

GAO

# Management News

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## **Chuck Bowsher Leaves Lasting Legacy**



**Charles A. Bowsher**  
6<sup>th</sup> Comptroller General of the United States  
May 30, 1931 – September 30, 2022

TO: All GAO Employees

FROM: The Comptroller General

October 13, 2022

It is with great sadness and respect that I write to let you know of the passing of Charles A. Bowsher (Chuck) who served as the 6th Comptroller General of the United States and head of GAO from 1981 to 1996. Chuck passed away on September 30th surrounded by family in his home in Bethesda, Md. He had a notable career of distinguished service to our institution as well as at DOD and various private sector organizations. It was an honor to be able to serve during his entire tenure. I observed first hand his dedication in successfully building upon the progress GAO had made under the leadership of his predecessor, Elmer B. Staats.

Mr. Bowsher was born in Elkhart, Indiana on May 30, 1931. He graduated from the University of Illinois in 1953 before honorably serving in the U.S. Army. It was while serving his post at Camp Kilmer in New Jersey that he developed a keen interest in government operations. After completing his service, Mr. Bowsher earned a master's degree in Business Administration from the University of Chicago. He promptly joined the Arthur Anderson public accounting firm where he worked on audit engagements and provided consulting services to clients throughout the United States.

Shortly after making partner at Arthur Anderson in 1967, Mr. Bowsher, by now a well-known and respected name in the field of accounting and financial management, was pursued by the Department of Defense for the position of Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Financial Management. He served this post from 1967-1971 under President Johnson and President Nixon before returning to Arthur Anderson to head their newly established government practice in Washington, DC.



With 30 years of exemplary service in auditing and financial management and the unique perspective of having both public and private sector experience, Mr. Bowsher was a prime candidate for Comptroller General of the United States. He was appointed by President Ronald Reagan and unanimously confirmed by the Senate on September 29, 1981. In his nomination speech, President Reagan announced, "Bowsher is uniquely qualified for this position...he has the expertise of an insider with the perspective of an outsider. He will need these qualities in great abundance."

Upon taking the oath of office, Mr. Bowsher utilized what he had learned from his past experiences to build upon the legacy of his predecessors and broaden the value of GAO to both Congress and the American people. He was a firm believer in encouraging a more cohesive, coordinated environment and accomplished that by listening to his directors and leveraging the expertise of GAO's highly-skilled employees. He expanded GAO's product line to move beyond narrowly defined audits to carrying out management reviews. He believed GAO should not just be a reporter of events, but should seek to ensure that its work resulted in more efficient government operations. Mr. Bowsher's efforts to expand GAO's portfolio and grow relationships with Congressional committees led to an immediate increase in interest in our work and a significant increase in Congressional requests.



In a message to Congress, Mr. Bowsher declared,

“GAO intends to continue meeting the needs of Congress with work that is objective and independently derived; accurate, timely and meaningful; and presented in a way that is most useful to responsible officials. Wherever our services are required, GAO takes seriously its mission to seek honest, efficient management and full accountability throughout government.”

As Comptroller General, Mr. Bowsher lived up to those words. Under his leadership, GAO played a significant role in advising Congress on some of the nation's most important issues such as the savings and loan banking crisis and the federal budget deficit and efforts to “reinvent the government.” At his direction, GAO developed our signature “High Risk” report, bringing attention for the first time to areas of the government most vulnerable to fraud, waste, and abuse, or mismanagement.



During Mr. Bowsher's tenure, he aimed to strengthen GAO's internal environment by creating offices and Assistant Comptroller General positions to improve collaboration, communication, and the planning and execution of GAO's work. During his internal reorganization and restructuring, Mr. Bowsher also recognized the need to diversify GAO's workforce and led the charge to transform the SES nomination system from seniority-based to merit-based, where it remains today.

*Comptroller General Chuck Bowsher meets with General Counsel Interns*

When asked how he would like his time as Comptroller General to be remembered, Mr. Bowsher replied,

“I would like to be remembered that we evolved and modernized, and I think when Elmer was there, GAO was already the top national auditing organization in the world. Some improved by watching us, but I think without question, we were the number one when I left. I think we helped a lot.”

I will personally remember Chuck Bowsher to be a strong, honest, dedicated leader who led efforts to modernize and grow GAO into the well-respected, non-partisan, professional organization that is today. I hope to continue his legacy with all of you as we honor his distinguished record and his life of service.



*Comptroller General Chuck Bowsher signs his last report. September 1996.*

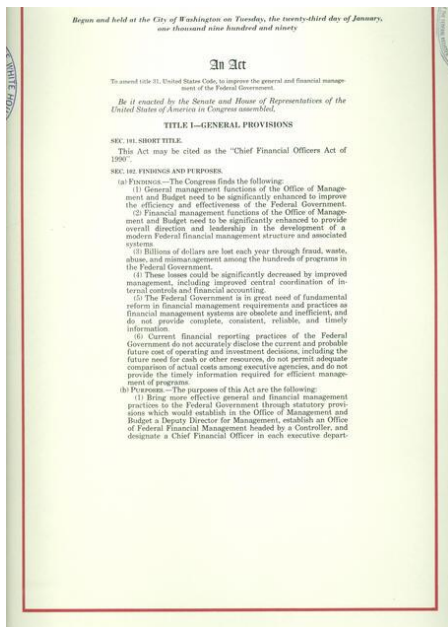
[Mr. Bowsher's obituary](#) may be seen in the *The Washington Post*.

Interview with Chuck Bowsher, Comptroller General of the United States, 1981-1996



Mr. Bowsher was interviewed in 2021 as a part of GAO's 100 year Anniversary celebration. It may be seen here:

[U.S. GAO - Interview with Chuck Bowsher, Comptroller General of the United States, 1981-1996](#)



One thing Chuck Bowsher was especially proud of was his work improving financial management in the federal government. “He displayed outstanding leadership in GAO’s work on the 1980’s savings and loan and banking crisis. Additionally, his persistent efforts to achieve the 1990 Chief Financial Officers Act and the 1994 Government Management Reform led to great improvements in the federal government’s financial management. This legislation continues to lead to positive results even today, and will stand as an enduring testament to his vision,” said Comptroller General Gene Dodaro.

**Comptroller General Dodaro** recently testified on all the positive accomplishments of the CFO Act in the 30 years since it was passed. GAO’s testimony on the 30-year results of the CFO Act may be found here:

[Federal Financial Management: Substantial Progress Made since the CFO Act of 1990 and Preliminary Observations on Opportunities for Enhancement | U.S. GAO](#)  
Oct. 30, 2019

## **GAO: Reporting the Facts, 1981-1996, The Charles A. Bowsher Years**

There is so much to learn about the impact that Comptroller General (CG) Chuck Bowsher had on GAO, the Congress, and the Nation. A powerful book was written about Mr. Bowsher by GAO's then-historian, Maarja Krusten. She beautifully lays out the Bowsher Years through oral histories provided through the GAO History Program.

The book is available at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/2019-09/690041.pdf>

