

U.S. Government Accountability Office –What We Do And How We Share Our Message - Transcript

Please stand by for realtime captions.

Good afternoon and welcome to our session. U. S. Government accountability office. What we do and how we share our message. I have a few housekeeping reminders. Please use the chat box for your technical issues, questions and comments. We will keep track of those and we will address them at the end of the presentation. We are recording the conference. All registrants will receive a link of the recording after the event. Please join me in welcoming our presenter, Holly.

Thank you so much. Can everyone hear me okay? I am going to turn on my camera now. Let me know if you can see me. I did wear makeup today so I want to have full credit. [Laughter] I want to thank the alpha want to talk about ourselves and share the work we are doing with a broad audience. Thank you very much for that. A little bit about myself, my name is Holly Hobbs I have not the alpha one for about 8 years. I am a senior analyst auditing financial policies economic polities to the housing market specifically. Right now working for GAO office of Public affairs. As a part of my job at OPA I run a blog. It is called the watch blog. We have blog posts that come out on Tuesdays and Thursdays. We will talk about that later. I am the host and producer of GAO podcast, the watchdog report. Those come out maybe twice a week, even more some weeks, if not regularly. We can talk more about that.

This is new tech for me but it is very nice. I am a military brat I divide everything into buckets. The three pockets of my presentation today. I will go over the role of GAO . And how we support Congress and we are receiving the federal government and where the work comes from. And a part of my second bucket I will talk about how we deliver work, and how you can access the work. Some resources available to you and Congress online. And other locations. And how we promote our work through social and digital media. And then I will give you a quick overview because there was some interest on the podcast which I will talk about the watchdog report. It covers how you can tune in what you look forward to and what is coming up. And just because GAO has been in the news a lot, over this past week. We will talk about it. I thought as a bonus if you are still around, at the end of my presentation, I will talk about some big work that is coming up and ongoing. As well as why we are in the headlines recently. Let's launch and. Please send me your questions as you have been.

So GAO established in 1912 as a part of the budget and accounting act. At that time literally a bunch of accountants. A group of nerds. I do not know if we moved on from the nerd quality march. Over the years our role within the federal government has been a financial budget auditor, to a mission that looks out performance on policy analysis. And in 2004 we changed our name. [Indiscernible]

We are more focused today on reviewing agency programs and spending. Effectiveness of policy, and analysis. We still do line item reviews to make sure money is going where should be going. At the GAO we are divided into 12 policy teams. These are different policy areas. It includes everything from national events in defense spending, to healthcare, a lot of healthcare work right now for the very reasons you are thinking. Marketing and trend analysis which is my background and education program oversight. I included some other responsibilities. I am not as involved with these responsibilities. If you have questions I will try to answer them. We do bid protesting in the buildings. We were in the building and we have a little courtroom set up on the first floor. This is an example. If someone has a dispute about the contract bid within the federal government, GAO is the one to adjudicate the contract and/or protest. We also do appointments to some of the healthcare review panels. And we have a website that you can access called fraud and at. It is on the landing page. It is at the bottom half if you are looking. This is a way for federal employees to reach out to us or civilians about any waste fraud and abuse that they see going on with communities and spending. And federal spending. As you can imagine right now with the amount of money going out under the cares act and other relief bills that have been passed over the last couple of months, there is a lot more need for oversight federal spending. We are seeing some calls into FraudNet then we probably would see normally during the year.

Let's start with an overview of how GAO gets its work. GAO works for Congress. We are one of the few legislative agencies. CRS is one. And then GAO. Naturally about 70% of our work comes from congressional request these are sometimes Democrat request, some times the public request. Sometimes bipartisan for example I worked with auditing of the small since administration. We get stuff from the Senate and House typically. Committees does send us or submit request. And FOIA -- GAO takes the request and we take the partisanship out. We form research questions. We can have a fact-based nonpartisan product. We give it back to Congress so both sides can trust the work. And they can value the work. To give an example of some of the more partisan requests. All parties that are of minority whether President is from one party, the other party is always interested in how many trips and how he spends his time traveling. That has been true of Trump and Obama and George W. They care about how many golf trips one golf trip is too much. We are always doing reports on presidential travel. That is the partisan request we get that we package as a nonpartisan product. We have legislative mandates. The most is the cares act. It is something like \$2.2 trillion in spending. For both public health emergency as well as economic emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Built into the legislation that needs to be audited with the federal response. Included with the money goes to every 60 days. We release reports every other month on evaluating the federal response. We had one that came out in September. The findings of that are very interesting but one of the reasons why we have been in the news lately. I hope you will take a look at it when you get a chance. It impacts all of us, even though it is GAO work .

Finally the last, the 10% and the ways we get our work is through comptroller general authority. The Comptroller General is the head of GAO. Right now it is [Indiscernible]. He is the Comptroller General of the U. S.. In an example of some work that he does through his own authority, we were reviewing the 2020 census. As you may have seen in the news there are

some delays. It is hard for them to get a hold of people in person. Because of the coronavirus. They do not want to get sick. We have continued to order beyond what we were asked to do for the 2020 census, to make sure it is on the up and out. We have identified the problems that are occurring.

How are these products released? The main ways through the website. GAO.gov. Reports are available in PDF form. If you are looking at GAO website and you click on any report, I hope this is true for the reporting. If you click on any report there is a number of paths or the report. We have done in iterations of the report at different levels of content. We have our fast stack. 200 words with a picture. It is the bare-bones of what we found in the report. If you toggle over to the highlights tab, this is a more thorough one pager about the report. It includes why we were asked to do the work, and how the work came across the desk whether it was a mandate, a legislative mandate or congressional request or Comptroller General. It includes a methodology which you may be interested in data the data we collect and how we use it. This includes findings and recommendations for agencies to improve their performance. And whether they agree with the recommendations are not which is always fun to now. So that is the main way we share work. We also have an email listserv that you can join if you want to email me. I will share my email address with you. I will add you to the listserv. We have a distribution list. All reports that come out today will be in the daybook tomorrow. You can see what GAO is working at . That is a way to stay informed on the work. It shows testimonies we had before Congress. And the link to the testimonies. It will show you what testimonies we have which is important. And finally we have social media. We are trying to get the word out through social media. I will talk about that. We are on Twitter, Facebook. We are now on Instagram. We talk about what we post. And what to look out for. That is an overview of how we are trying to get the work to the public.

I just want to provide you with some heads. These are some of the reports that were the most downloaded reports in 2024 GAO. Some of these are pretty controversial. We had our most recent cares report in September 21st. This report included far-reaching in the audit of the federal response to COVID-19. Including updates on what is going on with the federal efforts to get a vaccine. It's plans to distribute the vaccine. And there is now her plan. Thank to the GAO audit. An overview of IRS and the treasury know about stimming's checks that were now. Most people receive them in April. But there was concern of the time that in an effort to get these checks quickly to people, there were some accountability lost that expedited effort. There were a number of people who receive checks who were no longer with us. They were deceased. The Comptroller General's mother had died and had received a check. So that is something we will continue to audit. We have a new report coming out on the coronavirus response efforts at the end of November. It may come out sooner. This was a big one from January, via Ukraine security assistance decision. This is where GAO issued a legal decision on the administration withholding up security assistant and weapons for military. Military security assistance. To the Ukraine. We also had a legal decision in August that made headlines about the Department of Homeland Security's appointments. I think his name is Chad Wolf. [Indiscernible] they had been appointed and -- every year we have a big head. It includes an annual report on the nation's fiscal health. It is not great. That debt and deficit level are not great and we will

continue not to be great. We have some historic spending under the coronavirus relief packages. We also do an annual report on government efficiency and internally it is called the DLF duplication report. Basically a report that they do on how the government can save money. The most recent report came out in May of this year. It included 160 actions from the federal government that they can take to improve efficiency and effectiveness. We boasted at the time but more or less that our actions have saved taxpayers about \$430 billion in minimizing costs and increasing revenue. That is an important piece of work. That is a way to monetize recommendations so Congress can see what we are working as an agency. We are holding ourselves accountable as well.

How can you follow GAO ? We talked about GAO.gov . This is a picture of our new website. This new website slated to launch in February of the new year. I want to show you what it will look like. It is the same but a different format from the old website. The homepage has been ordered with the latest and greatest hits. New reports coming out. A search button. It will let you browse by topic. Or if you know the directors names and you want to look up work by them, this product is really good or you need information. You can browse by topic. We have key issue pages. Let me think of a good one. A lot of stuff on K 12. Different subjects under K 12. We have the national flood insurance program. Which is underwater. And that is a good resource to see what is going on financially. Balancing people's access to insurance, so they can live on the coast. Areas that are now high flood areas. Versus protecting the taxpayers money by providing this insurance. Making sure their program is solvent. All that is available on GAO.gov you can browse by topic. You can look at this stuff through your phone. It is formatted for phone. We did have a nap. -- And apt but it was a failure. It was not user-friendly. I do not think you can download how does GAO work differently from CRS? CRS does a lot of its work -- more of research. As the name implies. If you were to do a research project for school, or for your masters degree program, you may not take this subset GAO takes. We do interviews with officials and interacting with them constantly. We see where the progress is. We see what works for the programs and what does not. We do enter is that CRS that does not do interviews. We are also collecting a large amount that and running our own data analysis, what economic regressions. I do not think CRS does that on the regular bird a lot of times CR responding quicker to congressional request for background information on the topic, because it is just updating some of its own existing work. They do a great job. I do not want to undermined at all. They have a lot of value and they can turn and burn stuff much faster than we do. But we are doing this new research on this work. You cannot duplicate what GAO does.

Will the website change affect change the PURLS? I do not know about that one. I can write it down. I can get back to you.

I am seeing a link for Amazon. All reports are free. You can buy reports on Amazon.com. But there is no reason to. It is public access. You can access and download reports on GAO. The ones that I bought a report on is because I wanted to [Indiscernible] on the family's program. It was nicely bound. It had a pretty blue book that GAO used to produce. Save your money because you can get it for free.

No if there is a report existing on the website, the report link will not change. It will migrate over to the new website. Thank you for the question. Nothing will change. There will be some new stuff which I will talk about in our upcoming work. I think you will be excited about it. We talked about the daybook. We are available on RSS feeds. You can download it on your phone. We have social media. We have podcast. And we have video chats. We might start it up again. These are just through Facebook live type video chats. We grab a director in the hall and we ask questions about a report or testimony that they recently did.

Thank you for asking question. It makes me feel like you are listening. Which is great. Here is some of the different social media platforms. Just to give you an idea. GAO is [Indiscernible] we are late adopters to all digital and social media platform. We were not the last to join twitter but we are among them in 2009. Every report that comes out if you do not want to give me your email address, you can join the daybook. Every report that we issue immediately, since the issuer, you have a link to the report the title of the report pops up on Twitter. Some of the additional social media. We have the watchdog report podcast. We are on Facebook and Flickr. Facebook is a good idea to get the blog. If you do not want to go to the black. If you do not see yourself being one of those people who check a blog every Thursday and Tuesday, you can follow us on Facebook. We also put the latest on podcast. You can see what podcast we have. The detail about the podcast. We are on LinkedIn if you want to join us. Mostly the same stuff on Facebook. It is a good resource the watch blog is a very good place to get a less federal speak version of reports. A more condensed, high-level version of reports often times we will do a blog if we have a new report coming out. It will be on the new report and will talk about previous work. And how we are recovering over time. A good example, after George Floyd died we did a series of blogs on racial disparity work. There was one on racial disparity and healthcare and education. Racial disparities in how people are treated when they get loans. Or they apply for a loan of a small business. Or even for their own home. That is all important. Also some racial disparities in the military and VA practices. Rather than having you search for these reports we put them in a blog. It is user-friendly.

So the podcast. As I said in the introduction, I am the GAO podcast host and producer. I have not been the host or producer since 2010. I started leaving the podcast this spring. I have done 50 episode so far. I hope if you enjoy my voice now, maybe you will go out and listen to the podcast. We have over 500 episodes. We do about 50 or 60 per year. Like I said of is one of two episodes away. These are very much unscripted conversations with GAO experts about our new work . These experts are from all over the portfolio. Government contracting which might not appeal to you, we also have one recorded yesterday. I think you would like it. Especially if you are a parent, how K-12 education is held -- handling the coronavirus. And the resource they are given. To make sure kids are learning remotely from home having asked as to the inner. -- Internet. The impact living further away from resources or not able to attend school. It is a good podcast to listen to. These are quick heads. Providing overview of findings and recommendations. We have background on the topics but now you are getting the chance to go behind the scenes, and listen to our experts talk about the reports that they did, and provide examples that may not have been included in the report. It may not have price to the level of a finding.

The podcast comes in two formats. We have the short format that I do more regularly, the five to seven minute regular podcast which covers one of two reports. Then we have this newer format that we do call the deep dig. Longer, podcast. Around 30 minutes. Typically cover a portfolio of work or trending topic. We had one earlier this year, I think it was in May or March. The delays of the 2020 census. And what was going on. And what they were trying to do. And to get over the big hurdle of not being able to contact people in person because of COVID-19. We did artificial intelligence and the role it will play within the federal government. And outside of the federal government and concerns about artificial intelligence. Also some of the pros and benefits that we might see from artificial intelligence. That is a good one to listen to. We had one on Navy shipyards. I am filling out some topic so you can see the diversity of topics that we cover. And the roles they play both economically and making sure we maintain the battlefield superiority.

Thank you. There is actually another one. They used to call it a big fight. And so I deep dig. I do not know the difference. Maybe the name was too cute. How do we make the podcast? None of these people are me. You can see that that is not me we sit down with directors and we talk about reports, we typically report two weeks in France. These are -- two weeks. Usually 10 or 15 minute conversation. We convert down to five or six minutes. We aim for about 5 to 10 episodes per month. Some months we have more last month we had 12 episodes. Last January we had one. So there is some variation. I hope you will check it out.

I provided examples of podcast from September. When I created the slides these were the examples. But I have some new ones. I will tell them to because I hope it will get you excited, I hope you will become listeners or fans. We have done about -- how USA helps farmers impacted by trade attributions and tariffs. We did one in September about how [Indiscernible] that was in the news. Against China and how it might affect local farmers specifically soy and corn products. I recorded a podcast that is coming out early or mid next month. It is about FSA service agencies program. These are checks that go to farmers, not only to incentivize that they continue producing key crops, but also able financially to support the crops. And that we do not lose these critical products that are US-made. Corn, soy also cotton. And to have some cool ones coming up there is one that just came out about data breaches and schools. Public schools and the fun thing about that podcast, most data breaches perpetrated by kids trying to change their grades. The thing I thought it would be cyber hackers. It were kids breaking into school service and trying to fix their grades before mom and dad found out. Another form of data breach were teachers who accidentally sent emails to the wrong parents including kids personal information. I talked a little bit about challenges students facing. We have another one. Federal programs for breast and cervical cancer. The number of screenings provided by the CDC through its program has declined dramatically over the last decade or so. Since 2011. There is some reasons behind it that are not women or those who are skipping screenings. They are not seeking screenings are not qualifying for screenings. The decline has more to do with change to the Medicaid program that people are qualifying for and the affordable care act. Many people may have access to insurance. Those are coming up in November. I hope you will check it out. I do want to also highlight if you cannot stand to read the 200 pages of GAO federal response

that came out in September. There is a podcast. It is pretty good. It is about the federal response to COVID-19. We talk about a large range of topics. It is for the federal response including both addressing the public health crisis that we are in, and also far-reaching economic crisis.

Just to self promote Samara. Here are some numbers on listeners. Overall most of our podcast received about 1000 lessons. I hope you will make it at least 1005. September had 6000 lessons. I expect it has gone up probably significance in the last time I checked. Nearly 200,000 listeners since we started collecting data in 2014. About 90% of glasses are the U. S. English and French-speaking countries. Canada, Haiti and France itself. Our larger group of uses or iPhone uses. We are on Apple podcast it is easy to come with your download. We are also available through RSS feeds. Someone asked this morning why are we are not on Spotify or [Indiscernible]? It has to do with the terms of user agreements. I will look into it to see if we can get some flexibility on it. The federal terms of use for our work. Just to see that we do not want people charging for our work. Want to see if I can have some flexibility.

This is how you can listen. We are available on Apple podcast. You have to look for us. RSS feed. That is how I listen. You can check out the social media post you can see what we are doing. Click onto the link and it takes you to the landing page. And if you are looking at one now you have the podcast drink. -- Link. If you look on the Internet and the right-hand column we have the old website. We are the third item down. That is the most recent podcast. If you want more podcast you can click on the multimedia button on the website, or the podcast button it will take you to more podcast.

This is a duplicate slide. This is how you can listen. So before I go, before I answer all of your questions, I do want to talk about some big stuff that GAO is working on. Some big things that are in the headlines. We already talked about the cares report that is due out in late November. We talked about some of the topics. We are getting more and more data coming in from agencies. And what is going on with the deceased people, people receiving economic relief checks. Whether they know that people who should've received checks received them. Or people gentlemanly should have received the checks. We will know about small business lawns. Whether large businesses qualify. Vaccine development and distribution will be a hot topic in our report. The biggest thing that is coming out. We have an election coming up on November 3rd so because we work for Congress, we provide a lot of resources for the transition. We will have a new Congress regardless of who gets elected. This will be the 117th Congress. Some of our big resources on big issues. Like the coronavirus the economic recession. And then we will have more information available and ongoing issues, national debt is an ongoing issue. Racial disparity. Not anything new. Ongoing issues. We will have researches for Congress, the staff in the public and the media. And they can tap into it. And finally for other resources, we have a list of experts. If you go on a website and you search for experts. If you or your GPO want to have a conversation about housing related issues, it will show you our top housing expert. He will speak to you about housing topics. I know there is an interest in the type of data GAO collects and use. You go to those experts and asked. We saw you do this announcement will reverse

mortgage foreclosure. How do I get a hold of that data so I can share it? Or adapted for my own use. That is all available.

With that, actually I lied. We have been on the news. I cannot talk about this too much. I do not know a lot about it. GAO was recently in the news because we have been asked to investigate political interference at the CDC and the FDA. And whether political interference played a role in any of the guidance that the CDC or FDA provided to the public. Provided when it comes to vaccine development. And other federal agencies. I believe that the job is just a picking golf. It will not be staffed into the new year or after the election. Importantly so that we are not interfering as a nonpartisan agency. We are not interfering in any way the election. It is something in the news. Something of an interest. Keep an eye on it. I think it will be a good one. With that I just want to make sure I caught everything.

Hello, I have been keeping track of the questions. We have a question from Barbara what if money was not spent in the way intended, what happens next with respect to that issue?

We always issue recommendations. It would be like a recommendation -- it is up to the agencies to collect money. GAO is not going to knock door to door to get checks from deceased people. But we make recommendations. It is an Harrison for the agency. There is often a hearing. The agency will say we do not know. And GAO will say this is why you did not know the recommendations. That is happening when the money does not get spent. If it is accidental with the wrong people, we make sure we are good students of public resources and taxpayer money. If it is fraud, GAO has done undercover investigations. I cannot think of the name that involves stealing money. But I am sure people are stealing money. They do some investigations about how lenders or how for-profit colleges were talking to veterans about the benefits that they would see. And how financing will work for a loan. More for their degree. They become a target because they have access like the G.I. Bill. They do underground investigation. And then there was criminal action. Usually that is turned over to the Justice Department. I hope that answers your question.

Thank you. Bert would like you to tell about the high risk series of reports which will come out next spring.

We have a high risk list this will be a part of the resource that come to Congress they are interested. We deem some things high risk. So for a while the heart was high risk. We had a meeting with a came off the high risk list and everybody clapped and there is a number of factors that go into why someone would be on the high risk we have a nice description on the website. There are some things that are forever high risk. National debt is forever high risk. The more we owe other countries or whatever the more we are beholding to him. Our financial stability is important. Typically those things have lot of recommendations tied to them. And opened recommendations tied to them that have been closed. So those are the things that fall under high risk list. I look at the high risk list webpage. It is broken down. Has a nice description. It is an important part of our work. We hold hearings on every year. We talk about why somebody is on. Why someone is on the list, it is not necessarily a naughty list not any fault of

their own but the situation that they are in. That is a great question. I see the new series about science and tech spotlight. We do have a new series. We have a new policy team. They focus on science technology and analytics. That team is creating one pages or two pages. They provide overviews. The ones that I have seen mostly technology-based. An overview of how 5G technology works in the key policy issues surrounding it. It has some beautiful graphics that you can steal. GAO is not copywritten and available to the public. Everything from how heard immunity is working and how it is controversial and an option at this point. We have stuff on how vaccine development takes. Normal vaccine development takes about 10 years. I want the federal government might be doing to expedite vaccine development. I have seen some with artificial intelligence. We did one a while ago. There is a new blog out this week [Indiscernible] it is a technology that uses rigorous datasets a lot of pictures. It makes mostly video appear manipulated video appear like the real person. This is good cause. I will give you an example. The good cause is that [Indiscernible]. And so they use that technology to bring her to life in the last movie. They use it to show Carrie Fisher as a younger woman. She was at the end of World War I. We see her as a young woman. Also used for some very bad reasons. It has been used to put words in Nancy Pelosi's mouth and looks like she's saying something she's not. PP and settings that they are not. There was a lot of negative things to that technology. Everyone is looking out for them. As a part of the election there is a lot of concern that it will be used under the election. There are corporations that are coming out with software to detect. So that is all and some spotlights with some topics they are very popular quick turnarounds among the congressional requesters. Some of them are older. They may need a quick hit on what technology is and what they should know and some of the policy issues surrounding it.

We have a question from Elizabeth did you have a section for interactive graphics? She does not see it anymore.

We still do interactive graphics. If you search for interactive graphics. It might come up as a keyword. I do not see it. I am sure it will be on the new website. I do not remember us having one. I probably was not looking for it. But if you search for interactive graphics you should find it. We have a nice interactive graphic. I will add it to the blog. It will have its own entry. It will be tagged as into graphic -- interactive graphic. We had a recent graphic way you can see areas that had higher persistent poverty levels. And where they are, and what the communities have in common. And try to help communities develop.

Thank you for the comment. Any other questions? I see one about high risk list. I'm sure there are some individuals that are high risk. We do not target individuals. It is just agencies. We can talk agencies. Not target, that is a mean word. I told you HUD was on the list. It came off a couple of years ago. I am trying to think of another one. I cannot think of one. Maybe ice. I'm not sure. The areas are typically -- [Indiscernible] rather than the agency.

We have about 15 minutes. If anybody wants to send a question into the chat. We will wait a few minutes for you and while you are typing I will give you my email address.

If you want to sign up for the daybook. Or if you have questions that you do not want to ask try to answer them. The daybook again is the list that comes out every day includes yesterday's reports and testimonies. That is a good thing to look at. Or to consider . If you do not want to sign up for another Lister, you can also check out twitter. We have all of our new reports.

Are there any plans to get old reports digitized?

We have reports and I have seen them as early as the 1970s. They are on the website. They have all been digitized or scanned. GAO is turning 100 this year. Which I think GPO is well older. And as a part of our effort we are going to be looking at some of these archives and sharing them with you. And how we changed over time. And how we have not changed over time. We talked about a group of nerds that are accountants, now we are auditors. Among the things that have remained consistent, after the great depression GAO heavily involved in auditing. After the great recession in 2009 and 2011, heavily involved in auditing, toxic asset relief program. Now heavily involved in this new coronavirus release response.

Thank you for adding GAO podcast . That is so great. Is a deep dig a separate podcast? No. It is in the same podcast with the description. It will be labeled as deep dig. I do not have any plans for one coming up. We do not do them that often. If we do you will have access to and you will see.

Has GAO taken a look at GPO?

I am not aware. I do not think we order our sister agencies. I do not think so. I did not. [Laughter] I do not audit GPL. I do not think we have ever audited CRS. Oh what is the other publishing -- the patent office might be under legislative. We have audited the patent office because they got in trouble a long time ago. It had to do with teleworking and having issues with people teleworking and not actually working. I think they were contractors but not actual federal employees. That is a good question. I hope we only say good thing since I have been here. That is a good question. We have taken a look at everyone. Thank you.

We have comments, suggestions and links in the chat box. Any more questions? Thank you for listening. This late in the day. I did try to keep it short. I am a fast talker. I know right about 3:30 we take it to I am excited that somebody showed up and he brought really good questions. And we were able to share information about GAO. I hope you will add us to your research routine, or your searches. Look for us on the news. We sometimes end up in the news for good things. Thank you so much for listening.

Thank you Holly for an awesome program. And or the audience participation. Up next we have teleworking assistance, what on earth can day do from home? The next program will be USA.gov supports the federal COVID-19 response. If you want to join that program. Close out of this one first. And then the URL was posted earlier. I will post it again. To enter the other meeting room. For now we will take a short break. We will pick up again at 4:45 Eastern. May the force be with you.