

Amazon invests big money in Washington lobbying to get drone tech off the ground

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Amazon became Washington's fastest growing tech lobbyist in 2015, according to the New York Times. The biggest lobbying push is in the drone space, with Amazon vying to get drone delivery off the ground – pun intended – while others aim to keep them grounded.

Amazon spent \$9.4 million on lobbying in 2015, nearly doubling its 2014 spending. This includes money spent on easing regulations on drone use, as well as better roads, bigger delivery trucks and a stronger relationship with the U.S. Postal Service.



An Amazon Prime Air drone prototype

The jump is huge, but Amazon is still far from leading the tech lobby pack. The Times noted that Alphabet, Google's parent company, is the leader in tech lobbying, coming in millions ahead of Amazon.

Still, the rate at which Amazon is increasing its lobbying efforts, and investments such as an office for Amazon lobbyists, presses the idea that there's something to talk about here.

Amazon has been a posterchild for drone delivery efforts. Its years-long saga trying to get drone testing exemption through the Federal Aviation Administration became the story many folks were following to gauge if drone tech could be feasible in the commercial world.

Since Amazon received that coveted FAA exemption in 2015, commercial drone tech and solutions have grown. New hardware and software has been developed in an effort to push new commercial drone applications.

The company could see huge benefits from drone technology. It was already promoting its drone delivery service, Amazon Prime Air, even before the FAA allowed the company to test the technology. The potential for Amazon, and others like it (Walmart and others have shown interest in the delivery tech), is yet to be known, but surely is huge.

Drones still aren't fool-proof, and it's hard to tell when they ever will be. Sure, companies are working to get there, but the tech is so new, and the potential for unknown issues is just as big as the aforementioned commercial potential of drone tech.

According to the New York Times, while Amazon is lobbying to get delivery drones in the sky, some "drone makers argue that Amazon is pushing too hard, too fast. And airline and pilots groups have said opening the skies to more commercial drones, which are remote-controlled flying machines, could create safety risks."

And those are just the safety issues. There are other issues to keep in mind too, as Colin Sebastian, a senior analyst at Robert W. Baird, noted when speaking with The Times. "Amazon is disrupting huge industries; retail was a start, then the enterprise market with its cloud platform and now transportation logistics," Sebastian said.

The drone industry will keep developing newer, better, safer autonomous aircraft, and commercial applications will keep evolving. However, only time will tell what laws, if any, will be passed, and what commercial drone opportunities will be taken advantage of in the future.