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OIRA Celebrates 30th Anniversary

Regulatory Policy Commentary

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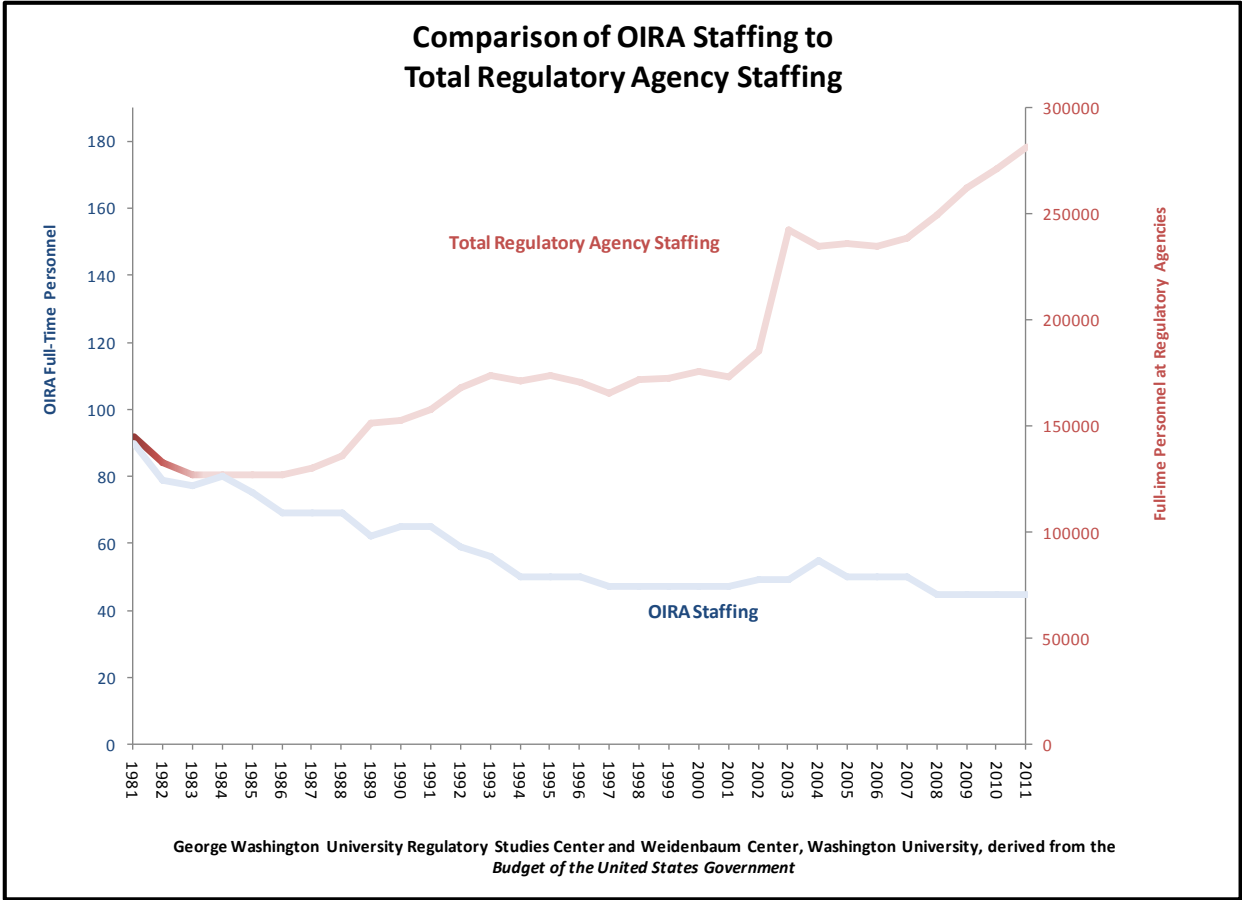
The George Washington University Regulatory Studies Center

In 1981, President Reagan's [Executive Order 12291](#) gave the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) responsibility for reviewing federal agencies' regulations before their publication in the [Federal Register](#). Three decades and four presidential administrations later, OIRA continues to play a critical role overseeing administrative discretion, ensuring that regulations serve the best interest of the American public and align with the President's priorities.

On May 20th, 2011, the GW Regulatory Studies Center hosted a [conference to celebrate OIRA's 30th anniversary](#), bringing together the office's former administrators and deputy administrators to discuss OIRA's origins, policies, practices, and staff culture, as well as its successes achieved and challenges encountered over the years. Panelists also shared their insights and recommendations for OIRA's path forward, emphasizing the importance of conducting cost-benefit analysis in evaluating regulations and suggesting reforms to help strengthen regulatory review and improve regulatory policies. Current Administrator Cass Sunstein also spoke at the conference about the President's regulatory policy agenda. [Complete video coverage](#) of the conference is now available online for viewing.

One popular suggestion put forth by the panelists at the conference was increasing OIRA's staffing level. According to [www.reginfo.gov](#), during the 2010 calendar year, OIRA reviewed a total of 690 draft proposed and final regulations, including 138 economically significant rules (with benefits and/or costs estimated to exceed \$100 million). In addition to this review of regulations under [Executive Order 12866](#), OIRA is charged with reviewing all information collection efforts by the Federal Government [under the [Paperwork Reduction Act](#)], as well as developing and overseeing the implementation of government-wide information and statistical policies.

Given this extensive set of responsibilities, it may surprise many to learn that for the current fiscal year, OIRA is staffed by just 45 full-time employees – exactly half the office's staffing count at its inception 30 years ago. Meanwhile, regulatory agency staffing has more than doubled in that same time period (see chart below). The divergence of these staffing trends is telling. Agencies' regulatory efforts have been on the rise, especially in the last decade, while OIRA's capacity to review regulations has fallen in that same period and remained unchanged over the last four years.



President Obama’s recent call for smarter regulation and a 21st century regulatory system, articulated in [Executive Order 13563](#), can be answered in part by strengthening the interagency review process overseen by OIRA. Accordingly, increasing OIRA’s staffing level would certainly help demonstrate the President’s commitment to responsible regulatory reform and improved regulation.