the Accountability in Government Contracting Act of 2007—which I introduced, with Senators Lieberman, Coleman, Carper, and McCaskill as cosponsors—will strike at many of the most serious issues that GAO has identified in the acquisition and oversight processes that govern billions of dollars in federal contracting every year. GAO research played a key role in developing that bill.

The GAO has also provided a great deal of valuable assistance on issues like homeland security

and disaster preparedness and response – issues that have accounted for much of this Committee’s work in the past two years. Following the disasters of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the GAO provided Congress with more than 30 reports and statements on FEMA, federal grant programs, disaster housing assistance, medical expenditures, contracting, and program waste, fraud, and abuse.

I understand that the GAO has computed the fiscal-year 2006 financial benefits of its work at \$51 billion, representing an amazing return of \$105 for every dollar. That kind of return – not to mention the clean audited financials – should be the envy of both private-sector and government organizations.

GAO has been able to perform all of this work on a budget that is 3 percent lower in real dollars

than four years ago. I hope today's hearing will not only illuminate some of the fine service that GAO performs for Congress, but also help spread Mr. Walker's message about the challenges of funding operations and human-capital operations now and in the years ahead. Some of you will recall that Senator Voinovich and I collaborated in 2003 on authorizing some personnel reforms for GAO. To the extent that we can assist the Office in meeting its future challenges, Mr. Walker, I am confident you will again find allies on this Committee.

I will close with one more note of appreciation. GAO's leadership in the continuing, nationwide "Fiscal Wake-Up Tour" on our long-term federal-budget problems strikes me as a particularly valuable public service. As demands for new or increased federal spending multiply, the core fiscal

reality is this: We are on an unsustainable path that cannot be repaired with simple solutions. This message needs forceful and repeated explanation, and I commend the GAO for working with a variety of groups - across the political spectrum - to spread that message in a responsible way that does not prejudice policy choices or outcomes.

In sum, Mr. Chairman, we have many reasons to welcome Mr. Walker here today.

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