



Lawmakers Want Competitive Sourcing on the Table

By Matthew Weigelt Jul 19, 2011

Twenty-one House members have urged Appropriations Committee Chairman Rep. Harold Rogers (R-Calif.) to allow agencies to put up fiscal 2012 funds for public/private competitions.

A group of Republican Study Committee members asked Rogers to keep the remaining funding bills this year free from "provisions inhibiting the utilization of the private sector," according to the July 14 letter.

"Government performance of commercial activities adversely affects the U.S. economy by duplicating activities available from commercial providers," they wrote.

They also said keeping commercial work in house increases the government's payroll and reduces tax revenues paid to the government. By doing commercial work, agencies even divert money from inherently governmental functions, or work that only a federal employee can perform.

Agencies have more than 850,000 employees in positions that are commercial in nature, they wrote, citing data gathered from Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act reporting. Fewer than 10 percent of those positions have undergone the "Yellow Pages test," according to the letter. A position may be determined as commercial if an agency can find a company in the Yellow Pages.

"That activity should be reviewed for performance by a tax-paying, for-profit company, not a government entity," they wrote.

This year, the House has passed several fiscal 2012 appropriations bills and the fiscal 2012 National Defense Authorization Act that allow for competitive sourcing, which is based on the policy known as the Office of Management and Budget A-76. The Senate has not passed any appropriations bills.

However, the Appropriations Committee soon will debate two spending bills that already contain provisions banning competitive sourcing. The 21 House members hope to change that.

Across the government, competitive sourcing continues to be controversial. Some Obama administration officials say the government has outsourced too much work to the private sector, leaving the federal workforce depending on those contractors. The government needs employees with knowledge about its agencies' operations, instead of overly relying on companies, they say. Meanwhile, other federal officials say agencies have hurt the economy in lean times by insourcing too much work, particularly work that isn't inherently governmental in nature.

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