

## GAO and Its New Union Reach Agreement on Raises

By Stephen Barr

Tuesday, February 12, 2008; D04

The [Government Accountability Office](#) and its new union have reached a tentative agreement that will guarantee at least a 4.49 percent pay raise this year to GAO employees who are meeting job expectations.

Under the agreement, GAO employees will receive a 3.5 percent across-the-board increase. Most of the unionized employees also will receive an additional performance-based raise, worth an average 2.75 percent, that will increase their salary more than the guaranteed 4.49 percent.

The raise is the first negotiated between the agency and the GAO Employees Organization, which is affiliated with the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers. GAO analysts formed the union last year because of concerns about the fairness of a 2005-06 restructuring of compensation practices at the GAO and the way managers conduct performance evaluations.

The employee complaints led to a rare joint hearing of the House and Senate federal workforce subcommittees last May, and it underscored the difficult nature of overhauling pay and personnel systems in the federal government.

Many Defense Department employees covered by the new National Security Personnel System, which features performance-based pay, also have been skeptical of performance-based pay, and Congress stepped in last year to modify the system to ensure that NSPS employees get 60 percent of the government-wide increase every year.

The GAO has about 3,000 employees, with about 1,400 unionized workers eligible for what the agency called the "floor guarantee," or raise of 4.49 percent if the combined across-the-board raise and performance raise fall short of that.

"That is one of the notable outcomes of the negotiations," *Dan Meyer*, a member of the union bargaining team, said yesterday. "For the last several years, significant numbers have not received any increase to their base pay."

During negotiations, the union used the government-wide pay raise authorized by Congress as a reference point. The GAO has a large number of employees in Washington, and the Washington area raise for General Schedule employees is 4.49 percent this year.

According to union representative *Ron La Due Lake*, about half of the employees in the bargaining unit will receive raises of 4.49 to 6.5 percent. About 18 percent will get a base pay raise greater than 7.5 percent, he said.

The agreement also will increase the top of salary scales by 4.5 percent, which will allow more employees to receive base pay raises. Employees who hit the top of the scale receive a lump-sum payment that does not count toward retirement credits.

[David M. Walker](#), head of the GAO, told employees in a message that he "remains committed to the principle of pay parity" and will extend the annual pay raise, performance increases and floor guarantee to the agency's non-union, rank-and-file staff.

GAO union members will be asked to ratify the pay agreement, probably this week. Once ratified, the pay raise will be retroactive to Jan. 6, the first pay period of this year.

The union is in its start-up phase and is being run by a 39-member interim council that was elected to serve until the union organization is complete. After 2008 pay issues are in final agreement, the council will begin negotiating a master contract.