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June Gibbs Brown: A Model IG

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June Gibbs Brown retired from federal service in December, 2000. The former inspector general (IG) for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), arguably was the most widely known and respected IG in the federal government. With a department that spends more than \$376 billion annually on such high-profile programs as Medicare, Ms. Brown's prominence was inevitable, but respect was something she had earned. Serving as IG at HHS since 1993, she brought to the position the knowledge and experiences she gained while serving as IG at three other federal departments, a major independent agency, and a Navy component. She consistently demonstrated a strong ability to lead people with differing areas of expertise to work together to achieve a common goal, a vital skill for responsive leaders.

Brown was a member of the first cadre of inspectors general, joining the Interior Department as IG in 1978. Since that time, she served as IG at National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Department of Defense, the Social Security Administration and the Pacific Fleet, and also has worked in the private sector. She is a certified public accountant with a master's degree in business administration and a law degree. Her resume, as one U.S. House of Representative staffer put it, makes her the “prototype IG”.

Professional History

Brown did not initially plan a federal career; she raised a family while working during the day in real estate and later for a CPA firm, and went to college at night. Brown recognized that she could make a difference by working in the federal government, and that the standard pay structure and benefits across all agencies meant multiple work opportunities, so she signed on as a grade GS-9 accountant with the Navy. She was promoted to GS-11 the following year and subsequently became director of internal audit and quality control at the Navy Finance Center. Continuing her education at night, she received a master's in business administration from Cleveland State University in 1972 and ultimately a juris doctor from the Denver School of Law in 1978.

When she began working at the Navy Finance Center, the congressionally-established savings program for all overseas Navy members had never been in balance, and teams of Navy and contractor accountants from Washington, D.C., had not been able to identify the problems. Working with the Cleveland staff, which had maintained meticulous records, Brown was able to identify several computer programming problems, reverse their effect, and reconcile the multimillion-dollar accounts to the penny within her first five months.

When her husband was transferred to Denver in 1976, Brown obtained a position as a GS-13 at the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management in charge of financial systems design. In 1979, she applied for and was selected as project manager at the Bureau of Reclamation, which led the effort to consolidate the Department of Interior's seven separate pay separate personnel systems into one consolidated pay and personnel system for the entire department. She was promoted to GS-14, then to 15 and 16 in the process. In fact, the effort was so successful that 18 years later the updated version of Interior's system, based on her original model, is being used by all of Interior's bureaus, the Social Security Administration, the Federal Trade Commission, and several other federal agencies and non-federal foundations.

When the Inspectors General Act of 1978 established IGs in 12 federal departments, Brown requested consideration for a presidential appointment, seeking and receiving support from the Denver area's congressional representative and both Colorado senators. She was already well known and highly regarded in the Department of Interior based on her leadership of the consolidated payroll/personnel effort. These factors led directly to her selection as Interior's first IG.

At the time she began service as Interior's first IG, Secretary Cecil Andrus was negotiating with a highly skeptical congressional appropriations committee regarding funding for a visitor center as part of a larger rehabilitation project of Washington, D.C.'s Union Station. Secretary Andrus told the committee he would seek a review by the independent IG, and based on that review the committee could decide if the project was sound and deserved further funding. Brown met with the heads of the audit and the investigation staffs, determined that they could consolidate the results of numerous visitor center work products already completed, and monitored development of this highly visible report as

it progressed. When the audit chief presented the final report on schedule, she personally delivered a copy to Secretary Andrus and to all committee members. The next day, to her astonishment, the head of investigations came to her with his separate report. Brown says, "That was a defining moment in my career. It was clear to me that auditors and investigators needed to communicate.

She began to develop "audigators," auditors who would recognize and prove that some apparently innocent errors are made on purpose, or "with intent," and investigators who would recognize that problems detected in a specific case could exist elsewhere, leading to follow-up work and potential recommendations for system, policy, or legislative changes. This concept established an excellent precedent for those who followed in her footsteps at Interior, and Brown introduced the same approach at her subsequent agencies. In fiscal year 1997, audigator teams at HHS were instrumental in recovering \$750 million in fines, restitutions, and other settlements.



NASA/Private Industry/ Return to NASA

Upon taking office in 1981, President Reagan fired all federal IGs. Brown began to explore a law school teaching position, but she also reapplied for an IG appointment. Her reputation as the Interior Department's successful first IG helped her to land the IG position at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), where she served for four years. NASA accepted the IG role more readily than Interior.

According to Brown, "there had been resentment at virtually all departments of the new congressionally mandated Offices of Inspector General. The culture at NASA was more accepting." While there she earned the NASA Exceptional Service Medal following a major case which disclosed that a contractor had falsified X-ray documentation verifying the integrity of weld points. The space shuttle had to be "torn down" to assure the safety of the work performed by that contractor. Brown also was recognized for her "innovative leadership in introducing microcomputer technology within the audit and investigative disciplines of government."

In 1985, she left the federal government, accepting the position of vice president and chief financial officer at Systems Development Corporation (now part of UNISYS). She found the work more lucrative but less meaningful than her government service. When Dr. James Fletcher was asked to

become the NASA administrator in 1986, he asked Brown to return as associate administrator for management. She jumped at the chance to return to the challenges of public service, notwithstanding a substantial pay cut.

Department of Defense (DoD) and Navy

In 1987, she was informed that Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger wanted to speak with her about DoD's IG position. She ultimately accepted it and served as the DoD inspector general for two years. DoD provided a tremendous challenge. With large-scale, long-term procurements involving hundreds of contractors and subcontractors, DoD has historically had thousands of on-site auditors. Brown reviewed the levels of risk associated with various contractors and initiated a program in which her office produced "Contractor Risk Assessment Guides." Contractors could follow the guide, an Internal Control Program, and the number of on-site auditors would be reduced. This self-monitoring objective was adopted by the largest and most progressive contractors, who developed their own forums on best practices.

When physical health problems dictated the need for a less stressful job, she applied for and was selected as deputy IG for the Navy Department's Pearl Harbor-based Pacific Fleet, where she was soon promoted to IG and served from late 1989 until 1993, when she returned to Washington for her last position at HHS.

Department of Health and Human Services

Content as IG of the Pacific Fleet operating out of Pearl Harbor, Brown had not sought a job change when she was contacted by newly appointed Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, whom she had never met. Secretary Shalala, searching for an experienced person for the sensitive IG position, had received recommendations from several sources that she consider Brown, and the two quickly found that they had similar views on how an IG can be most effective. Brown was confirmed by the Senate for the IG position at HHS, whose responsibilities then also included the Social Security Administration.

At HHS Secretary Donna Shalala insisted that Inspector General June Gibbs Brown be kept abreast of the rule-drafting to help agency staff avoid creating costly loopholes in the \$200-billion-a-year Medicare program. This consulting role became a hallmark of Brown's tenure at HHS. Her staff still does the audit and investigation work traditionally associated with IGs, but they also delve into department management systems and policy plans in an effort to prevent—rather than just detect—fraud, waste and abuse. "Secretary Shalala wants us included in all the meetings so that we can offer our experience and advice and help people reach some kind of logical policy decision," Brown said. That didn't mean department and IG staff always agreed, but they respect each other's input. On both sides, "it's an absolute commitment to a zero tolerance for fraud," according to Ms. Shalala.

Brown had introduced at HHS a voluntary self-disclosure protocol, a program modeled after the one she introduced at DoD, publishing model compliance guidance programs for health-care providers. In return for self-monitoring and adopting a viable compliance program, entities are assured that if HHS auditors or investigators find problems, the sanctions will be less severe when a good faith effort to comply with laws and regulations has been demonstrated. This approach both saves taxpayer money and creates a more positive customer-oriented relationship.

Brown, developed a staff well drilled in the importance of gathering all the facts and presenting them in a balanced fashion. Recognizing the value of broadening experiences through interagency work, she encouraged her staff to be active in professional organizations and to participate in interagency efforts. While she has lost some talented staff this way, many others received offers and stayed. Her office gained a reputation as a place where many from outside HHS would like to work.

Throughout her federal career June Gibbs Brown was active in professional organizations and interagency groups. She served as national president of the Association of Government Accountants in 1985-86, then a 11,800-member professional organization which has since continued to grow and, while in Hawaii, served on the board of directors of the Hawaii Society of CPAs. She also is a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration.

Brown twice served as vice-chair of the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency. Charles Dempsey, former vice-chair of the Council and former IG of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, credits her for being instrumental in setting up computer training for the IG community at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Graduate School. She also has chaired an interagency committee on information resources management and has served on several other interagency boards.

Brown's management and leadership training has been a combination of her work in obtaining her academic degrees, attending the 13-week Harvard Advanced Management Program in 1983¹, and on-the-job observation of effective leaders. In closing Brown said, "the experiences of working with Administrators James Beggs and Dr. James Fletcher at NASA, Secretaries Caspar Weinberger and Frank Carlucci at Defense, and Secretary Donna Shalala at HHS have been invaluable in learning models of effective leadership." 🏠

¹ At the time she took the Harvard Advanced Management program, women represented about 3 percent of attendees in this highly competitive program. That was double the number in any of the previous 91 classes. Many, particularly those from countries where women were not considered for executive positions, resented the women's presence. She applied herself, worked on teams in the case study system, and by the end of the course was elected by the class to give the graduation speech. She received a standing ovation prior to and then again immediately after her talk. Professional pioneering has its perils, but also impact and rewards.