



Outsourcing, Insourcing and Partisanship: Lawmaker Seeks Cooperation, Not Conflict

Rep. Connelly suggests hearings on insourcing federal work and poaching contractors' employees

By Matthew Weigelt

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Northern Virginia's House representative hopes the intense issue of insourcing government work may get a bipartisan touch in his House subcommittee.

Rep. Gerry Connelly (D-Va.), ranking member of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee's Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations, and Procurement Reform Subcommittee, sent a memo Jan. 20 to the subcommittee's chairman Rep. James Lankford (R-Okla.), laying out the procurement and IT issues as areas of common interest.

"Outsourcing, in some cases, has proved to be more cost effective and efficient," while some jobs must be done by federal employees, Connelly wrote in a memo that accompanied his letter to the chairman. "Striking the right balance between public and private workforce and providing the proper oversight and management for both is of paramount importance," he added.

Connelly suggested hearings on insourcing federal work and the poaching of contractors' employees when agencies bring work in-house. The subcommittee should also consider requiring metrics to compare insourcing to cost-reductions and creating a process to analyze decisions on insourcing, instead of deciding arbitrarily.

The Obama administration is expected to soon release the final policy guidance on defining governmental functions and when agencies should be insourcing work that isn't inherently governmental for federal employees to do. The initial proposal was released a year ago, and it raised a lot of controversy.

At the same time, the Defense Department and other agencies have set policies and goals to take work away from contractors, causing companies and business groups to react aggressively. The previous Congress drove the insourcing initiative too. It pushed for greater insourcing in its appropriations bills and other legislation, going as far as stopping competitions for government contracts between private-sector companies and federal employees, which is referred to as competitive sourcing.

Last spring, the administration charted a course in its budget proposal showing that insourcing was a top priority for many departments—particularly DOD. Defense Secretary Robert Gates moved forward on that issue last summer to cut back on how it relies on contractors to reduce DOD's spending.

In the government IT realm, Connelly also is interested in holding hearings on how the government monitors threats to its technology infrastructure and cybersecurity overall. He said the subcommittee also should review the potential savings from consolidating federal data centers through cloud computing.

"These are issues I have identified based on my past two years in Congress and two decades of experience in the private sector working with the business, procurement, and technology community in Northern Virginia and across the country," Connelly wrote in the letter.

The full oversight committee is interested in these issues too, not just Lankford's subcommittee.

Committee chairman, Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) said this week, the key pieces of his agenda are procurement reforms, updating technology and tracking how programs are managed.

