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# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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March 27, 2014

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General  
Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

The last few years have been challenging for federal employees. They have endured a three-year pay freeze, unpaid furloughs, and a government shutdown. In addition, their pay and benefits have been cut by nearly \$140 billion to help reduce the nation's budget deficit. The 1% pay increase that became effective at the beginning of this year does not begin to make up for the losses they have incurred.

These events have taken their toll on federal worker morale. According to the Partnership for Public Service, federal workforce satisfaction and commitment levels have fallen to historic lows.<sup>1</sup> The Partnership's 2013 Best Places to Work data show significant declines in federal employee satisfaction with pay, training and development opportunities, and rewards and advancement opportunities.<sup>2</sup> The Partnership also found that the federal government has trailed behind the private sector with respect to worker satisfaction for the last five years.<sup>3</sup>

Stakeholders, including federal employee organizations, have noted that federal workers have become increasingly dissatisfied with their employment, and that this may be compromising the federal government's ability to serve the American people.

In his fiscal year 2015 budget proposal, President Obama acknowledged the need to improve federal employee satisfaction and ensure that the federal workforce is "engaged,

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<sup>1</sup> Partnership for Public Service, *Ten Years of the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government Rankings* (Dec. 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Partnership for Public Service, *The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government: 2013 Rankings* (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Partnership for Public Service, *Ten Years of the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government Rankings* (Dec. 2013).

innovative, and committed to continuous improvement.”<sup>4</sup> The President also made employee satisfaction and engagement a key element of his Management Agenda for creating a 21st Century Government.<sup>5</sup>

We request that GAO study recent trends in federal employee morale, including possible root causes and steps the federal government can take to improve engagement. Employee engagement has been defined as “a heightened connection between employees and their work, their organization, or the people they work for or with.”<sup>6</sup> This objective goes “beyond basic job satisfaction to employees finding personal meaning in their work, taking pride in what they do and where they do it, and having the feeling that their organization values them.”<sup>7</sup>

In particular, we would like GAO to address the following questions:

1. What have been recent trends in federal employee morale and engagement based on the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) and other available data broken out by grade level, position, and other demographic attributes?
2. To the extent that they can be determined, what are the possible root causes underlying the trends in federal employee morale and engagement?
3. What has been the impact of federal employee morale and engagement on recruitment and retention, employee performance and productivity, and achievement of agency mission?
4. How, if at all, are selected agencies acting on the results of their FEVS engagement measures, including incorporating key drivers of engagement into their daily management practices?
5. To what extent is the Office of Personnel Management providing tools and other resources to help agencies improve employee engagement and do agencies find this assistance helpful?
6. For agencies that have significantly improved employee engagement, what lessons have been learned, especially as they relate to improved individual and organizational performance?
7. What efforts are being undertaken to implement the President’s fiscal year 2015 management initiative, and what are the initial results of those efforts?

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<sup>4</sup> Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2015* (Mar. 4, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Merit Systems Protection Board, *The Power of Employee Engagement* (Sept. 2008).

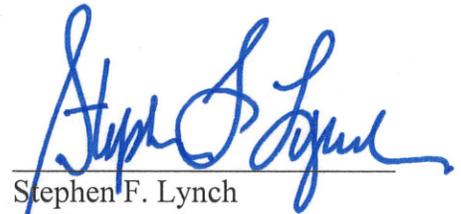
<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

Thank you for your attention to this request. Please direct any questions to Lena Chang  
at (202) 225-5051.

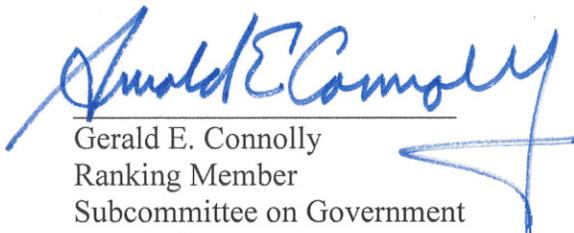
Sincerely,



Elijah E. Cummings  
Ranking Member



Stephen F. Lynch  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Federal  
Workforce, U.S. Postal  
Service, and the Census



Gerald E. Connolly  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Government  
Operations

cc: The Honorable Darrell E. Issa, Chairman  
The Honorable Blake Farenthold, Chairman, Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, U.S.  
Postal Service and the Census  
The Honorable John L. Mica, Chairman, Subcommittee on Government Operations