

Senator: Contracting provisions will be passed in next jobs bill

By Elizabeth Newell enewell@govexec.com March 4, 2010

A bill to make it easier for small businesses to win federal contracts on Thursday cleared the Senate committee where similar provisions have stalled, and the panel's leader said she is confident the legislation will become law.

The Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee unanimously passed the Small Business Contracting Revitalization Act ([S. 2989](#)). The measure aims to address four key areas: contract bundling, subcontracting, acquisition, and small business size and status integrity. Among its provisions is a requirement that acquisition officials review contracts worth more than \$2 million to see if they could be broken into pieces more accessible to small businesses.

The bill also would increase oversight of prime contractors that team with small businesses. Reacting to testimony from small business owners who told the committee they were disproportionately affected by late payments, the lawmakers included a provision designed to ensure prime contractors compensate small business subcontractors promptly. Another provision would aim to assist small businesses partnering in an effort to win large contracts.

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"Granting small businesses government contracts is one of the easiest, most inexpensive and most immediate ways we can help increase sales for small businesses and boost job creation on Main Street," said Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., chairwoman of the committee. "When large businesses get government contracts they can potentially absorb that new work into their workforce. When small businesses get government work they must staff up to meet the increased demand -- and that is exactly what we need to put Americans back to work."

Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, called the legislation "long overdue" and said it will go a long way toward ensuring agencies meet the statutory goal of awarding 23 percent of contract dollars to small firms.

"We're relying on small business to lead us out of this economic downturn, and it's all the more important we do everything we can to give them the resources and the tools," Snowe said. "Opening up federal contracting opportunities is clearly paramount among them. There are an infinite number of opportunities for small business, but we know there have been an exceptional number of barriers... that have denied small businesses those opportunities."

This is not the first time the committee has tried to tackle the problem of contract bundling, but Landrieu said there are several differences between this attempt and past efforts.

"First of all, this one is going to pass," Landrieu said. "And it's going to pass with strong bipartisan support."

Landrieu noted the committee unanimously approved all five bills that it has marked up this Congress. Senate leaders are likely to accept the committee's entire legislative package in the next jobs bill given the strong bipartisan support, she said.

"I'm really proud, in a sea of too much partisan work, this committee is doing its work for small business in America without regard to party lines," Landrieu said.

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