

**Testimony of Dr. Steven Jennings, University of Colorado-Colorado Springs
U.S. House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
Thursday, May 3, 2012**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

My name is Steve Jennings and I am Associate Professor of Geography and Acting Chair of the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (UCCS). My testimony today reflects my own views and opinions and not necessarily those of UCCS. I serve as Coordinator for the Colorado Geographic Alliance, which is part of a network of fifty state geographic alliances across the country. The alliance is focused on providing resources and professional development for elementary and secondary school teachers, ensuring the public understands the rationale behind comprehensive geography education in Colorado and throughout the country. I am a longtime member of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) and my testimony has been endorsed by the AAG and the American Geosciences Institute.

Mr. Chairman, I want to begin by congratulating you for your leadership in bringing geospatial issues to the fore through your introduction of H.R. 4233, the "Map it Once, Use it Many Times Act." While there are aspects of the legislation that trouble me and that I will focus on in this statement, there is no doubt that geospatial technologies and data are becoming increasingly vital to government agencies, non-profit organizations, colleges and universities, and the private sector. The U.S. Department of Labor has identified geotechnologies, such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Global Positioning Systems (GPS), photogrammetry, surveying, mapping, and remote sensing, as one of the three most important fields for high quality job growth with significant economic benefits.

It goes without saying that it is critical that the Federal government coordinate and properly utilize its geospatial assets. Therefore, I applaud your proposal in the legislation to create a National Geospatial Technology Administration within the United States Geological Survey. While some may differ about which existing Federal programs should be rolled into this new Administration, I do believe that the time has come for our national government to have a division focused on geospatial technologies and data.

While it is clearly time for Congress and the Executive Branch to give attention to geospatial assets, it is vital that the approach allow for efficient and accessible use of these assets. I am concerned that the focus of H.R. 4233 on the private sector could ultimately stifle innovation and jeopardize the development of a vibrant future geospatial workforce. Taken together, Titles II and III of the legislation require agency heads, "to the maximum extent possible," to convert "geospatial activities performed by or for the Federal government" to performance by "private geospatial firms," which the bill 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 requirement would seemingly be contrary to free market principles in that it would limit or even preclude government funding for geospatial activities with researchers, college and university consortia, non-profit organizations, and/or other public entities. I am deeply troubled by this aspect of H.R. 4233. It is my sense as Acting Chair of a geography department at a public university that if colleges and universities stop receiving federal funding for geospatial activities and there is no longer a place for geospatial scientists and experts outside of the private sector, the incentive for and ability of institutions of higher education to train the next generation of geospatial experts will be significantly diminished. This would be an especially-troublesome development given the recent emphasis on the need to protect our nation’s competitiveness by enhancing education efforts in STEM fields, including geography and geospatial education.

It is ultimately in the best interest of the private sector to have a robust system of geospatial education at our nation’s leading colleges and universities because it will reduce the amount businesses will have to spend on research and training. Title IV of H.R. 4233, which is aimed specifically at “Encouraging Private Enterprise,” lists as one of its purposes, “encouraging the development ... of a workforce that will meet future employment demands in the geospatial field.” The legislation, however, does not detail specific plans to aid in the development of our nation’s geospatial workforce, and it is my belief that by jeopardizing the ability of colleges and universities to receive Federal geospatial activity funding, the bill is actually undermining one of its stated goals.

I also want to make one other brief point about H.R. 4233. I am concerned about the proposed composition of the National Geospatial Policy Commission that would be created if the legislation were enacted. The bill specifies the inclusion of eleven citizen members on the Commission, but of these, only one would be appointed as representative of the university community. I am concerned that the lack of higher-education representation would limit the voice of the sector that is most-heavily focused on key geospatial research and training issues.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before your Subcommittee this morning. Geospatial technologies and data are already playing a major role in our nation’s capital and across all fifty states and they are poised to be increasingly central to the U.S. economy in the years to come. It is for this reason that I believe it will be critical to adopt a unified Federal approach that values the geospatial work of all sectors, including government agencies at all levels, higher-education institutions, non-profit organizations, and the private sector.