

Statement of Senator Daniel K. Akaka
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the
Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia

“Assessing Telework Policies and Initiatives in the Federal Government”

June 12, 2007

Thank you all for being here today as the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia meets to consider the issue of telework, otherwise known as telecommuting, in the federal government. We will also be reviewing S. 1000, the Telework Enhancement Act of 2007, introduced by my good friend Senator Stevens to promote telework programs.

Telework programs have allowed federal employees to work from their home offices or telework centers close to their homes for nearly two decades. As the Internet and wireless communication technologies have become a common place in the work environment, the costs and concerns with security for teleworking have diminished significantly.

Over the past ten years, the option for government employees to work from home or a remote location closer to home has become not only a quality of life issue but a necessary component of federal agencies in addressing continuity of operation plans.

Congress, and rightly so, has been vigorous in its efforts to enhance telework and encourage more agencies to implement comprehensive and robust programs. Telework has emerged as a dynamic option for agencies to offer more flexible work schedules, reduced overall traffic congestion, continue operations in the event of an emergency, limit overall costs, and improve energy efficiency.

With nearly 50 percent of the federal workforce eligible for retirement in the next five years, agencies must use all available tools to keep and attract talented federal workers. Telework allows agencies to compete in today's marketplace. Offering employees an option to work from home or a location closer to home improves an employee's quality of life and in the process eases the traffic burden on metropolitan areas.

According to a survey by the Texas Transportation Institute, the National Capital Region ranks third behind Los Angeles and San Francisco as the worst traffic congestion in America. In Hawaii, gas prices rank 7th among the highest in the nation. The Department of Transportation has launched an initiative in this effort, the National Strategy to Reduce Congestion on America's Transportation Network, which promotes public and private employers to use telework as a primary tool in reducing congestion and saving commuters' money on escalating gas prices.

As the largest employer in the National Capital Region, and one of the largest employers in Hawaii, the federal government has a responsibility to help reduce commuting times and costs for area workers. Furthermore, it is imperative that we develop strategies to maintain continuity of government operations should a natural or manmade disaster disrupt services.

OPM and GSA have been leaders in providing telework resources for agencies. They launched the Interagency Telework Site and worked with other agencies to implement telework programs. A few shining examples include the Patent and Trademark Office – who I look forward to hearing from this afternoon – the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration Office, and the Federal Aviation Administration.

Telework implementation should not be stalled by trepidation. I look forward to discussing ways to improve government-wide telework policies and practices and hearing our witnesses' thoughts on the Telework Enhancement Act. Again, I thank you all for being here today.