

Union Praises Workforce Provisions in Appropriations Bill

By Elizabeth Newell

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The American Federation of Government Employees supports provisions in a fiscal 2011 appropriations bill aimed at managing the federal and contractor workforce.

The fiscal 2011 Financial Services and General Government appropriations bill, approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee, would strengthen acquisition procedures to encourage the use of federal employees -- not contractors -- for tasks considered closely associated with inherently governmental functions.

AFGE National President John Gage said the legislation would ensure jobs that are closely associated with inherently governmental functions were performed "to the maximum extent possible by reliable and experienced federal employees."

The Office of Management and Budget's Office of Federal Procurement Policy deems job functions inherently governmental when they are so intimately related to the public interest that they must be performed only by federal employees. But applying this definition in practice, and establishing which federal functions fall under the more nebulous "closely associated" category, has long been an area of difficulty for agencies and lawmakers. Overseeing and evaluating contractors, preparing budgets and reorganizations, and interpreting and developing regulations, however, frequently are considered functions closely associated with inherently governmental duties.

The provisions in the bill also would improve the reliability of service contractor inventories. The fiscal 2010 Omnibus Appropriations Act established the requirement that all civilian agencies create service contractor inventories. The fiscal 2008 Defense Authorization Act included a similar requirement for the Defense Department.

According to AFGE, Sens. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., and Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., have worked to make sure agency inventories of service contractors are accurate and comprehensive. Among the changes implemented is a requirement that services procured through task orders are included in the databases and that agencies use concrete data rather than estimates of how many service contractors are being used.

"Reliable and comprehensive contractor inventories promote good management and ensure that agencies can generate savings from their vast contractor workforces instead of just their in-house workforces," Gage said.

The appropriations bill provides \$6 million to create and maintain these contractor databases, coming from the \$17 million Federal Acquisition Workforce Initiatives Fund. The fund appropriates money in support of governmentwide investments in the acquisition workforce. These investments include \$4 million for curriculum development and certifications management; \$2 million for management of acquisition workforce data and information technology needs; \$3 million for human capital support; and another \$2 million for a study of current and future acquisition workforce needs.