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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

March 31, 2000

The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. General Accounting Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

As you know, the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) requires agencies to submit annual performance reports in March of each year. The initial agency performance reports are due today and will cover agency accomplishments under their GPRA performance plans for fiscal year (FY) 1999. These reports complete the first full cycle of GPRA implementation. Thus, we have arrived at a critical juncture in our efforts to adopt an effective results orientation for the federal government.

The March performance reports will need careful scrutiny. As you said in your testimony before this Committee yesterday, "[t]he performance reports offer the first opportunity to systematically assess the agencies' actual performance on a governmentwide basis and to consider the specific steps that can be taken to improve performance and reduce costs." With this in mind, I request that the General Accounting Office (GAO) conduct a review and analysis of the performance reports for the 24 major federal departments and independent agencies.

In past work, GAO highlighted weaknesses in most of the FY 1999 performance plans on which the upcoming performance reports will be based. These weaknesses range from insufficient results-oriented goals to lack of reliable performance data. I recognize that these weaknesses will limit the usefulness of the performance reports. Therefore, it is important to look beyond the actual content of the FY 1999 reports and consider what agency performance reports should contain. In particular, do these reports tell us now, and how can future reports tell us better, what agencies are doing to achieve real results that matter to the American people?

To provide a framework for your analysis, enclosed is a list of key outcomes that the agencies are supposed to attain. The list of outcomes was compiled by Committee staff. It is based on a review of agency statutory missions and strategic plans, as well as input provided by GAO and the Congressional Research Service. The list is by no means intended to cover all

major functions of the agencies, but it does capture a representative cross section of important outcomes.

Using these mission outcomes as a framework, please analyze the March performance reports in terms of the following questions:

1. What performance goals and measures from the agency's FY 1999 performance plan relate directly to each of the listed outcomes for that agency?
2. Do the goals and measures track performance toward the stated outcome in a meaningful way? For example, are the goals appropriately outcome-oriented and are the measures valid indicators of progress?
3. According to the performance report, how did the agency perform under each of the relevant goals and measures?
4. How valid and reliable is the data by which the agency judged its performance? Where data shortcomings exist, did the agency acknowledge them and indicate what steps it will take to correct them?
5. Where an agency has not met a performance goal, does the report adequately explain why and describe a strategy to meet the goal in the future?
6. Where a goal from the FY 1999 performance plan is not covered in the performance report or has changed, did the agency adequately explain why?
7. What improvements has the agency made in its performance plan for FY 2001 that are relevant to the above issues for the key outcome areas?

Finally, I ask that you include an analysis of how the performance reports demonstrate progress in resolving the high-risk and other major management problems that GAO and agency Inspectors General have repeatedly highlighted for each agency. (As you will see, a few of these problem areas are included among the key outcomes.)

Thank you for your attention to this request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Robert Shea, of the Committee staff.

Sincerely,



Fred Thompson
Chairman

AGENCY OUTCOMES

Agriculture Department

- The Nation has an adequate and reasonably priced food supply.
- Food supplies are safe and wholesome.
- Global market opportunities for agricultural producers are opened, expanded, and maintained.
- Reduce hunger and ensure food for the hungry.
- Less food stamp fraud and error.

Commerce Department

- U.S. businesses have greater access to international markets.
- The U.S. is secure from proliferation of dual-use commodities and chemical weapons.
- Jobs are created and businesses remain successful.
- Weather forecasts and severe weather warnings are accurate and timely.

Defense Department

- The U.S. maintains technological superiority in key war-fighting capabilities.
- U.S. military forces are adequate in number, well qualified, and highly motivated.
- Combat readiness is maintained at the desired level.
- Infrastructure and operating procedures are more efficient and cost-effective.
- Reduced availability and/or use of illegal drugs.
- Fewer erroneous payments to contractors.

Education Department

- Schools are safe and drug-free.
- All students reach challenging academic standards that prepare them for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment.
- Greater school choice is available to students and families.
- Less fraud, waste, and error in student assistance programs.

Energy Department

- Energy systems are secure, competitive, and serve the needs of the public.
- Energy use is more efficient and productive, while environmental impacts are limited.
- Reduced nuclear weapons stockpiles and proliferation threats caused by the possible diversion of nuclear weapons.

Environmental Protection Agency

- The air in every community is safe and healthy to breathe.
- Water is safe for drinking and recreation.
- Hazardous waste ("Superfund") sites are cleaned up.
- Food supplies are free from unsafe pesticide residues.

Federal Emergency Management Agency

- Minimize human suffering and property losses after natural disasters.
- Timely responses to disaster aid requests.
- Prevent or reduce harm and losses from future disasters by mitigation efforts.

General Services Administration

- Quality products and services are provided to federal agencies at competitive prices and significant cost savings.
- Federal buildings are safe, accessible, and energy efficient.
- Federal buildings are adequately maintained.

Health and Human Service Department

- Reduced availability and/or use of illegal drugs.
- The public has prompt access to safe and effective medical drugs and devices.
- Beneficiaries receive high quality service.
- Improved prevention of diseases and disabilities.
- Poor and disadvantaged families and individuals become self-sufficient.
- Less fraud, waste, and error in Medicare and Medicaid.

Housing and Urban Development Department

- Increased home ownership.
- Increased affordable, decent, and safe rental housing.
- Improved community economic vitality and quality of life.
- Less fraud, waste, and error in HUD programs.

Interior Department

- Safe and environmentally sound mineral development occurs on the Outer Continental Shelf for which the public receives fair value.
- Visitors safely enjoy and are satisfied with the availability, accessibility, diversity, and quality of national park facilities and services.
- The Federal Government effectively meets its trust responsibilities to protect and preserve Indian trust lands and trust resources.
- The health of federally managed land, waters, and renewable resources is maintained.

Justice Department

- Less drug and gang-related violence.
- Reduced availability and/or use of illegal drugs.
- Immigration and Naturalization services are provided timely, accurately, and fairly.
- U.S. borders are secure from illegal immigration.

Labor Department

- Fewer workplace injuries, illnesses, and fatalities.
- Job training participants get and keep jobs.
- Worker benefits are protected.
- Individuals successfully transition from welfare dependency to self-sufficiency.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

- Expand scientific knowledge of the Earth system.
- Deploy and operate the International Space Station safely and cost-effectively.
- Expand the commercial development of space.

National Science Foundation

- Research is resulting in discoveries at and across the frontier of science and engineering.
- Administer research grants efficiently and effectively.

Nuclear Regulatory Commission

- No radiation-related deaths or illnesses due to civilian nuclear reactors.
- No radiation-related deaths or illnesses due to civilian use of nuclear materials.
- Wastes produced by civilian use of nuclear materials are treated, stored, and disposed of safely.
- No loss or theft of special nuclear materials regulated by the NRC.

Office of Personnel Management

- The Federal Government has an appropriately constituted workforce with the proper skills to carry out its missions.
- Federal employees are evaluated, rewarded, and otherwise held accountable for their performance.
- Federal agencies adhere to merit system principles.
- Less fraud and error in the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program.

Small Business Administration

- Small businesses become self-reliant and successful in the competitive marketplace.
- Businesses and families recovering from disasters receive timely assistance.
- More eligible minority small businesses participate in SBA programs and become successful.

Social Security Administration

- SSA provides timely, accurate, and useful information and services to the public.
- Disability determinations are more timely and accurate.
- Long-term disability benefits are reduced because people return to the workplace.
- SSA provides timely information to decision-makers necessary to address program policy issues such as long term trust fund solvency.
- Less fraud, waste, and error in Supplemental Security Income program.

State Department

- Reduced threats from weapons of mass destruction.
- Reduced international crime and terrorism.
- Reduced availability and/or use of illegal drugs.
- Foreign markets for U.S. products and services are expanded.
- American citizens (including government employees) travel and live abroad securely.

Transportation Department

- Fewer transportation-related accidents, deaths, injuries, and property losses.
- Improved safety and reduced flight delays through air traffic control modernization.
- Less highway congestion.
- Improved highway pavement condition.
- Reduced availability and/or use of illegal drugs.

Treasury Department

- Tax laws are administered effectively and fairly.
- Reduced availability and/or use of illegal drugs.
- Criminals are denied access to firearms and firearms-related crime is reduced.
- Improved delinquent tax and non-tax debt collection.
- Less waste, fraud, and error relating to the Earned Income Tax Credit.

U.S. Agency for International Development

- Increased economic growth in developing countries.
- Reduced spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Lives saved and suffering reduced from natural or man-made disasters.

Veterans Affairs Department

- Veterans are provided high quality health care at a reasonable cost to the Government.
- Veterans benefit claims are processed timely and accurately.
- Disabled veterans acquire and maintain suitable employment.
- Reduced availability and/or use of illegal drugs.