

## GAO RESPONSES TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROTH

Question: How would you characterize DOD's operational testing in terms of accuracy and usefulness of results, and utilization of results? What are your feelings in regard to having an independent test organization for testing at the Secretary's level - independent of the program managers?

GAO Response: In developing weapon systems it is critical to assess program acquisition risks and to evaluate the ability of a weapon system to perform as intended. The purpose of the test and evaluation is to minimize uncertainties that would adversely affect system cost, schedule or performance.

Over the years GAO has reported on weapon system performance problems and raised questions about the capability of systems to perform their missions. We have noted many examples of where early developmental or the later operational tests were not comprehensive, rigorous or complete resulting in unnecessary risks during the acquisition process and after deployment. We have issued reports on operational testing done by each Service. Overall, we believe the quality of test and evaluation has improved significantly between the early 1970's and recent times. Most recently, however, we have been concerned that required test and evaluation may be reduced because of a desire by DOD and others to shorten the time it takes for a weapon system to be developed, produced and deployed. This need not happen, but it could become a reality depending upon exactly how the Services implement current policies.