"Naughty Or Nice?" App Bogs Down (Updated 11 27 13)

Insights

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We reported in July that the U.S. Labor Department had launched a "Fair Labor Data Challenge" asking application developers to create "an innovative tool that lets an informed consumer find out if a business is obeying the law when it comes to paying workers properly." As we said then, the actual solicitation goes well beyond information relating to "paying workers properly" and indeed expressly mentions providing access to information maintained by state licensing agencies and health boards, as well as unspecified environmental data.

The initiative appears to be foundering so far. For one thing, substantive questions or concerns raised by developers weeks ago have received either no public reply or no more than essentially, "We're looking into it."

Furthermore, developers' submissions were due by October 11, 2013, and a public-voting phase was scheduled to begin the next day. Whether any apps have been entered is not clear, but it does appear that no voting is underway. USDOL might ascribe this to what its website calls the "suspension of Federal government services." But the contest seems to be administered by an external, private organization known as ChallengePost, which has been described as "the official online 'challenge platform' of the U.S. federal government."

The Fair Labor Data Challenge is off to an inauspicious start. This is all-the-more reason to be concerned about its already-troubling aspects, including whether any resulting app can be relied upon to provide accurate information.

UPDATED 11 18 13: Following our October 16 post, the "Fair Labor Data Challenge" website was changed to say that a winner would be announced last Friday, November 15, notwithstanding that no period of public voting appears to have occurred. In fact, as of this writing, the revised website continues to say, "Voting opens soon".

In any event, so far as we are aware, there has been no public announcement of any winner.

UPDATED 11 27 13: So far as we have seen, there still has been neither public voting nor a public announcement of a winning app. However, today's "DOL News Brief" e-newsletter announced that Chief Innovation Officer Xavier Hughes, who appears to be responsible in some way for the "Fair Labor Data Challenge", was awarded a 2013 "FedMentor of the Year" award by an organization

called FedScoop, "a Government IT media company".