



Remarks by the Comptroller General of the United States,
 Elmer B. Staats, at the Annual Banquet of the American
 Society of Women Accountants of the District of Columbia,
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THE ROLE OF WOMEN AS PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS AT THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

"The variety of subjects which a woman auditor might be assigned to in the U.S. General Accounting Office is almost endless."

These words are not mine. They are the words of a GS grade 13 woman auditor who has been on the professional staff of GAO since 1961.

"The role of a woman auditor in the GAO does not differ very much from that of its male auditors."

Again, the words are not mine. They are the words of a GS grade 12 woman auditor who has been with us since 1964.

I begin my remarks with these attestations from two of the 95 women auditors in the General Accounting Office to establish in your minds facts about their life in GAO that, I am confident, hold true for most of them: interesting variety to their auditing work and the sharing of the same professional experiences and challenges as their counterparts. Of course they move forward in their promotions the same as the men, merit being the principal criterion.

The only difference that I can think of between women and men in the GAO is that sometimes the former take maternity leave now and then. One of the women auditors in our Washington Regional Office for example is married to a lawyer and is the mother of two boys, 9 and 5.

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So, if you came here this evening wondering

--if a career in the General Accounting Office might be interesting;

--if women are treated professionally any differently than the men; and

--if a woman could expect to rise in the ranks on the basis of ability,

now you know the answers.

As for salary, all government agencies do their utmost to match the salary scales in public accounting, especially in the beginning years of one's career. After that, as in public accounting, much depends upon one's ability as to where he or she goes in terms of money. At the GAO a woman can go to the top civil service and on to the so-called "supergrade levels."

As Comptroller General of the United States, I am the head of the GAO. This means that I am responsible for an agency whose operating staff is composed largely of professional accountants. Present enrollment figures show, I believe, about 2,400 professional accountants on our staff, about 100 lawyers, some 110 professionals from other disciplines such as mathematicians, economists, engineers, statisticians, ADP specialists, management specialists, and one journalist (who is the GAO Information Officer). About one-third of GAO's newly employed are graduates from other majors, i.e. "non-accountants."

GAO is still very much a man's world. But, I repeat, in our search for new staff members every year, we concentrate on finding the

most able people available--men or women. It is a truism to say that ability is always of first importance to any employer. To the GAO it is a matter of supreme importance for the work that our accountants and auditors do, may, and often does, have a direct bearing upon legislation enacted by the Congress or the way in which programs are administered by the executive branch.

Our legal authority is relatively much less important than the respect and reputation we earn from the accuracy and objectivity of our work. Correct facts, reasonable arguments, and detached objectivity provide the incentive for action on our recommendations.

GAO is an agency of the Congress and is therefore in the legislative branch of the Government, as contrasted with the executive and the judicial branches.

GAO was created in 1921 and placed in the legislative branch to provide Congress, its committees and Members with independent reports on the financial management and legal operations and responsibilities of the 12 departments and 60 agencies of the executive branch.

As you no doubt recall, GAO often is called Congress' "Watch Dog" over Government spending. Actually, its role is much broader in scope

and deeper in purpose. GAO's role in appraising and reporting on a wide range of Government activities and operations--which I will shortly enumerate with examples--more accurately reflects its assistance to the Congress, the public, and the executive agencies.

GAO recommends ways in which the executive departments and agencies carry out programs and operations efficiently, economically, and effectively. It reports at all times its findings on these matters in need of attention--unlike the Commonwealth Countries--either by the Congress or the Federal agencies.

GAO headquarters are here in Washington. Our auditors are situated in our headquarters building on G Street, at nearly 50 audit sites in the executive departments and agencies; in 16 regional offices and 30 suboffices throughout the United States; and overseas in Frankfurt, New Delhi, Manila, Saigon, and Honolulu. The Honolulu office is the headquarters of our Far East activities.

GAO has five primary responsibilities:

- To audit and review the manner in which Federal programs are carried out;
- To assist the Congress directly through special audits and investigations; provide various types of information; and give testimony or comment on legislation and related questions;
- To render legal decisions involving the use of appropriated funds to assure that funds are spent in accordance with the intent of the Congress;
- To prescribe principles and standards for accounting in the Federal agencies; and
- To settle claims for and against the U. S.

To tell you how we go about doing all these things would require the next two hours of your time. Instead I would like to share with you statements made by three of our women auditors. These will give you, I believe, a fairly clear view of GAO activities as seen through the experiences of these women auditors.

First, Miss Janice K. Cox, graduate of Kansas State Teachers College. Miss Cox joined our staff in 1964 as a grade 7. In less than 5 years she has advanced to the position of Supervisory Auditor concerned with our work at the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, after having previously worked with our Audit Group at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Let me paraphrase a recent statement she made as to her experience:

The role of a woman auditor in our Office does not differ very much from that of our male auditors. However, it is certainly interesting to watch the expression on a person's face when they are told that a woman is auditing the solid waste disposal program and that as a part of the audit, she has sniffed compost samples and visited the Kenilworth Sanitary Landfill.

Over a period of 2 or 3 years, the woman auditor in GAO will explain many times to the personnel of other Federal Government agencies what the role of the U.S. General Accounting Office is and why we are interested in management-type information as well as financial data. She will read congressional hearings,

interview agency personnel, and analyze agency documents relating to the particular program being audited. She will write up summaries of those interviews and of her analysis of agency documents, finally writing up drafts of audit reports to the Congress. Also, she can expect to review proposed bills by Congressmen to see if our Office wishes to comment on financial aspects; complete financial audit segments; independently verify statements in report drafts against the supporting documents; and supervise other auditors. She receives a continuous exposure to the legislative process.

At all times, the woman auditor is learning a wealth of general and specific knowledge on such subjects as

- turning Alaska fur sealskins into those expensive fur coats,
- conservation of fish and wildlife,
- housing of the poor,
- construction terminology,
- available health services,
- federally-aided education of medical personnel,
- civil defense plans, and (increasingly important),
- disposal of garbage.

It is really only in little ways that the woman auditor's role differs from the men's. She is usually treated with a tiny bit

more courtesy even as she explains to agency personnel that she is not a secretary brought along to take notes on an interview. She also spends more time than the men explaining why she majored in accounting or why she left a given state to come to work in Washington. Occasionally she has to convince her male counterparts that she is to be treated just like them.

In the meantime, the woman auditor has to face the mixed social blessings created by receiving promotions sooner than her friends outside the General Accounting Office. She also gets to chuckle over the secretary who asked to see her identification because she was an auditor instead of a secretary, and the office memorandum she received that was addressed to "All Male Staff Members." And upon occasion, she goes home with the satisfaction of knowing that Federal tax dollars will be allocated to higher priority programs because of her audit work.

A second example is Mrs. Mary Jo Gibson, graduate of the University of South Carolina. Mrs. Gibson has been with GAO about ten years in a number of assignments but has summarized two years work involving the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, in these terms:

Under the federally aided public assistance programs, medical care is provided to welfare recipients under title XIX of the Social Security Act--popularly known as the Medicaid program. One of the significant components of the Medicaid program is the provision of prescription drugs to recipients of welfare and the medically indigent through prescribed drug vendor payment programs.

A significant amount of my time during my two years work in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, has been spent reviewing various aspects of this program. As a result, several GAO studies and reports to the Congress has led to a study of many facets of prescribed drugs available in the marketplace which lie outside the realm of the welfare programs.

I assisted in supervising a review carried out by the San Francisco Regional Office and the Washington staff of the States' prescription drug pricing formulas and schedules of prices being paid to retail pharmacists for drugs prescribed for welfare recipients. The review resulted in a report to the Congress.

As a result of this and other GAO studies; the Comptroller General was invited to testify before congressional committees concerning economies which may accrue to the Federal Government through the use of formulary systems and the supplying of drugs by established name rather than brand-name; and concerning proposed quality and cost control standards for drugs provided under the public assistance programs. I had the responsibility of gathering background data and developing information on which to base the testimony to be presented. In carrying out this mission I came into contact with various Government agencies

who are involved in the purchase of drugs, with staffs of the Senate Committees concerned, and with representatives of the National organizations who represent the pharmacists, the retail druggists, the manufacturers, and other members of the drug industry. Developing this material also involved attending hearings at which the responsible officials of other Government agencies, the above organizations and State representatives testified.

An interesting result of my work in the drug field was an opportunity to attend the national conference on the rising cost of medical care as a participant of the drug panel. Members of this panel represented the foremost leaders of the Nation in the area of drugs.

Presently I am involved in a review of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which is currently a subject of great national concern. The GAO was requested in September 1968 by the Chairman, House Committee on Ways and Means, to assist in carrying out a special review of public assistance in New York which was to be conducted jointly by HEW and the New York State Department of Social Welfare. The review was brought about because of the substantial rise in public assistance caseloads and expenditures in New York City and the concern of certain New York Congressmen and other interested

organizations that widespread ineligibility and overpayments of assistance might be increasing the costs of the AFDC program.

The role of GAO, which is different from its usual approach, is to monitor the special review at each of its stages and make suggestions to HEW designed to ensure that areas of interest to the Committee are given adequate attention. The special review is segregated into three phases: the first is

- a sociological research project with the objective of answering the question of what accounts for the rapid rise in caseloads and expenditures;
- an independent redetermination of recipients' eligibility and amount of payment; and
- an analysis of the effectiveness of services of the New York Social Services Department in obtaining employment for AFDC cases.

In monitoring the review my role along with other staff members is to act as observer, reviewer, and make suggestions where appropriate as well as to keep the Committee informed of the progress of the review. As part of the review HEW has entered into a contract with a nonprofit research organization. It has been necessary not only to evaluate the HEW plans, but also to visit the offices of the contractor and subcontractors to evaluate their research designs.

A third illustration is Miss Carolyn J. Jackson, graduate of the University of Nebraska. Miss Jackson has the following to say about her eight years' experience with GAO. I am again quoting substantially from her own account:

The variety of subjects which a woman auditor might be assigned to is almost endless. During the past two or three years one auditor has reviewed activities within

- the Bureau of Employment Security (Department of Labor);
- the National Park Services;
- Bureau of Commercial Fisheries;
- Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife;
- Geological Survey;
- Bureau of Mines; and
- the Office of Saline Water (all in the Department of the Interior.)

Miss Jackson has also been involved in an assignment involving the National Endowment for the Arts, National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities.

While at the Bureau of Employment Security, she was involved in a review of the effect of the method of collection of the tax under which the Bureau operates. The inefficiencies found to be caused by the annual collection led to the exploration of the potential benefits that might be derived if the tax were collected on a quarterly basis. In pursuing this question, the auditor was involved in discussions with

officials from the Treasury Department responsible for fiscal policies of the United States, with officials from the Internal Revenue Service responsible for the collection of the tax, and with various officials within the Bureau of Employment Security.

In another assignment, Miss Jackson has been assisting in the review of the administrative practices within the National Endowment for the Arts. In this review, the approach was by necessity entirely different. In the tax review, it was possible to project the benefits that could be derived if the changes were made. However, in the review of the National Endowment for the Arts no project result can be predicted accurately and the decisions made by the administrators of the programs are based on their experience in the arts and their knowledge of the individual or organization under consideration for an award or a grant.

In yet another assignment she was concerned with the research activities carried out within five bureaus. During this survey the topics ranged from such activities in the earth sciences such as finding new sources of scarce minerals and metals to developing new methods to use lower graded ores or new uses for the more plentiful minerals and metals. In the fishery research areas the subject ranged from methods used to investigate the decline of previously abundant fishery resources to the programs for developing fish farming in some of the midwestern states.

I could give you similarly detailed reports about the work of Mrs. Mary Converse, a graduate of Morris Harvey College in Charleston,

West Virginia, who works in our Washington Regional Office in Fairfax, and who has had interesting assignments involving the Environmental Science Service Administration of the Commerce Department, the Government Printing Office, and the Department of the Navy; or about Mrs. Gloria Mayer, graduate of the University of Kentucky, also in our Fairfax Regional Office, who has been particularly involved with the adjudication of claims against the Government and with the audit of 14 canteens from some 163 located in the Veterans Administration hospitals throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. But I believe that these are sufficient to give you the picture not only of the work of the women employed in our organization, but also the activities of the organization itself.

By now some of you may be wondering if there is time available in a GAO woman's professional career for the at least equally creative experience of marriage. As I have already indicated, of course there is. Moreover, GAO recruits a substantial number of eligible bachelors every year. As you might expect, sometimes our GAO accountants marry their women counterparts.

Perhaps it would help our recruiting work if we had a slogan: "Join the GAO and find your man." We have had several GAO romances. The best known no doubt was that of our former Assistant Comptroller General Frank H. Weitzel. He came to work for GAO out of high school in 1923, starting as a messenger. The GAO became his career until his retirement in January, this year, after 45 years of service. A vital part of that career was the discovery in GAO of the girl who became--and still is--his wife.

Occasionally, after marriage, our women auditors resign in order

to undertake the equally demanding full-time occupation of being mothers and raising families. This is always a loss to GAO but if we are compelled by these circumstances to say goodbye we do so with the reminder that GAO's door is always open if a time comes when any of them are able to resume their professional careers. And if they happen to marry a GAO employee they will understand what he does and why he may have to be away from time to time.

If it has appeared to you from figures I quoted earlier that women accountants are excessively in the minority in GAO, this is the case. The ratio, year in and year out, is something like 24 men to every woman. Whether this is out of balance in relation to the number of women accountants graduated each year from accounting colleges we do not know. These colleges are now turning out about 15,000 graduates annually and about another 1,000 with masters degrees in accounting. We do not have the information as to how many of these are women. This type of information is not available but we know that the percentage is small.

One of the reasons for this may be that young women now in high schools or just entering colleges do not realize how attractive the work of a professional accountant may be for them, both in terms of salary and professional interest.

This past year we at GAO started our new professional accountants at the civil service grade GS-7 at a salary of \$7,900 a year. These men and women will receive a boost in salary with the governmentwide salary changes in July to just over \$8,600--this in the first year of work. Those entering GAO last year with masters degrees in accounting

were started at approximately \$9,000. With the July increase their salaries will go to just under \$10,000. If you will stop and think for a moment you will remember that not much more than 10 years ago the attainment of a salary of \$10,000 for a professional man or woman came only after years of hard work.

These levels of salaries, as starting pay, are surely very attractive-- even in today's inflationary times. I should think that many women would find such a prospect very appealing, and particularly so in the government service where the atmosphere is congenial for the woman professional these days. It is the policy of the Government, as I have already made clear, that they be given the same considerations for advancement as the men. So, please pass the word to the younger women you may know about the possibilities of the government service.

It is of interest to note that, of the 95 women professionals in the auditing area at the GAO, fifty-one are stationed in our regional offices around the United States. Thirty one are doing audit work on operations of the civil agencies here in Washington. Five are working here in the Defense Division on military type audits. Eight are assigned to our International Division, six of them stationed in Washington and two in Europe.

The highest civil service grade that our present women auditors have reached is grade 13 but of course for those who continue their careers with GAO this is not their ceiling. Where professional competence is concerned GAO is impartial and the women professionals get the same consideration as the men. And they get it, I emphasize, not

only as to civil service grade and salary but equally important as to assignment. To be sure some of the earlier barriers still have to be overcome--particularly in areas overseas where travel and living conditions may be difficult, but these are exceptional and are being eliminated year by year.

As one of our women auditors told me just the other day--and these are her words:

"The assignments on which GAO auditors work always seem to expose the auditors to new fields, new philosophies, and never ending challenges."

This seems like an appropriate level on which to end the formal part of these remarks. If any of you have any questions about GAO as an institution or about the work that we do for the Congress in just about any field of endeavor that you can think of, I will be glad to try to provide the answers. Thank you all very much.

I can say with assurance, based on experience, that those of you here this evening who are planning to join the General Accounting Office will do things that you have never thought of before and things you never could do in any other activity. For just as there is one United States Government there is one General Accounting Office. Our activities therefore are unique, sometimes adventurous, and nearly always professionally satisfying, financially satisfactory, and a public service. This is not a bad formula for a professional career.

May I conclude by expressing my thanks once again for the kind honor that has been bestowed upon me, as head and representative of the General Accounting Office, this evening.

May I add a personal word to those of you here from Penn State, students or faculty. I know from the satisfactory experience that the General Accounting Office has had with Penn State graduates who have joined our organization that I am talking tonight with the cream of this year's crop of college-trained accountants. There are more alumni from Penn State in the GAO than from any other institution. We are looking forward to a substantial number from your ranks to be joining us again this summer.

Now, I will be only too happy to answer any further questions that you may have about GAO

What we do,

Why we do it, and

What you may expect to do when you join us.