

United States General Accounting Office

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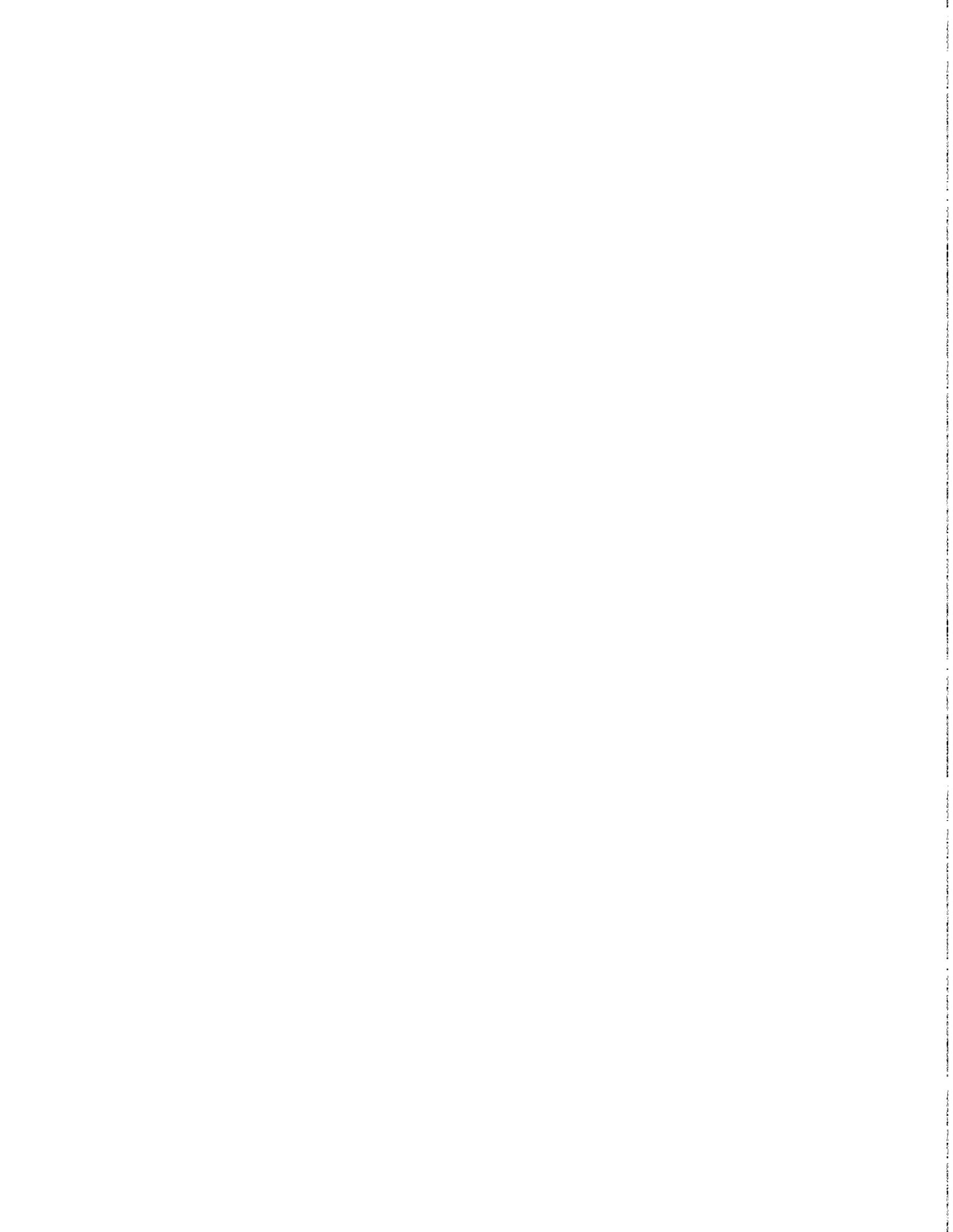
GAO

GS-13/14 Management and Policy
Advisory Council

May 1987

SP 203

**GS-13/14
Council 1986
Annual Report**



FOREWORD

This report summarizes the activities and accomplishments of the GS-13/14 Management and Policy Advisory Council for the period January through December 1986. The report is divided into three sections: (1) a background section on the objectives and makeup of the Council, (2) a section on the major issues addressed by the Council, and (3) a section on those activities undertaken in response to requests for Council input. In addition, appendix I is the Council charter, appendix II lists the representatives on the 1986 Council, and appendixes III through V provide additional details on some issues discussed in the body of the report.

The 1986 Council took office in the aftermath of an intensive effort by management and Council representatives during 1984 and 1985 to resolve a number of issues of deep mutual concern. A considerable amount of energy was expended on this effort, and one of the prime objectives of the 1986 Council was to continue the commitment to resolve these issues. Reflecting this commitment, the 1986 Council adopted the theme of "Communication and Constructive Involvement." In a February 1986 memorandum to the heads of divisions and offices, the Council stated:

"Already 1986 has presented GAO with many significant challenges and we, as mid-level managers, want to have a constructive role in meeting the challenges."

During the year, the Council sensed an increasing willingness on the part of top management to share information and seek staff involvement. The Council sees this as a positive step and hopes the trend continues. However, there is still room for improvement. The charge that this Council leaves for future councils is to continue to work for a constructive role in making GAO a better place to work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background.....3

Issues addressed by study groups.....4

 GS-13/14 roles.....4

 Gramm-Rudman-Hollings.....6

 Employee work environment.....7

 Health and life insurance.....7

 Asbestos removal.....8

 Office space renovation.....9

Other Council activities.....10

 Employee drug testing.....10

 Personnel Appeals Board.....11

 Employee placement program.....11

 Child care center.....11

 GAO fitness facility.....11

 International Fellowship Program.....12

Appendix I: GS-13/14 Council charter.....13

Appendix II: List of Council representatives.....17

Appendix III: Comments on draft RIF regulations.....18

Appendix IV: Questions on asbestos removal.....20

Appendix V: Memorandum on drug testing.....21

BACKGROUND

The GS-13/14 Management and Policy Advisory Council was established in June 1980. The goals of the Council as stated in the charter (see app. I) are

- to seek and represent to management the views and concerns of GAO's GS-13s and GS-14s and

- to participate in the management process of proposing, debating, and implementing GAO policies and procedures.

The Council is made up of 29 elected representatives (see app. II)--2 from each of the 4 operating divisions and 1 from each of the 15 regional offices, the 3 technical divisions, the Office of the General Counsel, the Office of the Assistant Comptroller General (ACG) for Human Resources, and the combined offices of the Assistant Comptrollers General for Operations and for Planning and Reporting. It is headed by a Steering Committee consisting of the Chair, the Vice-chair, and the Secretary. In 1986, the steering committee also included a study group coordinator.

ISSUES ADDRESSED BY STUDY GROUPS

The Council's 1986 agenda was developed from an informal survey of constituent and management interests that Council representatives then prioritized and categorized into three broad areas:

- the roles of GS-13s and 14s,
- the impact of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings legislation on Office activities, and
- the employee work environment.

To address these areas and to be responsive to requests for Council input, the 1986 Council established three study groups. Each representative, except those elected to the steering committee, was assigned to a study group. Following is a summary of each group's efforts during the year.

GS-13/14 ROLES

A study of GS-13/14 roles was undertaken because Council representatives felt that the titles assigned to GS-13s and 14s were not always consistent with actual roles and duties. Representatives believed that the inconsistencies caused confusion among staff and negatively affected career advancement. It was recognized that this subject had been studied by the GS-13/14 Management Study Group in 1984 and that several operating groups had conducted their own studies. Therefore, the study group set out to gather information on past studies, the status of actions taken to address past study findings, and current roles of GS-13s and 14s.

The study group found that while the roles of GS-13s and 14s had been much debated and studied among headquarters and regional offices, there is little agreement that a problem exists and, if so, what action is appropriate.

One area of inconsistency noted by the study group related to assigning titles. The group found that while the definitions for titles such as evaluator-in-charge (EIC), regional assignment manager (RAM), and regional management representative (RMR) are generally consistent throughout GAO, the assignment of the titles is not. For example, certain regional offices reserve the RAM role for GS-14s, while other regions assign RAM roles to GS-12s and 13s.

The study group also found that assigned titles may not reflect actual duties. For example, some GS-13s and 14s may serve concurrently as RAMs or EICs on several assignments, while others may have only one RAM or EIC assignment. As a result, those with multiple assignments devote less time to individual assignments than those with single assignments, even though the responsibilities of the title remain the same. Differences in duties may also arise when some GS-13 EICs report through a GS-14 RMR (or division assignment manager) while others report directly to a group director.

The Council made no recommendations as a result of its study because it was not clear that the inconsistencies between titles and duties materially affected the quality of our work or had a measurable effect on career advancement. The Council recognizes the need for management to have the flexibility to assign staff according to the needs of particular assignments. However, because of the recurring nature of this issue, the Council questions the utility of titles that appear to generate as much confusion as serve a useful purpose.

GRAMM-RUDMAN-HOLLINGS

During the Council's April 1986 meeting, GAO senior management briefed Council representatives on the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings legislation and on the measures planned by GAO in fiscal year 1986 to respond to the act's budget reduction requirements. Because of the high level of staff interest in this area, the Council formed a study group to monitor the effect of the legislation on GAO's operations and provide constituent perspectives on the planned actions. The Council was particularly concerned about possible furloughs and what actions GAO could take to avoid them. The group also wanted to stay informed about the status of reduction-in-force (RIF) planning and monitor the status of proposed early retirement legislation.

The study group met periodically with staff members representing the ACG for Operations and the ACG for Human Resources. In addition, the group obtained documents on GAO's proposed actions and provided management with constituent perspectives on budget priorities.

On the basis of the study group's work, the Council provided comments to Personnel on its draft RIF regulations. (See app. III.) The group also attended Personnel's briefing on RIF planning and viewed the RIF videotape. The group then monitored the status of RIF planning and provided information on it to other Council members.

Through discussions with the staff studying early retirement options, the study group tracked the progress of proposed legislation until it was tabled by the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee in July 1986.

The study group held periodic discussions with management that enabled the group to understand and comment informally on

management's budgetary planning. Fortunately, GAO was not forced to furlough staff or initiate a RIF in fiscal year 1986. Had such extreme measures been necessary to meet budget cuts, however, the study group was in a position to be involved in all phases of them.

EMPLOYEE WORK ENVIRONMENT

A study group was also established to study the diverse issues that make up the daily work environment of GAO employees. During 1986, the group focused on employee health and life insurance, asbestos removal, and office space renovation.

Health and life insurance

In past years, the GS-13/14 Council and the Career Level Council encouraged management to consider establishing a separate health and life insurance benefits program for GAO employees. The 1986 Council reviewed Personnel's study proposing that GAO seek legislative authority to establish its own health and life insurance benefits program. The proposal was based on the finding that significant cost savings for employees and GAO would be realized if the Office negotiated its own program. The study also showed that employees could expect benefits equal to or better than those offered under the current Federal Employee Health Benefits Program.

In a July 9, 1986, memorandum to the Comptroller General, the GS-13/14 Council and the Career Level Council jointly endorsed the proposal. Since that time, the required legislative language has been drafted, and a decision by the Comptroller General as to the appropriate time to seek such legislation is pending.

Asbestos removal

The group was concerned about the health and safety implications of GSA's and GAO's efforts to remove asbestos from the headquarters building and to monitor asbestos exposure in regional offices. The group met with staff members of the Office of the General Counsel to review and discuss documentation on asbestos removal. After the meeting, a list of questions was submitted to the Office of the General Counsel and was subsequently forwarded to the ACG for Operations and the Office of Security and Safety. (See app. IV.) Many of the questions were subsequently addressed in staff memorandums and Management News articles.

Members of the study group and the steering committee were periodically briefed by staff members from the Office of the ACG for Operations about the asbestos situation. Several briefings were held in June concerning apparently high asbestos levels detected in the GAO building at that time. As a precaution, the GAO building was closed for part of a day because of the high levels. During the briefings, participants discussed the methods used to monitor the asbestos levels, the significance of the levels, management actions in response to the situation, the most effective ways to communicate relevant information to employees, and comparisons of the situation at GAO headquarters with those at other GSA facilities containing asbestos.

A Council member met with representatives of several other GAO employee groups to discuss a joint recommendation to the Comptroller General regarding employee concerns. Before any action by that group, however, the Comptroller General established an advisory panel. The panel will act as a liaison between the various employee councils and management to provide information on employee concerns and recommend improvements in

communication and education efforts. A member of the study group represents the 13/14 Council on the employee advisory panel.

Office space renovation

The study group also addressed management's plan to renovate and upgrade office space throughout GAO. Because of how a new configuration might affect employee morale and productivity, the Council requested an opportunity in April 1986 to provide its views on the plan as it was being developed.

The study group met with staff from General Services and Controller (GS&C) in June to discuss the progress made in planning for space renovation and to establish a procedure for expressing the Council's views and concerns. A follow-up memorandum was sent to GS&C in October that reiterated the Council's interest in the project and suggested how the Council might work with GS&C to make office renovation a coordinated management and staff project. In November, the Director of GS&C responded that the Council would be asked to participate in the renovation project after management made some basic design decisions.

During a November meeting with GS&C staff, Council representatives expressed the opinion that employee involvement could never be too early. It was noted that a successfully designed work space would not only meet technical needs but also have the support of those who had to work in the space. The chances of achieving that support would be enhanced through user involvement in the decision process. Subsequently, on December 21, the Director of GS&C requested that the Council provide him with a list of facility requirements that, in the Council's opinion, would be necessary for the professional staff to do their jobs.

In responding to this request, the Council plans to send a questionnaire to staffs from the Boston Regional Office and the Accounting and Financial Management Division who are moving into redesigned office space. The questionnaire will solicit staff views on the adequacy of their work space before and after the moves.

OTHER COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

During the year, the Council was called upon by management and other GAO groups to provide representatives to study groups and/or to comment on proposals or plans. The more significant of these activities are briefly described below.

EMPLOYEE DRUG TESTING

Employee drug testing received much attention in 1986. On September 15, the President ordered the executive branch to set up mandatory tests for federal workers in sensitive jobs.

Anticipating that management might be faced with some tough decisions regarding drug testing in GAO, five employee groups, including the GS-13/14 Council, sent a memorandum to the Comptroller General on October 3. (See app. V.) Without taking a position on the merits of a drug-testing program, the groups requested that management seek active and early participation from employee groups if GAO decided to study the need for drug testing.

On November 4, the Comptroller General announced the establishment of a committee of senior staff to review GAO's approach to helping employees with all types of drug and alcohol problems. The committee, organized by the ACG for Human Resources, will address the broader issues before considering

whether GAO should have a drug-testing program and, if so, how it should be structured. To assist the committee, the Comptroller General also called for establishment of an advisory group representing all segments of GAO staff.

PERSONNEL APPEALS BOARD

A Council representative served as a member of the selection panel to screen applicants for GAO's Personnel Appeals Board. The panel members reviewed the resumes of over 40 individuals and selected several for follow-up interviews. Two interviewees were selected and later appointed to serve as Board members, and another was selected as an alternate.

EMPLOYEE PLACEMENT PROGRAM

GAO's proposed reduction-in-force plan provided the impetus to consider expanding and improving the Office's employee outplacement program. Among other things, such a program would assist employees affected by any RIF. The Office of Organization and Human Development (OOHD) was responsible for designing the program, and the Council was requested to provide a point of contact for the OOHD staff member in charge of that assignment. Several discussions were held concerning the proposed program and the most effective means of communicating it to the rest of the Office. However, when the threat of a RIF was eliminated, the impetus behind the outplacement program was reduced. Late in 1986, OOHD staff told the Council that work on the program did not have a high priority.

CHILD CARE CENTER

The Council endorsed a proposal initiated by the GAO Child Care Development Board to establish and operate a child care center for children of GAO employees working in Washington, D.C.

GAO FITNESS FACILITY

Council representatives reviewed the draft report of a study group formed to consider the establishment of a fitness facility in the GAO building. A Council representative attended a meeting of division, office, and employee group representatives to discuss the proposal and obtain comments on the study group's report. The proposal was endorsed by those attending the meeting, and the study group is continuing its efforts.

INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Each summer, GAO hosts about 10 to 15 auditors selected by their governments to undergo an intensive 3-month course of study at GAO. As part of the curriculum, a Council representative spoke to the auditors concerning Council objectives and its current and proposed projects. The representative also discussed the roles and responsibilities of GS-13s and 14s in the regional offices and headquarters and held a question-and-answer session with the auditors.

U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
GS-13/14 MANAGEMENT AND POLICY ADVISORY Council CHARTER

I. BACKGROUND

During the late 1970's the General Accounting Office instituted several fundamental changes in its operating policies and procedures which heavily impacted those in grades GS-13 and GS-14. This group had very little voice in developing and implementing the changes, and unlike other grade groups, lacked a forum for expressing their views and concerns to the management.

With the support of top management, a survey of the GS-13's and GS-14's was taken in November 1979. The survey showed that a forum for this group, which would actively participate in the GAO's policy development and implementation process, was needed and desired by the majority of the staff who responded to the survey questionnaire. The Comptroller General agreed, and as a result, an organizing conference with representatives from GAO's various divisions, offices, and regions was held in June 1980, and the GS-13/14 Management and Policy Advisory Council was established.

II. OBJECTIVES

The Council is established to provide a means for the GS-13's and GS-14's to participate, through their elected representatives, in management and policy-making decisions of the GAO. The Council will address not only policy and procedural matters, but also other substantive issues, including the technical aspects of our work. To meet these goals and to assist in efforts to improve GAO's operations and enhance the work environment, the Council will actively;

- seek and represent to management the views and concerns of GAO's GS-13's and GS-14's, and
- participate in the management process of proposing, debating, and implementing GAO policies and procedures.

III. THE COUNCIL ORGANIZATION

A. Representation

1. Representatives shall be elected from each of the regional offices, the headquarters divisions, the Office of General Counsel, and the offices reporting to each Assistant Comptroller General.
2. All representatives must be a GS-13 or GS-14 to serve on the council. GS-13 representatives and alternates shall be allowed to complete their term even though promoted to GS-14 during the term.
3. The representatives should be selected such that the regions and headquarters units are represented about equally by GS-13's and GS-14's.

B. Term of Office

1. The normal term of office shall be 24 months with half the Council elected each 12 months.
2. If the representative is no longer eligible or able to serve on the Council, the alternate will serve the remainder of the term.

C. Election Procedure

1. Representative(s) will be elected by a combined vote of the GS-13 and GS-14's in that unit.
2. Units with two representatives will have one at GS-13 and one at GS-14. Units with one representative will alternate every 2 years between grade GS-13 and GS-14, unless the unit can only be represented by one grade level.
3. In addition to the representative, each unit will also elect an alternate at the same grade level.

D. Duties and Responsibilities

Each representative is responsible for keeping abreast of the issues and concerns of his or her constituency and serving on the Council except in extreme emergency. The alternate will assist the representative in dealing with issues and concerns of the unit but should only participate in the Council in the absence of the representative.

E. Meetings

The Council will meet no less than two times a year, and more often if called by the Chair or requested by the Management Committee. Generally, the meetings will be limited to three days.

F. Council Reporting

Following each Council meeting, the Secretary will distribute summarized written minutes to each representative for their approval.

G. Management Committee

The Comptroller General will be represented by a Management Committee. The Management Committee members will make themselves available for Steering Committee meeting and Council meetings.

IV. THE STEERING COMMITTEE

A. Composition

The Steering Committee will consist of three (3) members elected by the Council. The Steering Committee membership will be comprised of the Council Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary.

B. General Duties and Responsibilities

The primary responsibilities include implementing council decisions and carrying out administrative functions. The Steering Committee shall serve as the Council liaison

with GAO management and shall coordinate Council activities.

C. Duties and Responsibilities of the Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary

The Chair will have overall responsibility for the Council activities and will preside at Council and Steering Committee meetings. The Vice-Chair will act in the absence of the Chair. The Secretary will record the minutes of Council and Steering Committee meetings.

D. Term of Office

The Steering Committee members will serve one (1) year.

E. Meetings

The Steering Committee will meet when called by the Chair or requested by the Management Committee.

F. Meetings with the Comptroller General

The Steering committee will offer to meet periodically with the Comptroller General to discuss the work of the Council.

V. CHARTER AMENDMENTS

Amendment of this charter will be a two-thirds vote of all Council representatives with the concurrence of the Comptroller General.

GS-13/14 Management
and Policy Advisory Council

List of Representatives - 1986

- Chairman - Bob Lidman (Cincinnati)
- Vice-Chairman - Joe Jozefczyk (GGD)
- Secretary - Fritz Mulhauser (PEMD)
- Study Group Coordinator - Carl Mays (Atlanta)

* * * * *

- Lynn Ernst - ACG/HR
- Mary Quinlan - ACG/OP-P&R
- David Grindstaff - AFMD
- Benny McKee - GGD
- Sam Deramo - HRD
- Tom Smith - HRD
- Scott Chamberlin - IMTEC
- Carl Amman - NSIAD
- Sherlie Svestka - NSIAD
- Joyce Maguire - OGC
- Walt Hess - RCED
- Posey McCarthy - RCED

- Tom Harvey - Boston
- Clem Preiwisch - Chicago
- Tom Ward - Dallas
- Bill Temmler - Denver
- Bob Coughenour - Detroit
- Don McDade - Kansas City
- Noel Lance - Los Angeles
- Rudy Plessing - New York
- Ed Soniat - Norfolk
- Richard Halter - Philadelphia
- Don Miller - San Francisco
- Bob Higgins - Seattle
- Tony Salvemini - Washington

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

Memorandum

MAY 16 1986

TO : Policy and Executive Personnel Branch, Personnel -
Mark E. Colville

FROM : Chairman, GS-13/14 Management and Policy Advisory
Council - Robert I. Lidman *Bob Lidman*

SUBJECT: Council Comments on Draft GAO Order 2351.1,
Reduction-in-Force

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft GAO order 2351.1. While a reduction in force (RIF) is not the most pleasant of circumstances for an organization to consider, the Council recognizes that budget reductions required by the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings process may force GAO to initiate a RIF. Given that possibility, the Council supports efforts to develop an orderly framework of policy and related contingency plans.

The draft GAO order generally follows the Office of Personnel Management's RIF regulations for the executive branch as prescribed in 5 CFR 351. Our major concern with the draft order is that unlike 5 CFR 351, performance is not considered when placing individuals on a retention register (chapter 3, paragraph 2). Whatever the short-term technical or logistical constraints that make it difficult to include performance as a factor in retention, we believe that a policy which bases retention primarily on longevity could send a disquieting message to our more productive staff members. The omission of a performance factor contrasts with GAO's efforts over the last few years to develop sophisticated appraisal methods and to link them to important personnel actions such as promotions, awards, and pay-for-performance. If performance is to be used to determine which staff members the agency most wants to reward, the same should be true when separation is the issue.

We would support an effort to incorporate performance in the order should a RIF become necessary after FY 87. We believe such a change should go hand in hand with continued refinement of the performance appraisal process so that GAO can be assured of a valid and reliable measure of performance. In the meantime, the Council and heads of divisions and offices have heard the reasons performance considerations will not be included in the order covering potential FY 87 RIFs. Given the importance of this issue, we believe those reasons should be communicated more directly, and in more detail, to all staff members.

In reviewing the draft order, Council representatives raised other questions that might not need to be addressed in the order but that perhaps deserve some sort of management response. For example:

- The staff recognizes that management's choice of competitive areas and levels is critical. What criteria will management use in defining competitive areas and levels? Also, when will these choices be made and communicated with the staff?
- Office of Personnel staff members have assured us that GAO will have written policies concerning severance pay, grade-saving, pay-saving, reemployment rights, and related matters. Since these policies are not included in the draft RIF order, when will they be communicated to the staff?
- In a recent report (PEMD-85-6), GAO concluded that RIFs can cost more than they save. Our report strongly urged consideration of alternatives to a RIF and the use of data in thoroughly assessing comparative costs and benefits. To what extent has management applied the report recommendations? Will the results of any analyses be shared with GAO staff?

Because we believe that many GAO staff have similar questions, we suggest that management consider addressing the questions in a Management News article. A similar approach was used effectively in the February 4, 1986, Management News regarding other Gramm-Rudman-Hollings questions.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft GAO order. For further information on the Council's views, please contact me (FTS 684-2105) or Joe Jozefczyk (376-0023).

cc: Mr. Fee (ACG-OPS)
Mr. Ahart (ACG-HR)

QUESTIONS ON ASBESTOS REMOVAL

The 13/14 Level Advisory Council is interested in getting information regarding the problem of asbestos at GAO, and if possible, sharing that information with our constituents. General questions regarding the information we seek are set forth below.

1. What control/responsibility does GAO have regarding asbestos testing and removal (at headquarters, audit sites and in the regions).
2. What is GAO's Asbestos Abatement and Control Program?
 - a. What is the overall plan?
 - b. What is currently being done?
 - c. What is projected time frame?
 - d. Re: Maccaroni, Roberts memos, What are current levels, how are employee fears being addressed/dealt with?
3. What are the procedures being used and precautions currently being used?
 - a. What standards are being used?
 - b. Are there plans for monitoring employee health, etc?
4. What is being done with regard to the regional offices and audit sites?
 - a. Have they been tested?
 - b. If so, which regions and sites?
 - c. Is there a general plan with regard to the regions and sites?
 - d. If not, when will they be dealt with?
 - e. What will be done to protect regional employees?
5. What effect will Gramm-Rudman have on the removal and testing of asbestos?
6. What effect will the office design project have with regard to asbestos removal?
 - a. ie, will renovation be delayed until after asbestos has been removed?
7. Will more information be available to employees?
8. What role can the council play in keeping employees informed?



United States
General Accounting Office

Memorandum

Date: October 3, 1986
To: Comptroller General
From: See below

Subject: Request for Employee Group Participation in the
Development of Any GAO Drug Testing Program

Drug testing for employees is an issue receiving increasing attention throughout the nation. Many employers are requesting that their employees submit to tests designed to detect illegal drug use. At the same time, questions are being raised regarding the legal and civil rights issues surrounding voluntary and mandatory drug testing programs.

Implementation of government-wide drug testing for federal employees appears imminent. On September 15, President Reagan unveiled his plan to attack drug abuse in America and ordered the Executive Branch to set up mandatory tests for federal workers in sensitive jobs.

We believe that setting up any drug testing program should include much interaction between management and employees. Therefore, if GAO decides to study the need for an employee drug testing program, we request that management seek active and early participation by representatives of the signatory organizations.

At this time, none of these employee groups is taking a position on the merits of a drug testing program. However, should a program be formally proposed, each group could be expected to express its views at that time.

We recognize the importance and significance of the drug testing issue and all of us are willing to help GAO come to grips with it.

Frank M. Lewis for
Chair, Advisory Council on Civil Rights

Joseph E. Jozefzyk For
Chair, GS-13/14 Management and Policy
Advisory Council

Joni Justice for
President, Blacks in Government

Patricia L. Martin for
Chair, Career Level Council

Christine M. Kopocin
President, Women's Advisory Council

cc: ACG for Operations
ACG for Human Resources
Judy England-Joseph, ACG-Ops
Chair, Advisory Council on Civil Rights
Chair, GS-13/14 Council
President, Blacks in Government
Chair, CLC
President, WAC

