House Bill Would Create Federal GIS Administration and Restrict Procurements

On March 21, Congressman Doug Lamborn (R-CO) introduced legislation containing troubling provisions that could restrict the procurement of GIS and mapping services to specific types of private “firms” and have a negative impact on the Federal Government’s growing need to collect geospatial data.

The “Map it Once, Use it Many Times Act” (H.R. 4233) has language specifically “encouraging the acquisition of geospatial data, products, technology, and services from private geospatial firms,” which it defines as “a private individual, firm, partnership, corporation, association, or other legal entity organized and permitted by law to engage in geospatial activities, that engages in such activities—(A) as a regular course of trade or business; and (B) with the principal objective of livelihood and profit.” This usage of the term “firms” reflects language in the restrictive procurement policies of the Brooks Architect-Engineers Act of 1972 (40 U.S. Code §§ 1101-1104), which defines firms as licensed A&E entities, and has been used in the past to advocate for limiting GIS and mapping to only those eligible A&E firms. Also, the extreme private-sector focus of the bill could seemingly limit the ability of researchers, college and university consortia, and/or other public entities to engage in geography-related contracts from the federal government.

The legislation also would create a National Geospatial Technology Administration (NGTA) within USGS. This new entity would be headed by a presidentially-appointed official who would report directly to the Secretary of the Interior.

Under the bill, one of the primary missions of the NGTA would be to establish and maintain a National Geospatial Database for “all lands owned or managed by the United States, all Indian trust parcels, and, to the extent possible, all non-Federal lands in each State.” The text also would restrict the mapping and GIS needed for the Database largely to firms and specifies geospatial data which should be included in the Database, such as: cadastral information; information on transportation networks; hydrography; information on the geographic areas of governmental and administrative units; and other geospatial data determined to be useful in carrying out national priorities, including data related to economic development, management of the home mortgage system, smart energy grids, homeland security, emergency preparedness and response, the delivery of health-care services, and the maintenance of public works and other infrastructure systems. The database is to be made available to the public (likely through user fees) – except, of course, for the ubiquitous carve outs for national security purposes.

The NGTA would assume responsibility for a wide-range of Federal geospatial activities, including work currently carried out by USGS; other Department of the Interior agencies; the National Forest System (which is under the Department of Agriculture); and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (which reports to the Department of Commerce).

The legislation would also create a National Geospatial Policy Commission (NGPC), which would be charged with developing a National Geospatial Data Plan; overseeing coordination to avoid redundancy in the performance of geospatial activities; converting “geospatial activities to performance by private firms when possible”; and reducing “the costs to the Federal government of geospatial activities not eliminated or converted to performance by private geospatial firms.”

The bill has been referred to four House Committees and two Subcommittees, but no hearings have been scheduled to date.

The primary website for the review process is: http://www.census.gov/acs/www/about_the_survey/acs_program_review/ and questions about the review process and/or comments or submissions can be sent to: acs.program.review@census.gov.

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