



Contractors or Feds: How will Congress Decide?

By Matthew Weigelt

Sep 20, 2011

The administration's top procurement policy official has warned senators their loyalty to federal employees will soon be challenged. The coming demand to reduce federal spending will show whether senators approach the issue thoughtfully or haphazardly, said Dan Gordon, administrator of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy, speaking to Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii) in a hearing Sept. 20.

"There are those, who, I think, in a myopic way focus on reducing the size of the federal government and what they really mean is reducing the size of the federal workforce," Gordon said. "Your vigilance in thinking about, and preserving, the appropriate balance between work done by federal employees and by contractors, I think, will be tested."

Gordon testified before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee's Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia Subcommittee. Akaka is the panel's chairman.

Gordon said arbitrary cuts that may happen across government will force agency officials to revert back to a heavy reliance on private-sector companies to help their agencies carry out their missions.

Federal officials would have to hand out work, "in an unjustified and unthoughtful way, to contractors to do work that, upon reflection, the agencies recognize should be done by a federal employee," he said.

In August, Gordon released a policy letter on the meaning of the term inherently governmental functions, or work that only federal employees should be doing, such as setting federal policy or doing interrogations for the government. The letter gives agency officials the definition of inherently governmental work. It also gives managers tests for deciding whether their employees themselves have the enough knowledge about certain work and are able to oversee a contractor doing jobs that are critical to the agency meeting its mission successfully.

Congress and the Obama administration are going through agencies looking for cuts and savings. The bipartisan Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction has orders to trim \$1.5 trillion from the federal budget during the next decade. Its proposed cuts are due by Nov. 23. President Barack Obama announced his proposals Sept. 19.