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## *Unions*

### **Alliance of Groups, Unions Launches Effort to Promote Professional Integrity**

An alliance of professional associations and unions representing more than 4 million workers May 21 launched a Web site aimed at increasing awareness of professional codes of conduct, ethics, and integrity and encouraging scientists, teachers, nurses, and others to put them into practice in their work.

The initial focus of the project (<http://www.pftpi.org>) will be to invite employees to share stories and experiences related to “professional integrity and its connection to the public interest,” Professionals for the Public Interest, which includes eight professional associations and 10 national unions, said. The Web site, which has been in the planning stage for about a year, also contains online resources for professionals, including organizations' codes of ethics and conduct.

President Obama on March 9 addressed one of the coalition's issues—maintaining the scientific integrity of federal government professionals—in an executive memorandum directing the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy to develop recommendations for presidential action “to guarantee scientific integrity throughout the executive branch.” The directive was seen as a response to reported incidents of misrepresentation, suppression, and alteration by Bush administration officials of findings and research by government agency scientists.

“We expect that visitors to the site will contribute to the national conversation that President Obama sparked not just in science, but across the professions,” Paul Almeida, president of the AFL-CIO Department for Professional Employees, which includes most of the unions in the coalition, said at a news conference. The disciplines represented range from science and engineering to arts, education, and social services.

Professionals in both the public and private sectors are experiencing various pressures and challenges to the integrity of their work, leaders of the alliance, which began in March 2007, said.

Among the examples cited were teachers who advocate for smaller class sizes, nurses who push for minimum staffing levels, and librarians who argue against censorship of free speech.

“There have been jobs lost and careers damaged, sometimes irreparably,” when librarians have adhered to their code of professional ethics in the midst of “bitter political battles in their communities,” Mary Ghikas, senior associate executive director of the American Library Association, said.

The coalition “brings the power of several organizations together” to strengthen professional integrity and provide a voice for professionals who advance the public interest, said Mark Frankel, a fellow at the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The group hopes to learn lessons from workers' stories and share them with a wider audience, Frankel said.

Although the alliance of professional associations and unions began in March 2007 “when we had a hostile administration,” its efforts are continuing now that a friendly administration is in office because control of the government could change again, Almeida said.

The concept of uniting labor organizations that represent workers and associations with other professional purposes around the common goal of “defending professional integrity against external pressures in the interests of the public” continues to be an important theme, he said.

### **Conflict Between Unions, Professions Denied**

Too often, professionals who speak out against a misguided public policy or problems in the workplace are perceived as “maybe a whistleblower or just an individual who has an ax to grind with their employer,” said Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, an AFL-CIO affiliate that represents 1.4 million educators.

“This is not about what goes on ... in the individual workplace,” she said.

“We see ourselves as a union of professionals,” Weingarten said. “The simple fact is that the people who do the work care more than anyone else, know more than anyone else, and can do more than anyone else about improving public services,” she said.

Registered nurses “run up against a long-held perception that you can't be true to the profession and be a union member,” Ann Converso, a registered nurse in Buffalo, N.Y., and president of United American Nurses, said. “I've never understood that,” she said, noting that her collective bargaining agreement protects her job if she speaks out and advocates for patients' interests.

### **No Litigation, Complaints Anticipated**

A section of the Web site invites employees to submit stories about their “experiences,

challenges or triumphs in defending professional integrity against external pressures.”

The stories will be edited for confidentiality and entered into an “Integrity at Work” contest, with the winners to be selected by a panel of judges from member organizations and highlighted on the Web site on Labor Day. The public then will be invited to vote for the best story.

In addition, Professionals for the Public Interest may share stories and related information with appropriate public agencies while maintaining professionals' confidentiality, Almeida said.

The aim in inviting professionals to share their stories is to “spark a widespread discussion” of integrity issues, not to generate information that could lead to filing federal whistleblower cases or other litigation or administrative complaints, David Cohen, executive director of the Department for Professional Employees, said.

“That's not going to happen as a consequence of this, Cohen said. “In fact, the stories will be edited for anonymity,”he said.

Other unions in the alliance include American Federation of Musicians, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employes, International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, Office and Professional Employees International Union, Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, and United Steelworkers.

By Larry Swisher