

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DANNY K. DAVIS SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

H.R. 4106 the "TELEWORK IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2007"

EXTENSION OF REMARKS

Tuesday, November 6, 2007

Mr. Speaker, telework continues to be under utilized by federal agencies. Improvements are needed to allow more federal employees to participate in telework programs. Today, Representative Sarbanes will join me in introducing legislation that will ensure that agencies make those much needed improvements. Telework provides numerous benefits including increased flexibilities for both employers and employees, continuity of operations during emergency events, and decreased energy use and air pollution.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) defines telework as "work arrangements in which an employee regularly performs officially assigned duties at home or other worksites geographically convenient to the residence of the employee." Many of the current federal programs were developed in response to a provision included in an appropriations bill enacted in October 2000. This law requires each executive branch agency to establish a telework policy under which eligible employees "may participate in telecommuting to the maximum extent possible without diminishing employee performance." Under the current legislative framework, the General Services Administration (GSA) and OPM have leading roles in implementing government-wide telework initiatives.

Unfortunately, telework is not being used to the extent it should be. According to OPM's most recent report, only about 119,000 of the approximately 1.8 million federal employees participated in telework in 2005. That figure represents only 6.6% of federal agency employees. Some of the barriers to telework include office coverage, organizational culture, management resistance, and technology security and funding. Today we want to examine ways to address these barriers and encourage teleworking.

On May 7, 2007, I, along with my colleagues, Rep. Kenny Marchant, full committee Chairman Henry Waxman, and Ranking Member Tom Davis sent a letter to 25 federal departments and agencies requesting information on the telework programs of those agencies. The letter was intended to help us better understand how well agency telework programs are working. What we found is that not only is telework inconsistently defined across agencies, many agencies, do not effectively measure and track teleworkers. Some agencies do not even know how many of their employees actually telework.

In recent years, telework has increasingly been viewed as an important tool for ensuring continuity of essential government services in a time of crisis, such as in the event of a natural disaster or a terrorist attack. To help improve the preparedness of the federal governments operation in emergency situations, last session, I introduced H.R. 5366, the “Continuity of Operations Demonstration Project Act.” This legislation provided for a demonstration project under which at least two federal agencies would perform services and operations under a simulated emergency in which federal employees would have to work at locations away from their usual workplace, including home, for at least 10 consecutive days. A number of agencies have taken the initiative to perform demonstration exercises in the last several years but there are still many agencies that have not done so. I would like to see more agencies test their ability to continue operations in an emergency and incorporate telework into their continuity of operations plans.

Representative John Sarbanes, House Oversight and Government Reform Chairman Henry Waxman, and Representative Frank Wolf, have joined me in introducing the “Telework Improvement Act of 2007.” This legislation breaks new ground by ensuring that eligible federal employees have the opportunity to telework and that agencies are incorporating telework into their continuity of operations planning. The Act spurs federal agencies to improve their telework policies by requiring every federal agency to develop a telework program that allows employees to telework at least 20 percent of every two week work period, designate a senior level employee as a Telework Managing Officer, and incorporate telework into their continuity of operations planning.

Our expectation is that this legislation will increase the number of federal employees that are allowed to telework and thereby better prepare the government for emergency events, reduce congestion and pollution, and create a more family friendly workplace.