

Coalition of Geospatial Organizations

January 6, 2009

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Leader and Madam Speaker:

In recent years, there has been explosive growth in the use of geospatial data in the U.S. economy. The Federal Geographic Data Committee's 2006 Annual Report reports that as much as 90% of government information has a geospatial information component. The Geospatial Information and Technology Association reports that up to 80% of the information managed by business is connected to a specific location. While a 1993 survey by the Office of Management and Budget found total annual geospatial expenditures in federal agencies alone was close to \$4 billion, there is no current, accurate accounting of the government's annual investment. A recent study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies estimated that at least \$30 billion is generated by geospatial-related companies annually. The geospatial sector has steadily increased by 35% a year, with the commercial side growing at an incredible rate of 100% annually. The U.S. Department of Labor predicts that the geospatial sector is one of the three technology areas that will create the most jobs in the coming decade.

Despite this extraordinary growth and the near-ubiquitous presence of geospatial data in government and the private sector, Congress does not have a committee or subcommittee with primary jurisdiction over geospatial activities. Rather, responsibility for oversight and authorization of Federal geospatial activities is spread among more than 30 House and Senate committees and subcommittees.

The Coalition of Geospatial Organizations (COGO) is a coalition of 15 national professional societies, trade associations, and membership organizations in the geospatial field,

representing more than 30,000 individual producers and users of geospatial data and technology. We are writing to respectfully request that a subcommittee with primary oversight jurisdiction over Federal geospatial activities be established in both the House and Senate so that the taxpayers' investment is both efficient and strategic.

Geospatial activities have benefited from oversight by Congress and the Executive Branch on a bipartisan basis. The following are a few highlights:

- Executive Order 12906, "Coordinating Geographic Data Acquisition and Access: The National Spatial Data Infrastructure", was issued by President Clinton on April 11, 1994. This created the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) as a strategic investment of the Federal government and established the Department of the Interior as the lead agency in the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC).
- A National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) report, requested by Congress, was released in January, 1998. "Geographic Information for the 21st Century Building- A Strategy for the Nation" called for a reorganization of the Executive Branch agencies in order to improve coordination within the Federal government and with state and local government, the private sector, and the academic community.
- Two hearings were held in 2003 and 2004 by the Subcommittee on Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations and the Census of the House Committee on Government Reform. These hearings identified the challenges and shortcomings of current Federal geospatial coordination. This subcommittee was later disbanded.
- At the request of the House Subcommittee, the Government Accountability Office investigated Federal geospatial activities and reported "efforts have not been fully successful in reducing redundancies in geospatial investments" and "federal agencies are still independently acquiring and maintaining potentially duplicative and costly data sets and systems. Until these problems are resolved, duplicative geospatial investments are likely to persist.
- In response to these hearings and the GAO report, the Bush Administration established a "Geospatial Line of Business" initiative. However, it has not been able to accurately account for annual federal geospatial expenditures.
- Earlier this year, Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne established the National Geospatial Advisory Committee (NGAC) to "provide advice and recommendations related to management of Federal and national geospatial programs, the development of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure, and the implementation of Office of Management and Budget Circular A-16 and Executive Order 12906".

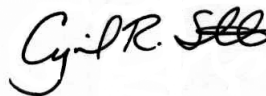
We believe the oversight, coordination, efficiency and utilization of geospatial data to enhance the quality of life of the American people would be enhanced by the establishment of a

subcommittee in the House and Senate, respectively, with primary jurisdiction over these activities. Whereas the FGDC is chaired by and the NGAC reports to the Department of the Interior, a subcommittee of the House Committee on Natural Resources and the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources would be appropriate. Given that geospatial activities are part of the mission of more than 40 federal agencies, and primary responsibility for OMB Circular A-16, Executive Order 12906 and Geospatial Lines of Business rests in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), a subcommittee in the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs would also be appropriate.

COGO is not asking that a new and dedicated subcommittee be created. However, including geospatial in the name and mission of an existing House and Senate Subcommittee would be a timely and appropriate action for the 111th Congress.

The member organizations of COGO deeply appreciate your consideration of this request and we pledge our assistance with the important issues Congress will address in the coming months. If you have any questions, please contact John Palatiello, Executive Director of MAPPS, (703) 787-6996 or john@mapps.org.

Sincerely,



Cy Smith
Chairman

