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Republicans: If You Want to “CLEAN UP” Government, Open a Phonebook

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In April, several senate Democrats, led by Maryland’s Barbara Mikulski, introduced a bill to convert some contracted work to federal performance and otherwise prevent the government from competing federal jobs with the private sector.

Mikulski’s “CLEAN UP Act” - short for “Correction of Longstanding Errors in Agencies Unsustainable Procurements Act” - drew applause from unions and criticism from industry groups. But now Senate Republicans are getting in on the act with their own bill designed to do the opposite.

Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., introduced the “Freedom From Government Competition Act” yesterday. The bill mandates federal agencies rely on the private sector for commercially available goods and services.

The bill would codify what Thune calls the “yellow pages test,” meaning if government employees perform tasks found in the phonebook, then agencies should compete those jobs with the private sector.

Thune said in a statement:

This bill would ensure the government isn’t involving itself in areas that duplicate products and services that are available in the private sector and in doing so protecting taxpayer interests. This legislation would give private companies the chance to do the work which has been shown to save taxpayer money.

However, Thune’s news release also claims the bill will “not mandate the privatization of any federal service and would protect those activities which are inherently governmental, such as certain national defense and homeland security functions, prosecutions, foreign policy and activities to bind the United States to take or not to take some action by contract, policy, regulation, authorization, or order.”

Thune’s co-sponsors on the legislation are Senators James Inhofe, R-Okla., Pat Roberts, R-Kan., Sam Brownback, R-Kan. and David Vitter, R-La.