

GAO Analysts to Seek Union Representation

By Stephen Barr

Tuesday, May 8, 2007; D04

Watchdogs who work for the Congress are ready to seek union representation.

A group of analysts at the Government Accountability Office -- often dubbed the congressional watchdog agency because it ferrets out waste, fraud and mismanagement in the executive branch -- plan to petition today for a union election.

The call for a union vote, to a large degree, reflects unhappiness over changes in recent years to pay and personnel rules at the GAO that some analysts believe have eroded teamwork and increased workplace tension over assignments, responsibilities and promotions.

"We need a meaningful way to work with management," *Judy Knepper*, a senior analyst and project manager who has been at the GAO for 21 years, said yesterday.

The GAO has been in the vanguard of the pay-for-performance movement in government, mainly because *David M. Walker*, the agency head, has wanted to ensure that his workforce could serve as a model for modern public-sector compensation practices. Congress granted him broad leeway to reshape the GAO workforce in 2004.

Walker retained a consulting firm to look at GAO pay practices and help design a compensation system that reflected labor-market salary rates. The study suggested that many longtime GAO employees were overpaid, based on their job positions.

The GAO, in the end, decided to not give pay raises to about 300 analysts and specialists in January 2006. The agency also split a "pay band," or salary range, in two and restructured salary caps for many employees. Dozens of GAO employees complained that the new pay system had not been implemented fairly.

Although Walker posted information on the agency's internal Web site and met with the agency's Employee Advisory Council about the changes, some employees decided it was time to bring in a union to formally bargain on their behalf with GAO management.

In April 2006, GAO analysts approached colleagues at the Congressional Research Service, where employees are represented by the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers.

The analysts and the union struck up a partnership, and the union helped sponsor meetings of GAO employees last summer, including some held in a church basement near the agency's headquarters on G Street NW. One analyst used her vacation to visit

GAO field offices across the country and urge those employees to join the organizing effort. Union advocates coined the slogan "Band together," a reference to the agency's pay bands.

Union officials said yesterday that a majority of the 1,500 analysts at the GAO have signed cards asking for a unionization vote. GAO analysts and union officials plan to file the cards with the GAO's personnel board before noon today.

Union officials *Paul Shearon* and *Julia Atkins Clark* and spokesman *Jamie Horwitz* said they hoped voting and balloting procedures can be worked out so that GAO employees can cast votes by summer's end. The union expects the GAO to raise questions about who is eligible to vote because some analysts take on supervisory or management responsibilities.

The GAO says it has taken a neutral stance on the unionizing effort, as required by labor law. But Walker has said he will try to correct any misinformation and ease employee concerns prior to a vote.

Last month, the GAO settled 12 cases brought by employees who had objected to the restructuring of pay bands. In a statement, the GAO called the costs of the settlement "very modest" and reiterated that GAO management "had the full legal authority" to split the pay band that covered most analysts.

Although some analysts say that morale has suffered recently at the GAO, the agency was rated No. 2 in a 2007 "best places to work" index of the government. Data for the survey were collected last year after pay and job classification changes were made.

"But just because something is good doesn't mean you can't make it better," said *Gay Hee Lee*, a senior analyst who has been with the GAO for about five years.

Most employees agree with the idea of performance-based pay, Lee said, but have problems with the way it has been implemented at the GAO. She said it has been hard to understand how salary ranges were established and performance pay calculated.

Lee said that the GAO has given her opportunities to advance but that she believes some of the opportunities have come at a cost to someone else at the GAO because of the way the personnel system has worked.

That, Lee said, "is not fair."

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Union Files at GAO

By Stephen Barr

Wednesday, May 9, 2007; D04

A union took the first step yesterday toward representing analysts at the Government Accountability Office by filing papers with the agency's personnel board.

Some of the analysts have objected to pay and personnel changes at the GAO and turned to the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers for help in forming a union.

David M. Walker, the head of the GAO, said in a statement: "We are prepared to fully support a timely election process if the union meets the related requirements for a vote. We plan to take appropriate steps to ensure that any election does not include supervisory employees, which would be inconsistent with applicable laws."

Defining leadership roles at the GAO could be tricky, in part because most of the agency's 1,581 analysts work in teams. Some analysts hold temporary assignments as team leaders, some shift in and out of supervisory roles and some are designated as "analysts in charge."



Many in watchdog agency want a union

By JESSE J. HOLLAND
WASHINGTON
May 7, 2007

Some of the people at the Government Accountability Office think it's a good time to try to organize a union at the investigative arm of Congress now that it's being run by Democrats.

GAO analysts and the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers plan to present hundreds of cards requesting a union vote for 1,500 analysts and investigators to agency officials on Tuesday.

Gay Hee Lee, a senior health care analyst at GAO, said a union would ensure the workers become part of the decision-making process at the watchdog agency. "It's something that we often recommend to other agencies, for all stakeholders to be involved. We're stakeholders in GAO," she said.

More than half of the 1,500 GAO analysts signed cards asking for a vote on becoming a local of the AFL-CIO-affiliated union. Union officials say a vote could happen in the next 45 days.

The IFPTE already represents NASA and Defense Department scientists and engineers, as well as workers at the Congressional Research Service, another legislative branch agency.

Comptroller General David Walker, head of the GAO, said he would have no comment until after a union petition is filed and reviewed by his agency.

"Let me assure you that we are prepared to fully support a timely election process if the union meets the related requirements for a vote," Walker wrote in a February letter to Rep. Albert Wynn, D-Md.

While the union campaign at GAO began last year, the Democrats' takeover of Congress helped, said Paul Shearon, the union's secretary-treasurer.

"GAO is an important government agency, and it can set an example for other institutions of government and industry," said Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., a civil rights movement veteran. "It can demonstrate that the empowerment of employees can benefit the well-being of any organization as a whole."

Some GAO analysts have complained about Walker's decision to move the agency away from the federal personnel structure and give more account to market salary rates and job performance when determining pay. The change meant some employees did not receive a raise for 2007.

Walker acknowledged the switch caused problems. "Obviously, reforms that affect an employee's pay and job classification tend to be particularly controversial," he said in an earlier statement.

But GAO recently ranked second in a "Best Place to Work in the Federal Government" survey. The survey was done by the Partnership for Public Service and American University's Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation.

Management Matters

Union to file for first-ever election at GAO

By Brittany R. Ballenstedt bballenstedt@govexec.com May 7, 2007

A federal labor union is planning to file a petition Tuesday for an election to represent analysts at the Government Accountability Office.

The International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers has spent the last several months trying to generate support from 1,500 analysts at the watchdog agency for an organizing campaign resulting, in part, from discontent with a new pay system.

IFPTE Secretary-Treasurer Paul Shearon said about half of the analysts have filed election cards with the union. On Tuesday, IFPTE and many of those employees will deliver the cards to the agency's Personnel Appeals Board.

Shearon said only 30 percent of potential union members must sign cards for an election to occur. But in the election, 51 percent must agree to bring the union into the workplace. "We're pretty confident going on," he said. "We'll be filing a significant number of cards."

There have been organizing drives at GAO field offices across the country, Shearon said, adding that several analysts at the Washington headquarters have used their paid time off to travel to field offices to boost support.

An election is expected within 90 days of the filing.

GAO declined to comment until the petition has been filed and reviewed.

An election would mark the first time GAO employees have voted for union representation rights in the watchdog agency's 86-year history. IFPTE [announced](#) in late January that a group of employees had launched the organizing campaign.

The desire to unionize is partly a response to a new personnel system at GAO, under which 308 senior analysts did not receive a pay raise last year. Comptroller General David M. Walker has argued that the decision to deny the employees the pay hike was based on a 2004 market-based compensation study that determined that many analysts were overpaid relative to employees with comparable skills and experience at other agencies and outside government.

Several employees have maintained that there was little or no justification for the placement in the lower pay band. [GAO reached settlements](#) with 12 of the employees last month, offering them promotions, back pay and associated benefits as if they had been promoted as of Jan. 8, 2006.

Shearon said giving employees union representation would provide them with more authority over new personnel reforms. "By having the protection of a labor union, it provides employees an opportunity to actually be a part of the process," he said.

Some GAO employees expressed concern over selecting IFPTE for representation because the union represents employees at the Congressional Research Service, which had a reduction in force that affected 59 employees last year.

"What do CRS' current morale problems ... imply about IFPTE's effectiveness as the exclusive representative of CRS employees in matters of collective bargaining with CRS management?" one GAO analyst asked.

Some analysts have said they would prefer representation by the National Treasury Employees Union. NTEU President Colleen Kelley said Monday she is pleased that GAO employees hold NTEU in such high regard.

"They have had a number of issues resulting from GAO's pay for performance system," Kelley said. "NTEU is always interested in talking with groups of employees seeking representation; however, at this point NTEU is not currently organizing in GAO."

Shearon said it's not likely that another union would enter the election, especially since a clear majority of employees have signed authorization cards for IPFTE. "It's highly unlikely that we would have someone else climbing on to the ballot at this late stage," he said.

GAO analysts launch effort to unionize

By [M.Z. HEMINGWAY](#)

May 08, 2007

It wasn't quite a scene out of *Norma Rae*.

About two dozen analysts in smart suits and sensible shoes — one, holding a box full of petitions — filed calmly down a Washington street and into the office lobby of the Personnel Appeals Board.

That's how about 1,500 analysts and auditors at the Government Accountability Office may get the vote they're seeking to join a union.

A union trying to organize the agency claims it filed enough petitions with the appeals board today — representing more than half of eligible employees, far more than the 30 percent required — to force a union vote. If the appeals board confirms the count, the GAO analysts will get their vote by the end of July.

It may seem a bit odd that such labor strife is hitting an agency that even its own employees say is the second best place to work in government.

"We believe GAO is one of the best places to work in government and we want it to continue to be a model place to work," said Scott McNulty, a GAO auditor for 20 years. "This is not a reaction against change. This is a way to manage change in the way it's most effective."

The effort reflects growing angst among many employees that they lack a voice in recent pay and personnel changes at GAO, analysts said in interviews.

GAO, which is at the helm of the federal government's performance-based pay reform movement, began paying employees according to their performance in 1998. And in 2004, it began the move to a market-based pay system that caused some analysts' pay to be capped at a lower level. Dozens of employees complained to *Federal Times* then that the change was unfair and harmed morale.

The changes were made without enough transparency and concern for employee morale and teamwork, they said.

While the agency has an employee advisory council that meets with agency leadership regularly, employees want more.

"Instead of advice, we'd like a voice," Jacqueline Harpp, a senior analyst, said May 8.

"This is not about pay for performance," said Lise Levie, a senior analyst who has been with the agency for more than 20 years.

The real controversy according to analysts is over how market-based pay was handled. With congressional authorization, Comptroller General David Walker commissioned a study in 2004 to determine whether analysts were paid according to their value in the marketplace. The study showed that some analysts were underpaid and some were overpaid, he said. As a result, he split up one broad pay range into separate ranges, dropping the salary cap for the lower range and increasing the salary cap for the upper range.

While the analysts concede that the unionization effort would not have happened without this split, they insist they do not seek a union to block change.

Senior analyst Judy Knepper says a union will help her perform her job better. In the last few of her 21 years at the agency, she says too much time and energy has been spent keeping up with complex

reforms. She would rather have a representative organization monitor and evaluate the changes and advocate on her behalf.

Other analysts said it was the rate and increased scope of change that concerned them. Levie said Walker now decides when the agency's Washington office has a snow day, instead of having it be determined by the Office of Personnel Management as it is for most agencies.

"As analysts, we question if OPM doesn't have more expertise," she said.

While the names of the employees who requested a unionization vote are kept secret, Levie said that roughly the same percentage of requests were signed by analysts in the two sectors of the split pay band and that similar rates of interest were expressed by new staff and older staff. Analysts from all 13 teams at GAO — divided by areas of interest such as health care and information technology — signed onto the effort.

Walker said he's prepared to support a timely election process if the union, the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, meets the requirements for a vote.

"I support the right of GAO employees to organize in a manner consistent with applicable laws and regulations," he said in a May 8 statement. A joint congressional hearing will be held May 22 to discuss GAO's personnel reforms. Walker and a union representative are scheduled to testify.

GAO was ranked last month as the second best place to work in the federal government by the Partnership for Public Service, a public service advocacy group.

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Walker backs union rights at GAO

By Kelly McCormack

May 09, 2007

David Walker, head of the Government Accountability Office (GAO), yesterday spoke in support of union rights at the agency. "I support the right of GAO employees to organize in a manner consistent with applicable laws and regulations," Walker, the U.S. comptroller general, said in a statement. "We are prepared to fully support a timely election process if the union meets the related requirements for a vote."

Several employees and members of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Employees submitted a petition for a union election yesterday. To secure an election, 30 percent of the 1,500 analysts must sign on.

Walker said the GAO has consistently complied with the law and promised to "ensure that any election does not include supervisory employees."

Many in Watchdog Agency Want a Union

Tuesday May 8, 2007 12:46 AM

By JESSE J. HOLLAND

AP Labor Writer

**Breaking
news
International**

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Gay Hee Lee, a senior health care analyst at GAO, said a union would ensure the workers become part of the decision-making process at the watchdog agency. "It's something that we often recommend to other agencies, for all stakeholders to be involved. We're stakeholders in GAO," she said.

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"Let me assure you that we are prepared to fully support a timely election process if the union meets the related requirements for a vote," Walker wrote in a February letter to Rep. Albert Wynn, D-Md.

While the union campaign at GAO began last year, the Democrats' takeover of Congress helped, said Paul Shearon, the union's secretary-treasurer.

"GAO is an important government agency, and it can set an example for other institutions of government and industry," said Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., a civil rights movement veteran. "It can demonstrate that the empowerment of employees can benefit the well-being of any organization as a whole."

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Walker acknowledged the switch caused problems. "Obviously, reforms that affect an employee's pay and job classification tend to be particularly controversial," he said in an earlier statement.

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Union, GAO officials discuss union election

BY Richard W. Walker

Published on May 10, 2007

Officials from a professional labor union and the Government Accountability Office met today to begin working out details for what will be the first union representation election in GAO's 86-year history.

The International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers filed a petition this week to form a union after a majority of GAO's approximately 1,500 analysts voted to unionize, said Jamie Horwitz, a spokesman for the federation, which is an affiliate of the AFL-CIO.

Horwitz declined to specify the number of GAO analysts who signed cards requesting a vote for unionization.

"We received cards from a majority of analysts in Washington and in field offices around the country," Horwitz said. "We still have cards coming in because people want to show their commitment."

Horwitz said that in voting to form a union, GAO analysts have expressed concern about a range of issues, especially those related to the agency's pay-for-performance system, which was implemented in 2004. Employees had little input into the system's structure and management, Horwitz said. "The result is that it has hurt teamwork and morale," he added.

In a statement, Comptroller General David Walker, head of GAO, said the agency is "prepared to support a timely election process if the union meets related requirements for a vote."

Walker has been a vocal advocate for establishing a culture of performance in government and particularly for pay-for-performance systems. Indeed, GAO has often been cited a model agency for merit-based pay systems in government.

By most accounts, GAO's employees like their work and relish the agency's mission as the investigative arm of Congress. GAO was recently ranked the second best place to work in government in a study by the Partnership for Public Service and American University's Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation. The rankings were based on the Office of Personnel

Management's Federal Human Capital Survey, which included responses from more than 220,000 civil servants.

But there has been an undercurrent of unhappiness at GAO about the pay-for-performance system since it was deployed, one GAO analyst said.

"I believe GAO's pay-and-performance system could benefit from the input of its employees," said another analyst, Gay Hee Lee, who has worked at GAO for five years. "It would make the system more transparent and objective and would make us as employees more accountable because we would have an active part in its implementation."

"It's time we led by example here at GAO," analyst John Vocino said, ironically echoing a phrase Walker uses frequently.

At a March hearing of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, Walker testified that GAO is "leading by example in transforming how government should do business."

A joint congressional hearing is scheduled for May 22 to examine GAO's personnel reforms, Horwitz said.



GAO Employees Consider Union Options

Monday, May 07, 2007

By JESSE J. HOLLAND, AP Labor Writer

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Many in watchdog agency want a union

WASHINGTON Some people at the Government Accountability Office think it's a good time to try to organize a union now that Congress is being run by Democrats.

G-A-O analysts and the A-F-L-C-I-O affiliated International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers plan to present agency officials with hundreds of cards requesting a union vote for 15-hundred analysts and investigators. More than half of the analysts have signed the cards.

Gay Hee Lee, a senior health care analyst at the G-A-O, says a union would ensure the workers become part of the decision-making process at the congressional watchdog agency. The I-F-P-T-E already represents NASA and Defense Department scientists and engineers, as well as workers at the Congressional Research Service, another legislative branch agency.

Yahoo News
GAO employees consider union options

By JESSE J. HOLLAND, AP Labor Writer Mon May 7, 6:18 PM ET

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GAO Analysts 'Band Together' for a Union

by [Mike Hall](#), May 8, 2007

Looking for accountability from management following recent sweeping changes in personnel policy, analysts at the Government Accountability Office (GAO) filed union authorization cards today, calling for the first union election ever at the investigative arm of Congress.

The cards, signed by a majority of the 1,500 analysts at the agency's Washington, D.C., and field offices, say the workers want to gain a voice on the job with the Professional and Technical Engineers (**IFPTE**) union. Says IFPTE president Greg Junemann:

Analysts at the agency devote their careers to speaking out about improving government, yet at their own agency their voices have been muted. In recent months, problems with a reclassification system have hurt the team mentality that has made the agency successful in the past. Morale has suffered, and the agency's management has unfairly eliminated cost-of-living increases for many GAO employees and frozen the salaries of others.

Two years ago, GAO made several drastic and unilateral changes in personnel policy, including dividing workers into salary "bands," eliminating cost-of-living increases for many and labeling some workers as "over market" and reducing their salaries.

Many of the unilateral changes made at GAO, says the union, are similar to personnel policies that have been challenged at the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security by unions at those workplaces. (Click [here](#) and [here](#) for more information.)

Coming together under the slogan "Band Together," GAO workers have gathered authorization cards from hundreds of their colleagues, held regular meetings and used personal vacation time to visit with colleagues employed at field offices in preparation for today's card filing with the agency's Personnel Appeals Board.

Senior analyst John Vocino says:

In its advice to other agencies, GAO encourages meaningful employee involvement as a critical element of successful personnel management change. It is time we led by example here at GAO. There is no question that many of management's recent missteps could have been avoided had employees been union-represented during the planning, adoption and implementation of personnel management changes.

GAO is an independent agency, but members of Congress have urged the agency to deal with its workers in a fair manner without intimidation or interference. Says Rep. Albert Wynn (D-Md.):

I believe that it will be important for Congress to serve as a watchdog in coming weeks to make sure that GAO's management does not interfere in this unprecedented vote in any way nor try to delay the election process.

The election is expected to be held within 90 days.



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