

Local Contract

U.S. Solicits Border Surveillance Technology Proposals

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The long-awaited request for proposals for the Department of Homeland Security's Secure Border Initiative-Net was released last week, marking the start of competition for a contract worth an estimated \$2 billion.

The contract will be used to develop and install surveillance technology along U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico. It is the technology element of the broader Secure Border Initiative, or SBI.

"Adding agents at the border is insufficient unless we also can give them the technology they need and unless we contain and remove the aliens they catch," the department's request for proposals says. Under the contract, the system must detect entries when they occur, identify who has entered, classify the level of threat and "effectively and efficiently respond to the entry," the statement says.

But key members of Congress have said they will not approve funding for the initiative until they are convinced it won't become what one called "another money pit."

The SBI-Net contract will have performance-based task and delivery orders. It will be for a three-year base period with three one-year options.

Three federal contractors -- Ericsson Inc., [Lockheed Martin Corp.](#) and [Raytheon Co.](#) -- have confirmed that DHS has qualified them to bid on the SBI-Net contract. [Northrop Grumman Corp.](#) also has confirmed its interest in the contract. [Boeing Co.](#), which has been considered a potential bidder, has declined to comment.

The department is working to meet a congressional request to prepare an overall strategy for immigration policy enforcement and border security by the end of April. Once the strategy is complete, the agency in June will begin to create an operational plan, Gregory Giddens, SBI-Net program manager, told the House Appropriations subcommittee on homeland security on April 6. It should all be done by September, when DHS intends to award the SBI-Net contract, he said.

"We have been charged with creating a strategy . . . but it does not stop there," Giddens said. "We have to take that strategy and turn that into programs and tasks and metrics and milestones, so that we can have accountability."

The subcommittee is considering the Bush administration's fiscal 2007 request for \$1.3 billion for the SBI, which includes \$100 million toward the SBI-Net technology component.

But Rep. Harold Rogers (R-Ky.), who chairs the subcommittee, said in an April 7 hearing that he wants to see a strategic plan for the SBI before approving the funding.

"How do you know that items such as \$100 million in technology and \$51 million in desert tactical infrastructure are needed, when you have yet to put into place an SBI

resource plan or award the primary SBI contract?" Rogers asked. "Without seeing your strategic plan, how do we know that this \$1.3 billion is the right investment and not just another money pit? When presented with questions like this, we apply a simple formula: No plan equals no money."

Rogers said the government has spent millions on "elaborate border technology that, eventually, has proven to be ineffective and wasteful," such as the Integrated Surveillance Intelligence System and America Shield Initiative. "How is the SBI not just another three-letter acronym for failure?" he asked.

Rep. Martin O. Sabo (D-Minn.), the subcommittee's ranking minority member, said he wants more strategic information about how the SBI would operate and how it would avoid the contracting problems of the past.

"Money isn't the only issue. There are complex policy and technical issues here that require expert leadership and well-thought programs on top of significant resources," Sabo said, adding that the budget request may be "just a drop in the bucket compared to what will be needed."