AMAZON HAS SPENT NEARLY $10 MILLION LOBBYING FOR DRONE DELIVERY

News / Airlines

Amazon wants a future where drones will drop off practically anything you order within 30 minutes. To push legislation that will ensure the skies are filled with its autonomous, flying delivery robots, the e-commerce giant has ramped up its lobbying strategy in Washington, D.C.

Amazon spent $9.4 million on lobbying in 2015, almost twice the total from the year before, according to records from the Center for Responsive Politics. That sum only includes money Amazon is legally compelled to disclose, The New York Times reports. The Times also notes that the company has gone from two lobbyists 15 years ago to 60 today, and is building a new office in D.C. to make room for them all.

The focus on lobbying has paid off. After winning Federal Aviation Administration approval last year to test its drones outdoors, Amazon has been pushing for legislation that would allow it to deploy autonomous drones from its warehouses. That would eliminate the greatest obstacle to nationwide drone delivery, the rules requiring drones to remain within a pilot's line of sight. The Senate Transportation Committee drafted a bill earlier this month that would ensure delivery

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drones rules within two years, the Times reports.

Amazon also is laying the groundwork for a drone superhighway in the sky. During the NASA UTM Convention last summer, the company proposed a plan to reserve airspace between 200 feet and 400 feet above the ground exclusively for fully autonomous drones. This airspace would be open only to pilotless aircraft that are self-operating and equipped with navigation and communication systems, as well as collision avoidance technology.

Many groups are rallying against Amazon's plans. Airlines and pilot groups oppose widespread drone delivery. Chris Dancy, a spokesman for the trade group Helicopter Association International, tells the Times that the proposed changes could increase risk to commercial, military, and other aircraft.

"The chances of a collision will go way up when you have more unmanned aircraft up," Dancy says.

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