



## **GAO executives got bonuses as others were denied raises**

By Kelly McCormack

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While the Government Accountability Office (GAO) contended with controversy surrounding a pay-for-performance system that denied nearly 17 percent of its employees cost-of-living increases last year, 72 senior executives and senior-level employees received bonuses totaling more than \$900,000 in fiscal year 2006, according to information obtained by The Hill.

Although Office of Personnel Management (OPM) data is not yet available to compare the agency's extras to those awarded in executive-branch agencies, 63.7 percent of eligible personnel received performance-based bonuses as of March 2007, according to a letter from the agency head to several lawmakers.

At a hearing late last month, Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.) petitioned Walker to outline bonuses he awarded to his senior executive service (SES) and senior-level (SL) staff. She was concerned that senior-level employees received bonuses, while other employees did not receive annual adjustments for inflation or locality pay.

In fiscal 2006, bonuses for the senior executives and senior-level workers totaled \$901,700. The previous year, bonuses totaled \$837,350, according to the documents. However, documents did not include special GAO awards, retention allowances or bonuses received by retired SES employees, several GAO employees confirmed. At a minimum, SES employees make more than \$110,000 a year, a GAO spokeswoman said.

If the 300 employees were given promotions and retroactive pay, a cost-of-living increase alone would cost the GAO nearly \$1 million, according to a basic calculation by The Hill.

Comptroller General David Walker said the bonuses he has approved have been far more modest than those in the executive branch.

“The highest bonus amount I approved in the past two years was 17.5 percent of base pay,” Walker wrote to Norton in a May 25 letter. “That compares to bonus ranges in the executive branch that reach 20 percent of base pay, and up to 35 percent of base pay for ‘distinguished’ service in presidential rank positions, according to OPM.

“A total of 121 SES/SL personnel at GAO were eligible for performance bonuses in FY 2005, and a total of 113 were eligible in FY 2006,” Walker wrote. In fiscal year 2005, 64 GAO executives, 52.9 percent of eligible personnel, received bonuses based on performance, which “compares to 66.5 percent of career SES in the Executive Branch who received bonuses, according to data reported by” OPM, Walker wrote.

Bonuses for such employees are tied to their annual performance ratings relative to their peers, a GAO spokesman said. Walker reviews and approves all bonus amounts.

In fiscal 2005, the average senior executive’s bonus at GAO was \$13,214, which is \$600 less than the average bonus for the same-level employees in the executive branch, Walker wrote. In 2006, GAO’s average bonus was \$12,400. The OPM data is not yet available.

According to the data, the same two senior executives received the highest bonuses in both of the last two fiscal years.

Gene Dodaro, chief operating officer of the Executive Committee, received a \$29,000 bonus in 2006. In 2005, Dodaro received a \$28,075 bonus, according to the data. Last year, Sallyanne Harper, chief administrative officer and chief financial officer, collected a \$27,000 bonus; in 2005, she was given a \$26,400 bonus.

Data on the agency’s website reads: “GAO’s starting salaries are commensurate with education and experience. In general, GAO’s entry-level range for new employees with masters [sic] degrees is \$45,000 to \$68,000 depending on the individual’s qualifications and the location of the position.”

A GAO spokesman said that personnel costs constitute the majority of the agency’s budget, but that bonuses are small in comparison.

“While human capital costs at GAO represent 79 percent of our total operating expenses, funds allocated toward SES/SL bonuses represent less than one half of 1 percent of this allocation,” GAO spokesman Paul Anderson wrote to The Hill.

The GAO used a compensation study as reason to deny 17 percent of analysts a cost-of-living adjustment last year, saying that a number of employees were overpaid. At the same time, the agency separated 1,200 senior analysts into two groups: 800 analysts went into Band II A, with a lower pay rate, while 400 analysts were placed in Band II B, with a higher pay rate.

At the time of the Band II restructuring, the Band II cap in Washington was \$114,987. The fiscal 2007 Band IIA cap is \$104,700 and the Band IIB cap is \$132,200 in Washington, the GAO said.

The letter was also sent to Sens. Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii) and George Voinovich (R-Ohio), who head the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce and the District of Columbia

subcommittee, and to Reps. Danny Davis (D-Ill.) and Kenny Marchant (R-Texas), leaders of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee's Federal Workforce, Postal Service and the District of Columbia subcommittee.

"For the record," Walker wrote, "I did not receive a bonus for either FY 2005 or FY 2006."