

Highlights of [GAO-13-394T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Legislative Branch, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives

Background

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) mission is to support the Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people. GAO provides nonpartisan, objective, and reliable information to the Congress, federal agencies, and to the public and recommends improvements, when appropriate, on a wide variety of issues. GAO's work spans the full breadth and scope of the federal government's responsibilities.

This testimony addresses (1) the GAO's approach to managing Congressional requests in a period of fiscal constraint and (2) the potential impact of a sequester on its ability to carry out its mission – now and in the future.

GAO provides products spanning the extensive interests of the Congress. In fiscal year 2012, GAO provided reports to 95 percent of the standing committees of the Congress and about 60 percent of their subcommittees. Additionally, senior GAO officials testified at 159 hearings on national and international issues.

GAO's annualized fiscal year 2013 continuing resolution (CR) funding level of \$514.4 million reflects a decrease of about \$42 million from fiscal year 2010 levels. Since fiscal year 2010, GAO's staffing level fell by 10.5 percent—due to extremely limited hiring in the face of ongoing attrition—dropping its full-time equivalent level (FTE) below 3,000 for the first time since 1935.

View [GAO-13-394T](#). For more information, contact Gene L. Dodaro at (202) 512-5500 or dodarog@gao.gov.

February 2013

U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Operations and Potential Impact of Sequestration

What GAO Found

In just this past fiscal year alone, GAO's work yielded significant results across the government, including \$55.8 billion in financial benefits—a return of \$105 for every dollar invested in GAO and 1,440 other benefits—that is, recommendations that helped to change laws, improve public services, and promote sound management throughout government. Since 2002, GAO's work has resulted in over ½ trillion dollars in financial benefits and over 14 thousand other benefits for the American people.

To manage its workload during a period of declining budgets and staff size, GAO gives priority to work that is statutorily mandated by Congress and to requests from Congressional Committee leaders which allows it to support these committees as they carry out their appropriation, authorization, and oversight activities. GAO also focuses on areas where there is the greatest potential for results, such as recommendations that identify cost savings and improve government operations and programs. Strategic planning and continuous dialog with Congressional leaders and their staffs also help GAO anticipate and respond to Congressional needs.

In this period of fiscal austerity, GAO has been guided by two core principles—maximizing its ability to provide Congress with high-quality, relevant, and insightful analyses and minimizing the impact on GAO's people. To do so, GAO reduced engagement support costs, such as travel, by nearly 36 percent and infrastructure support costs, such as information technology, by nearly 21 percent.

During fiscal year 2012, GAO began prudently planning for the possibility of a funding sequester in fiscal year 2013. Given the reductions in operational costs made already, a sequester at the proposed level of \$27.3 million would impact the size of GAO's workforce. It would reduce planned hiring by sixty percent, eroding the current staffing level to 2,875 FTE, which represents a significant reduction of 472 FTEs, or more than 14 percent over the last 3 years. GAO would also reduce employee benefits which will negatively impact our ability to recruit and retain highly qualified staff and severely jeopardize our ability to build and develop the needed workforce for the future. It also would further reduce travel and contract resources used to complete Congressional engagements; and further reduce planned investments in information technology that have the potential to increase GAO's efficiency and effectiveness and reduce costs in the future. The additional staffing reductions would also adversely impact GAO's ability to:

- identify cost savings and other suggestions to help Congress address the government's serious deficit and debt issues;
- provide timely and responsive information to support Congressional deliberations or reauthorization activities for pending programs; and
- effectively assist Congress in addressing the broad array of social, economic, and security challenges facing the nation.

It is imperative that GAO rebuild its staff capacity to a level that will enable us to optimize the benefits we yield for Congress and the nation. Given the size of the federal budget and the multi-year actions needed to address the seriousness of the government's fiscal condition, investing resources to restore some of GAO's staff capacity would be a prudent and wise investment that will produce positive outcomes for the Congress and our country.