



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 18, 2011

Should OMB Employees Be Unionized?

ABC News reports:

Peter Winch, deputy director of field services and education for the American Federation of Government Employees, confirmed to [ABC News](#) that his organization, which is affiliated with the AFL-CIO, has been meeting with employees of the OMB in the past few months to discuss their work conditions and desire to have more say over the conditions of their employment.



Enough employees — more than 30% — are interested for a union to be formed, he said. The union would be for mid- and lower-level employees.

According to Winch, employees at the OMB are generally content with their positions, but some would like to have more input regarding their working conditions. "A lot of people are expected to come in on weekends and work late," he explained. "They don't mind that culture because they feel they are engaged in very important work, but they would like more recognition for the fact that they do make those sacrifices."

CNN [notes](#) that the American Federation of Government Employees already represents 600,000 federal and D.C. government workers, and is also in the process of representing TSA employees, who have been given permission to unionize.

The union is seeking to represent approximately 400 career employees at the OMB. *Business Week* [explains](#), "It would not represent any political appointees, supervisors or managers."

In compliance with the process of unionization, last week OMB employees filed a petition for an election with the Federal Labor Relations Authority's Washington, D.C. regional office.

While the OMB is supposed to remain a neutral agency, the Obama administration is reportedly "a strong supporter of the right of workers to organize," reported Kenneth Baer, OMB communications director. Seemingly hoping to assuage any concerns, he added,

It is up to the people working at any bargaining unit to decide if they want to join a union or not. Whatever the decision of these employees may be, we are committed to working together to serve the President and the American people.

Regardless of Baer's assertions, many are unconvinced. *National Review's* Andrew Stiles [writes](#), "[It] will be interesting to see whether the White House takes being 'required to stay neutral' as seriously as Senate Democrats do in terms of their being 'required to produce a budget.'"

Interestingly, even progressive hero Franklin D. Roosevelt warned of the dangers of public-sector and government unions. In a 1937 letter to Luther Steward, president of the National Federation of Public



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Employees, FDR [wrote](#):

Meticulous attention should be paid to the special relationships and obligations of public servants to the public itself and to the Government.

All Government employees should realize that the process of collective bargaining, as usually understood, cannot be transplanted into the public service. It has its distinct and insurmountable limitations when applied to public personnel management. The very nature and purposes of Government make it impossible for administrative officials to represent fully or to bind the employer in mutual discussions with Government employee organizations. The employer is the whole people, who speak by means of laws enacted by their representatives in Congress. Accordingly, administrative officials and employees alike are governed and guided, and in many instances restricted, by laws which establish policies, procedures, or rules in personnel matters.

Upon employees in the Federal service rests the obligation to serve the whole people, whose interests and welfare require orderliness and continuity in the conduct of Government activities. This obligation is paramount. Since their own services have to do with the functioning of the Government, a strike of public employees manifests nothing less than an intent on their part to prevent or obstruct the operations of Government until their demands are satisfied. Such action, looking toward the paralysis of Government by those who have sworn to support it, is unthinkable and intolerable.

FDR's warning has clearly been ignored, as most federal employees are now permitted to unionize. However, they are prohibited from going on strike and do not have direct bargaining rights over wages and most benefits, notes *Business Week*.

According to *The Blaze*, it was the goal of the administration to keep the unionization of the OMB relatively quiet, as indicated by the release of the news story on a Friday:

Usually, when an organization wants to release news without really making it news, it will do so on Friday evening. So maybe it's not surprising that it wasn't until late Friday that a branch of the AFL-CIO confirmed that the Office of Management and Budget — the White House office in charge of number-crunching — could soon unionize.

If the OMB's petition is approved by the Federal Labor Relations Authority, a vote could come as early as this summer.



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