

Organizing

IFPTE Says It Wants to Represent GAO Analysts; Walker Questions Viability of Union Campaign

The International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers is seeking to represent approximately 1,500 analysts at the Government Accountability Office, the union announced Jan. 24.

According to IFPTE, its organizing campaign has gained widespread support from "hundreds" of GAO analysts at all levels, ages, and lengths of service.

"GAO wants to be a model agency for the rest of the federal sector, but its new personnel system has become a model of what not to do," IFPTE President Greg Junemann said in a statement, adding that changes made by the agency to its classification system have "undercut the team approach that has made the agency both effective in its mission and a place where people enjoy coming to work."

GAO announced in November 2005 that, beginning in January 2006, it would move to a pay-for-performance system under which agency employees would no longer receive the annual, across-the-board pay increases provided to most federal employees (43 GERR 1112, 11/15/05).

Comptroller General David M. Walker, the head of GAO, told reporters at the time that no employee's pay would be lowered, even if GAO's compensation surveys showed that certain employees were overpaid. However, employees who do not get promoted could see "constrained" pay increases in the future, he said.

Walker Objects to 'Misinformation.' Walker told BNA Jan. 25 that in his view the IFPTE statement included "lots of misinformation and disinformation," including the suggestion that a vote on unionization of GAO analysts was imminent.

"They haven't met the requirements for a vote. . . . They're way ahead of themselves and this is very unprofessional," Walker said, adding that attempts to organize GAO employees in the past have not worked.

Walker also disputed IFPTE's assertion that approximately 1,500 GAO analysts are eligible for union representation. A large number of the analysts have supervisory duties and cannot be represented by a union, he said.

Should IFPTE reach the point where GAO employees are asked to vote on union representation, Walker said, he will present to employees his views on the advantages and disadvantages of unionization. "I will provide management's views at the appropriate time if they meet the representation requirements," he said.

Walker said that he first became aware of IFPTE's interest in organizing GAO analysts in August 2006. The effort originated with a very small number of employees, including those found to be overpaid by GAO's pay survey, he said.

"There are a lot of winners from our market-based survey," Walker said, estimating that 85 percent to 90 percent of employees have been "OK or better off" since GAO moved to the new system. The latest market survey found that approximately 10 percent to 15 percent of employees are overpaid, he said.

At the same time, Walker emphasized that he is not opposed to collective bargaining for GAO employees. "I

believe that our employees have the right to organize," he said.

IFPTE Sees Future Model Employer. GAO's changes to its pay-for-performance system and employee classifications have been held up by Walker and others as models for other agencies, such as the departments of Homeland Security and Defense, that are seeking to move away from the federal government's General Schedule pay system.

But according to IFPTE, while GAO routinely reviews the policies of other federal agencies, its own personnel policies lack similar oversight and GAO analysts have few opportunities to influence changes in compensation and evaluation. Union representation will help GAO employees use their collective analytical skills to help create and implement personnel policy and work rules that not only serve the interests of employees, management, and Congress, but also serve the public interest by making GAO a model employer that positively influences overall federal personnel policy, IFPTE said.

The union said its organizing campaign at GAO began several months ago when a group of analysts approached the president of the IFPTE local union at the Congressional Research Service about forming an organizing committee. CRS, a sister agency to GAO, has had union representation for 27 years, IFPTE said.

In addition to those employed at GAO's Washington headquarters, the union said it is reaching out to Band I and Band II analysts at GAO field offices in Atlanta; Boston; Chicago; Dallas; Dayton, Ohio; Denver; Huntsville, Ala.; Los Angeles; Norfolk, Va.; San Francisco; and Seattle.

Current IFPTE-represented employees in the federal government include scientists with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration; DOD engineers, scientists, and technicians; federal immigration and administrative law judges; and CRS employees. According to the union, it represents a total of approximately 80,000 public and private sector employees.

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