

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
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Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee on Government Reform. Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss the progress of Federal telecommuting initiatives. My name is Stephen Perry and I am the Administrator for the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA).

Along with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), GSA is a lead agency for promoting, supporting and developing Federal telework. As a result of our ongoing partnership with OPM, many of the initiatives presented here are joint efforts or efforts in which the lead agency is assisted by the other partner. According to Federal statute (40 USC 587), GSA's specific telework roles are to provide guidance, assistance, and oversight to any person regarding the establishment and operation of alternative workplace arrangements and to acquire space for, establish, and equip telecommuting centers.

In working with our customer agencies, we promote telework as a key component in our mission to provide high performance workplaces and as an effective way to better use facilities, technology, and advances in human resource management. We recognize that telework is an important means of achieving improvements in the quality of worklife, family-friendly workplaces, and environmental responsibilities including energy conservation, air pollution and traffic congestion.

Nearly all of GSA's main component offices play a role in support of the Federal telework initiative. The Innovative Workplaces Division in our Office of Governmentwide Policy is GSA's lead organization for governmentwide telework. In addition, our Public Buildings Service, Federal Technology Service, Federal Supply Service, General Counsel, and human capital management office are all involved in telework support activity. In 2001, we presented Congressional testimony on our telework activities and I am pleased to highlight improvements, as well as new activities, in our telework services.

Some of the primary activities we have undertaken to carry out our statutory role include the following:

- We have established an active outreach and communications program which provides up-to-date information on advances, opportunities, policy issues, technical guidelines and assistance, events and other relevant information. For example, we operate a telework listserv which broadcasts key telework information to agency program coordinators, media outlets, and other interested parties in both the public and private sectors here and elsewhere around the world. Also, we recently released a telework video, targeted to Federal agencies, which demonstrates applications and benefits of a variety of alternative workplace arrangements. I would like to thank Rep. Wolf for his participation in this video.
- GSA offers technical assistance and consultation services in a wide range of areas, including telework and alternative workplace arrangements. Our Innovative Workplaces Division, as well as our Public Buildings Service through its "Workplace 20 20" program, has been active in providing consultation services

to agencies such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). EEOC is encouraging expanded telework to reduce their facility expenditures.

- For obvious reasons, there has been increased interest in the use of telework for both emergency response and emergency prevention measures and GSA has collaborated with the Department of Homeland Security to develop newly issued policy and guidance regarding the use of telework for continuity of operations planning (COOP) and operation.
- In the area of facility utilization and funding, we are implementing a new initiative to encourage and guide agencies in improving their facility management through the use of alternative officing which combines telework with arrangements such as hoteling and desk sharing.
- As telework advances into the mainstream, technology is becoming increasingly important to its success. We are actively involved in examining and testing applications of new technology to facilitate telework. One of our partners in this effort is the Federally-funded Telework Consortium; together we are working to bring the benefits of virtual presence (desktop videoconferencing) into the Federal mainstream. In 2002, we completed an important governmentwide study examining technology barriers to home-based telework. The study findings provided an assessment of the impact of technology issues on telework programs as well as key solutions which we currently recommend to agencies. We also are working with vendors to develop and implement cost-effective, flexible wireless remote access applications which will greatly help teleworkers and mobile workers and extend telework capability to non-teleworkers.
- Regarding our telework centers, we have taken, and will continue to take, steps to boost agency utilization of the centers. These steps include holding free trial periods and examining the use of COOP and new technology applications in the centers. As a result of our initial free trial, we gained more than 100 new users. We plan to use this encouraging news as a basis for more creative promotion activities.

In addition to its statutory responsibilities, GSA has been promoting the utilization of telework in reducing traffic congestion and air pollution, such as assisting the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments in a very aggressive public/private campaign to generate 113,000 new teleworkers in the Washington region by the fall of 2005. Also, in responding to the career burdens placed on the spouses of relocated US Government personnel such as those in the military and in the foreign service, we are helping to establish an important initiative called the Spouse Telework Employment Program (STEP) which uses telework to provide career relief to the affected spouses.

We are active in other areas of telework such as the following:

- Even though the telework model was developed more than 15 years ago, some of its components must be updated and refined. At GSA, we continuously conduct research to determine new and better ways of teleworking. Currently, we are studying the relationship between telework and dependent care and expect to complete our findings within the next six months.
- We believe there is much to gain from collaborating, networking, and information sharing with other public sector, private sector, and international organizations working on telework issues. We have therefore maintained long time leadership and support roles in the International Telework Association and the Mid Atlantic Telecommuting Advisory Council and have been active in annual events such as Telework America! and the Washington Area Conference on Telework (WACOT).

At GSA

Regarding our own telework program at GSA, we provided a comprehensive overview of the program structure in our previous testimony so I will only provide an update here. While we have experienced the usual telework resistance issues, we have taken steps to become a solid telework performer. To begin with, our telework policy and guidance is in complete compliance with the standards set by OPM. We also have completed a review necessary to declare on record that more than 90 percent of our workforce (compared to 43 percent governmentwide) is eligible for telework; our participation rate is 24 percent (compared to 14 percent governmentwide). We have worked to raise the level of awareness with associates throughout GSA. Additionally, we are incorporating telework into our emergency response strategy and have used telework very effectively when adverse weather conditions cause commuting problems.

Recommendations

Mr. Chairman, we appreciate the Congressional support we have received for the development of Federal telework and we share the frustration with the slow growth of the program. Since our previous testimony, OPM and GSA have made significant efforts to boost the participation in Federal telework programs. These efforts, however, have not achieved the participation levels we all seek. Our current recommendations focus and elaborate on top management accountability and on technological capability.

Regarding top management, we applaud, support, and echo OPM's published emphasis on the need for Federal agencies to take responsibility for meeting their statutory telework obligations. We commend this more aggressive approach and recommend additional emphasis on

- (1) Working with agencies to ensure that they are using the best and most efficient telecommuting policies; and
- (2) clarification/establishment of standards on the confusing issue of telework eligibility.

Finally, to facilitate significant long term telework expansion and productivity, there needs to be improved technology management as well as increased and improved investment in technology as discussed in our report on telework technology barriers.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate having the opportunity to appear before you today and I would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.