

Unfair Government Competition with Private Geospatial Firms

There is a dangerous trend toward “in-sourcing” activities and building in-house government capabilities at the expense of private sector jobs creation in the geospatial market. Federal agencies are purchasing equipment, in some cases with “Stimulus” (ARRA) funding, to build their own agency capacity to conduct what are considered commercial activities: mapping, surveying, and charting. Agencies are also bringing contracted geospatial and remote sensing services into the government for performance by Federal employees.

MAPPS has documented examples of stimulus money being spent for in-house government agency capabilities to directly compete with private geospatial firms, and lessen the reliance by Federal agencies to contract out for products and services available from commercial sources. In this difficult economy, government agencies should be utilizing private geospatial firms to the maximum extent practical, not directly competing against them.

Not only do Federal agencies duplicate the private sector business activities, but many engage in unfair government competition with the private sector. Each time there has been a White House Conference on Small Business, one of the top issues identified by American entrepreneurs is unfair government-sponsored competition with the private sector.

Congress has tied the hands of agencies in utilizing the private sector. In March 2009, Congress passed language in the Omnibus Appropriations Act, Public Law 111-5, allowing “in-sourcing” while restricting contracting out to the private sector. In October, Congress passed language in the Defense Authorization, Public Law 111-84, placing a moratorium on A-76 public-private competitions. In December, Congress passed language in the 2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act, Public Law 111-117, allowing “in-sourcing” while restricting contracting out to the private sector. MAPPS recommends Congress not place restrictions on the private sector’s ability to compete for contracts. A robust, qualified and competent private sector exists within the mapping profession and government at all levels should utilize it, not duplicate or compete with it.

Representative John J. “Jimmy” Duncan, Jr. (R-TN) and Senator John Thune (R-SD) introduced the “Freedom from Government Competition Act” (FFGCA) in the 111th Congress. H.R. 2682 and S. 1167 will codify a “Yellow Pages” test. That is a simple test that has been applied by Mayors and Governors, both Democrat and Republican, that says if you can find firms in the Yellow Pages providing products or services that the government is also providing, then the service should be subject to market competition to break up the government monopoly and prove a better value to the taxpayer. This bill will not only make government smaller and more efficient, but it can save up to \$28 billion annually.

ACTION REQUESTED: MAPPS respectfully urges members of Congress to offer amendments to appropriations bills and authorization legislation calling for utilization of private sector to the maximum extent practical for geospatial activities. MAPPS opposes limits on the ability of agencies to utilize the private sector and urges members of Congress to reject such provisions. Additionally, Representatives should cosponsor H.R. 2682 by contacting Don Walker in Representative Duncan’s office at 5-5435. Senators should cosponsor S. 1167 by contacting Adrian Arnakis in Senator Thune’s office at 4-2321. For more information, contact John Byrd, MAPPS Government Affairs Manager, at jbyrd@mapps.org or (703) 787-6996.