

## GESTA President's Corner

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Dear Bargaining Unit Employee (BUE),

I hope that you have had great and safe Labor Day weekend, and that you were able to take some time to reflect on what Labor Day really means in America. For me Labor Day represents a day of remembrance of workers who have struggled and some of whom have died for worker's rights, dignity and decent working conditions. Internationally, worker's day, or May Day, is celebrated on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Personally, I am extremely grateful to all of the men and women who have come before us to improve our quality of life by working so hard to improve our working conditions. Many people tend to take for granted many of the improvements that have been made in our working conditions by unions, and yet there is so much more to be done. Sadly, to attempt to score political points there is too much vitriol by politicians against Federal employees. Some politicians not only want smaller government, but they want to reduce the pay and benefits, and worsen the working conditions of our employees. I understand the desire to limit costs; although, consider there are now more than 326 million people in the United States. Hence, we really need an adequately sized government to properly address the needs of our country and the people.

Unhappily, there are almost two dozen bills in the U.S. Congress against Federal employees. Some of the bills propose even more reductions in salary even though we have undergone what amounts to ~10% reduction in pay (consider the three years of zero cost of living increases and the 1% cost of living increase the two years after that). Some Congressional members want to reduce the number of Federal employees by 5% or 10%, but has anyone told them that we already went through a 5% reduction in the NASA workforce, through September 30, 2015? I really wonder if some Congressional leaders know or understand what we have been subjected to. NASA's workforce was reduced through fiscal year 2015, and reduction occurred through attrition; i.e., as employees retire some of those employee's positions were eliminated. What's really happened is that many employees had to take on extra work as many of those positions were eliminated.

One major working condition GESTA is currently negotiating with Management is the Employee Performance Communication System (EPCS) or the performance appraisal system, as it's more commonly referred to. Unfortunately, NASA Headquarters wants to implement the worst form of performance rating system no other Federal agency uses, which is a rather nonsensical and illogical three-tier rating for employee's critical elements and four tiers for employee's summary rating. The NASA proposed "hybrid" three tiers don't make sense, because it's not the typical three-tiers many Federal agency's use such as the 1, 2, and 3 Level's, rather it's a 1, 3, and 5 Level's with the 2 and 4 missing. The summary ratings are based on the average of critical element rating and have four tiers, i.e., 1, 3, 4 and 5. Such a system skews statistical results and unfairly prevents employees with one critical element from getting a four (4)

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summary rating. GESTA previously informed NASA Management of these problems and we've also informed the new Associate Administrator of human resources about the problem.

There is something you can personally do if you agree that NASA should have a better budget, and working conditions. As a U.S. citizen you can directly petition the U.S. Congress regarding the NASA budget and Federal employee issues such as the salary freezes we have been asked to endure. Your petition can be a letter, an e-mail or a telephone call. Your petition must be done on your own time and on your own personal equipment, e.g., your own computer, telephone, cell phone, etc., and you cannot use government owned equipment regarding your petition and you cannot do it during working hours. Such a petition is permissible and is covered in the U.S. Constitution and in our contract with Management. A citizen's petition to their Congressional leaders does not violate the Hatch Act, which addresses partisan elections and candidacy; campaigning; fundraising; political activity; and so forth.

Please be aware that GESTA does not fund or contribute to any candidate or political action committees (PACs), and that has been our policy for over two decades. Since we have members who are Independents, Republicans, Democrats, etc. we prefer to communicate with our national leaders through letters, e-mails and yearly visits regarding employee issues.

GESTA ensures that Management abides by our contract; we continue to work to ensure that our employees have due process; we ensure that our employees are treated fairly and equitably; we provide representational services to our bargaining unit employees; and we collectively bargain with Management on behalf of our employees. Imagine if there was no union and if there was no due process; no one to bargain over our working conditions; no contract; and no one to ensure that our employees were treated fairly and equitably. Just imagine, where would you be? Personally, I would hate to think of it, but that is exactly what is happening to millions of employees in the U.S. and in other countries around the world.

It is still a great time to join GESTA as a dues paying member, to get even more benefits, and to help in supporting one of the most worthwhile organizations entirely and solely dedicated to you and your fellow employees. If you are a non-supervisory scientist, engineer or technician, then you are covered by our bargaining agreement with Management. Become a dues paying member and get a \$50 check. Get other BUE's to join as dues paying members and collect \$50 per new BUE up to a total of \$300. Your \$50 check is collectable during your swearing in during one of our general membership meetings held monthly.

Finally, please remember our fellow Americans in Texas who have suffered as a result of hurricane Harvey and please donate generously.

In Solidarity, *Anel Flores*, IFPE Local 29 President