



## **LEADING THE NEWS**

### **GAO employees vote to form a labor union**

**By Karissa Marcum**

**September 20, 2007**

Government Accountability Office employees on Wednesday, for the first time in the agency's history, voted to form a labor union.

"I'm pleased with the outcome. GAO's analysts banded together to help restore GAO's greatness. We declared our independence," Robert Kershaw, a senior analyst who voted in favor of the union, said.

Analysts voted 897 to 445 to form a union that would be represented by the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers.

More than 1,800 employees were eligible to vote. Analysts working in the Washington headquarters voted by manual ballot while field-office employees, working nationwide, voted by mail.

Union organizers said the move was necessary after changes in personnel policies divided analysts into salary "bands," eliminating cost-of-living increases for many and labeling of some workers as "over market," which translates to a reduced salary.

## In a First, GAO Analysts Vote to Join a Union

By Stephen Barr  
Friday, September 21, 2007; D04

Analysts at the [Government Accountability Office](#) have voted to join a union, a first at the 86-year-old agency.

The analysts voted 897 to 445 to be represented by the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers. About 74 percent of eligible employees voted in the election.

The push for unionization began about a year ago after several analysts complained about the fairness of a 2005-06 restructuring of compensation practices at the GAO. As the campaign evolved, other analysts said they thought a union would give them a stronger voice on workplace issues, including the way managers conduct job-performance evaluations.

GAO analysts are dedicated to their jobs, but many think pay and management problems "are impeding their ability to actually do their work," said *Paul Shearon*, who headed the organizing drive for the union.

"They think the processes are broken, and they would like the opportunity to sit down with management and make a better GAO," he said.

The election was held Wednesday, and the final round of votes was tallied at about 11 p.m.

[David M. Walker](#), the head of the GAO, said he was notified of the outcome yesterday morning and called the union's president, *Gregory J. Junemann*, to extend congratulations and suggest that the two meet and begin "a constructive working relationship."

Walker said he was surprised by the margin of the vote but pleased with the high turnout, saying that was important for the GAO. "As to why people voted the way they voted, I'm not in a position to speculate," he said.

The 2-to-1 show of support was no surprise to the union, Shearon said, adding that young GAO employees had expressed increasing interest in the organizing campaign in recent weeks.

As part of that drive, the union created a "band together" Web site for employees, its theme playing off a controversial 2005 decision by Walker to split a "pay

band," or salary range, in two. Some analysts thought they were not treated fairly in the split. Others were angered when they did not receive a cost-of-living raise, the common practice across most of the government, in 2006.

With the site, the union created an "online picket line," union spokesman *Jamie Horwitz* said. The site linked viewers to [YouTube](#), where GAO analysts and union members explained why the GAO needed a union to represent analysts. Shearon called the videos "a nontraditional union-organizing campaign" and predicted that "you will see a lot more of this sort of thing."

The GAO is an agency of Congress that audits federal programs and ferrets out waste, fraud and mismanagement in the executive branch. It is widely regarded as a prestigious place to work in Washington and was ranked No. 2 in a "best places to work" index this year.

But Walker's changes to the pay system angered some analysts, who took their complaints to members of Congress. During the dispute, Walker authorized a settlement with 12 employees who had filed grievances over the pay changes. After the union filed a petition in May seeking the election, he hired a law firm to help with legal issues related to the unionizing effort.

The union vote, to some degree, underscores the difficult nature of overhauling pay and personnel rules in the government, especially if employees perceive them as eroding annual raises and reducing credits for retirement.

GAO analysts are not the only white-collar professionals who have turned to a union when uneasy about work changes. Employees at the [Federal Aviation Administration](#) headquarters joined the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees in 1999 and 2000 after changes were made to pay rules there.

From 2000 to 2004, white-collar professionals at the [Securities and Exchange Commission](#), [Office of the Comptroller of the Currency](#) and the National Credit Union Administration brought in the National Treasury Employees Union as their bargaining representative.

Shearon said GAO analysts met yesterday to discuss their next steps, which include electing a council, writing a constitution and making arrangements to negotiate their first contract.

## **GAO analysts vote for union representation**

By Brittany R. Ballenstedt

September 20, 2007

Analysts at the Government Accountability Office voted Wednesday to unionize, marking a first in the watchdog agency's 86-year history.

The analysts backed union representation from the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers by a vote of [897-445](#). More than 74 percent of the 1,800 eligible analysts at headquarters and field offices participated.

"This is a great and historic day for GAO," said Robert Kershaw, a senior analyst who voted in favor of the union. "We need to restructure the incentives in this agency so that the talents and gifts of each employee are utilized to the maximum."

Comptroller General David M. Walker on Thursday praised the level of employee turnout. "GAO management will bargain in good faith," he said.

GAO's union will be an IFPTE local, and bargaining unit employees will now move forward to elect a council, write a constitution and determine bargaining priorities. The local can then sit down with management and negotiate a first contract.

"The analysts at GAO are experts at creating efficient organizations," said IFPTE President Greg Junemann. "You can bet that their bargaining surveys and their research will be data driven. This local union will be an example for other groups."

The [push to unionize](#) is partly a response to sweeping changes in the agency's personnel policies two years ago, resulting in the division of analysts into salary bands, the elimination of cost-of-living increases for many, and the [labeling of some analysts](#) as overpaid relative to the market. IFPTE has said that employees have cited what they consider to be a lack of transparency in pay for performance as a major driver of the organizing campaign.

And unlike unions in much of the federal sector, GAO's bargaining unit will be able to negotiate over wages. Most federal employees do not have such rights,

largely because most agency managers are not responsible for setting wages. But GAO's personnel changes gave management more discretion in setting pay.

Still, the organizing campaign has evolved to encompass more than just discontent with the new pay system, said Paul Shearon, secretary-treasurer for IFPTE. "The analysts at GAO are very proud of the work they do, and the majority sent a message today that the union is a vehicle to move the agency forward and do its important work better," he said.

Kershaw, who joined GAO in the 1970s, said he hopes having representation will help restore some past benefits, including an annual art show and an employee newspaper. But most important, he said, would be the opportunity for certain employees to work with congressional committees, an authority that was taken away by former Comptroller General Charles Bowsher. Currently, only senior executives are able to meet with congressional staff.

"Earlier in my career, it was OK for staff at all levels of GAO to interact with congressional staff," Kershaw said. "That's the way they understood what the requester wanted, and the quality of work was much better. The staff felt more a part of the team."

On Sunday, Kershaw and a group of GAO analysts launched a [Web site](#) for employees to discuss unionization issues. Ownership of the Web site will be transferred to union officials as soon as they are elected, Kershaw said.

Members of the bargaining unit met Thursday to set interim ground rules until a convention is held to adopt a constitution and elect union officers. According to the rules, interim officials must be elected no later than Oct. 19, with an official convention held between Feb. 25 and April 18, 2008.

"We're looking forward to a great working relationship with Comptroller General David Walker," said Lise Levy, a GAO analyst. "The union will help us to make GAO a true model agency."

AFL-CIO Weblog - <http://blog.aflcio.org>

## Federal Analysts Choose Union in First-Ever Vote at GAO

Posted By [Mike Hall](#) On September 20, 2007 @ 12:28 pm In [Organizing & Bargaining](#) | [No Comments](#)



**Jacqueline Harpp**

By a nearly 2-to-1 majority, analysts at the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) capped off a year-and-a-half drive to “[1] [Band Together](#)” and yesterday voted to form a union with the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers ([2] [IFPTE](#)). Says senior analyst Jacqueline Harpp:

We’re ecstatic. Our slogan for this campaign was “band together” and that’s exactly what we did. Over the past 18 months we came together regardless of pay band, years of service and whether we worked in D.C. or the field. This vote reflects that spirit of unity.

Yesterday’s vote was the first time in GAO’s 86-year history that the agency’s analysts have voted for union representation. There are more than 1,800 analysts in the GAO bargaining unit. Analysts at the at GAO’s sister agency, the Congressional Research Service, also are represented by IFPTE.

After sweeping changes in personnel policy were imposed by agency management two years ago, the analysts began their organizing drive in early 2006. They held regular meetings at a downtown Washington, D.C., church, used personal vacation time to travel to field offices around the country, established a [3] [Band Together](#) website and produced an [4] [online video](#). [5] [This May](#), they turned in authorization cards signed by the majority of GAO analysts.

But rather than quickly agreeing on an election date, the agency brought in an [6] [outside legal firm](#) to help fight the organizing effort. GAO also challenged the union eligibility of hundreds of workers, claiming they were supervisors—and thus not eligible to join the union under current labor law.

[7] [In July](#), the GAO—an independent federal agency—and IFPTE reached an election agreement that included the challenged employees and other GAO employees as well.

Harpp says that following the election victory:

The next steps will be to elect a council, write a constitution, determine bargaining priorities and then sit down with management to negotiate a first contract.

With a nod to the analysts' expertise, IFPTE President Gregg Junemann says:

We're going to do everything we can to assist our new members at GAO, but the involvement of the national union will likely be limited. The analysts at GAO are experts at creating efficient organizations. You can bet that their bargaining surveys and their research will be data driven. This local union will be an example for other labor groups.

Says analyst Lise Levie:

We are looking forward to a great relationship with Comptroller General David Walker. The union will help us make GAO a true model agency.

## **GAO analysts vote for a union**

By [STEPHEN LOSEY](#)

September 20, 2007

The Government Accountability Office's analysts Wednesday voted by a 2-1 margin to organize and be represented by the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers.

It is the first time employees have unionized in GAO's 86-year history, the union said. The vote was 897 to 445. The bargaining unit will cover 1,813 employees.

"Our slogan for this campaign was 'band together,' and that's exactly what we did," said senior analyst Jacqueline Harpp, who was one of the union's election observers.

The analysts now will have to elect a council, write a constitution and determine their bargaining priorities before they can negotiate their first contract with GAO management.

There's no word yet on what will be on their agenda, however. Chris Langford, a GAO analyst who was involved in the union effort, said there have been no discussions about overturning the pay band system that in 2004 ended up reducing some analysts' salaries and directly led to the organization drive.

Instead, Langford said analysts want more of a say when future workplace changes are enacted. Many analysts were upset at how pay bands were adopted and felt like they were frozen out of the discussion.

"Nobody's talking about going back to the [General Schedule] system," Langford said. "Some people think the band system is good, some think it's bad. But most people don't think it was implemented right."



Langford said the union local for GAO employees will hold meetings and survey analysis to find out what's on their mind. He said the union will also reach out to analysts who disagreed with the organizing drive and listen to their concerns.

"If we start excluding people, we won't get anywhere with that attitude," Langford said. "But people are excited to see what happens now."

## GAO Analysts Sign Up for Union

Posted By [Editor](#) On September 20, 2007 @ 1:03 pm In [Global](#) | [1 Comment](#)

*Mary Lu Carnevale reports on the GAO's new union.*

This clearly isn't a matter of the Democrats' more labor-friendly politics.

Analysts at the **Government Accountability Office**, the watchdog arm of Congress, voted 897-445 to join the [International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers](#).

What gave the union movement traction? Last year, the head of the GAO, Comptroller General **David Walker**, adopted a new personnel plan that emphasizes job performance and market pay rates when determining salaries. Under the system, some employees didn't get raises this year.

The [GAO Web site](#) doesn't mention the vote, but it does tout the agency's designation by the [Partnership for Public Service and American University's Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation](#) as one of the best places to work in the federal government.

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## **GAO analysts vote for union representation**

BY [Richard W. Walker](#)

Published on Sept. 20, 2007

**By a wide margin, analysts at the Government Accountability Office voted Sept. 19 to be represented by a labor union. The vote was 897 to 445 in favor of representation by the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers. About 1,813 GAO employees were eligible to vote in the election.**

**Jacqueline Harpp, a senior analyst at GAO and one of four official union observers during the vote count, said employees who supported the union were ecstatic about the results.**

**“Our slogan for this campaign was ‘band together,’ and that’s exactly what we did,” she said. “Over the past 18 months, we came together regardless of pay band, years of service and whether we worked in D.C. or the field. This vote reflects that spirit of unity.”**

**In a statement, Comptroller General David Walker, head of GAO, thanked the employees who took the time to vote and said GAO managers will bargain in good faith.**

**Employees will next elect a council, write a constitution, determine bargaining priorities and negotiate a first contract with GAO managers.**

**Union President Gregory Junemann said the national union’s involvement in the employees’ next steps will likely be limited. “The analysts at GAO are experts at creating efficient organizations,” he said. “You can bet that their bargaining surveys and their research will be data-driven.”**

**Last May, the federation filed a petition to form a union after more than half of GAO's analysts signed cards endorsing a vote on unionization. In voting to support the election, GAO analysts voiced concerns about issues relating to the agency's two-year-old pay-for-performance system.**

## **GAO Analysts Decide to Join Union**

Thursday, September 20, 2007

(09-20) 08:33 PDT WASHINGTON, (AP) --

Analysts at Congress' watchdog agency, the Government Accountability Office, voted early Thursday to join a union and have it negotiate with management.

Analysts voted 897-445 to join the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, a union that already represents workers at the Congressional Research Service, another legislative branch agency.

It's the first time in GAO's 86-year history that analysts have voted to join a union.

"The union will help us to make GAO a true model agency," said Lise Levie, a GAO analyst who was an election observer for the union.

Some analysts have complained about the decision by Comptroller General David Walker, head of the GAO, to move the agency away from the federal personnel structure and give more weight to market salary rates and job performance when determining pay. The change meant some employees did not receive a raise for 2007.

The analysts now will have to elect a council, write a constitution and then work with GAO's management to negotiate a first contract.

"GAO management will bargain in good faith," said Walker, who noted that 74 percent of eligible workers voted in the election.



## **GAO analysts decide to join union**

-- The Associated Press  
(Published: September 20, 2007)

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**inclusion** - <http://inclusionist.org/node/1169>

### **Policy Analysts Unionize**

A tip of the hat to the analysts at the Government Accountability Office (GAO) who **now have a union for the first time in GAO's history**. GAO analysts overwhelmingly voted, 897-445, to be represented by the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers. The IFPTE also represents workers at CEPR, EPI, and some other DC-based policy shops.

PS: If you're a policy analyst or advocate in DC and want to have a voice in your workplace, contact the folks at **IFPTE Local 70**.

# Fedsmith.com

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