

Principles for Evaluating Nominees for Comptroller General of the United States

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Appointed for a 15-year term, the Comptroller General safeguards the power of the purse and improves government performance through fact-based audits, evaluations, and legal decisions across congressional sessions and presidential administrations.

A qualified nominee must demonstrate unimpeachable integrity, genuine independence from partisan influence, proven leadership of large organizations, and a credible plan to modernize GAO's methods and workforce. The standards below provide a clear, durable framework for evaluating candidates to serve as Comptroller General.

1. Integrity and Independence

The foremost qualification is an unassailable record of honesty and fair dealing and a demonstrated willingness to follow facts and law wherever they lead. The position requires a deeply ethical person who places the public interest above partisan or personal advantage, avoids any actual or perceived conflict of interests, and possesses a track record of making independent judgments.

2. Oversight and Accountability Expertise

Candidates should bring substantial, hands-on experience uncovering waste, fraud, abuse, or mismanagement—such as prior service as an Inspector General, senior GAO official, congressional oversight staffer, investigative journalist, professional auditor or accountant, or member of a civil-society watchdog. They must view oversight as an essential expression of constitutional checks and balances necessary for a functioning democracy.

3. Understanding of Congress's Constitutional Role

The Comptroller General must understand that GAO serves the legislative branch. The ideal nominee will have a deep appreciation of Congress's constitutional responsibilities, an understanding of the information and analytical needs of legislators, and a demonstrated commitment to furthering congressional oversight without partisan favor or bias.

4. Leadership and Organizational Management

GAO is a large, multidisciplinary institution. Candidates must show success setting strategy, aligning resources to priorities, managing senior talent, maintaining morale, and stewarding a high-trust culture grounded in rigor, transparency, and nonpartisanship. Experience in running large, complex organizations is an essential skill.

5. Data-Driven Vision and Commitment to Modernization

GAO's continued effectiveness depends on its ability to evolve with changing technology, data, and congressional needs. The nominee should possess a clear vision for modernizing the agency's methods—leveraging data science, open government practices, oversight techniques,

and emerging technologies—to improve how GAO informs Congress and the public. The next Comptroller General must embrace GAO’s broader mission of promoting accountability, learning, and institutional improvement across government.

6. Adept Communication

As the face of GAO, the Comptroller General must be a persuasive and credible communicator. The nominee should demonstrate the ability to translate complex analyses into clear, accessible language for lawmakers, the press, and the public—reinforcing GAO’s reputation for nonpartisan, fact-based work. The office requires both technical expertise and the capacity to build public understanding and trust in government accountability.

7. Even-Handedness and Professional Judgment

The Comptroller General interacts regularly with senior officials in all branches of government. The nominee must have a demonstrated ability for impartial engagement and the ability to navigate politically charged circumstances with steadiness, fairness, and discretion. A consistent commitment to even-handed treatment of all parties—regardless of political affiliation—is essential.

8. Energy and Commitment to Service

The office demands sustained intellectual energy, focus, and a strong sense of public duty. Candidates should exhibit curiosity, persistence, and the discipline to drive long-term institutional improvement. A demonstrated commitment to improving financial literacy across agencies and both branches, strengthening the machinery of accountability, and good governance should mark the nominee’s career.

9. Robust Management Philosophy

Impact depends on speed and relevance. The nominee should commit to prioritization, risk-based scoping, and timely delivery—aligning GAO’s portfolio with Congress’s oversight calendar and decision points without sacrificing quality. Similarly, the Comptroller General must be an advocate for the needs of the GAO so these goals can be met. In doing so, the CG must be capable of stewarding the workforce and developing a healthy, mission-aligned culture.

Conclusion

The selection of the next Comptroller General offers Congress and the President an opportunity to reaffirm GAO’s vital role as an independent, nonpartisan watchdog for taxpayers. The statutory, bipartisan commission process is essential to selecting a Comptroller General who embodies integrity, competence, and fairness. Following this process will help preserve the agency’s credibility and strengthen congressional oversight for years to come.

Endorsing Organizations

Americans for Prosperity

American Governance Institute

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

Levin Center

Project On Government Oversight

Protect Democracy

R Street Institute

Taxpayers Protection Alliance