

**STATEMENT BY THE
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BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

ON

THE STATUS OF TELEWORKING IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

JULY 8, 2004

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, Congressmen Wolf and Hoyer. It is a pleasure to appear before you today to address the state of teleworking in the Federal Government and to address the questions you posed in your request for me to testify. In these highly challenging times, we increasingly view telework not just as an issue of personnel management, but as a matter of agency governance. Telework is more than an alternative work arrangement; it is a vital tool in agencies' accomplishment of their missions through the strategic management of their workforces. As agencies come to realize telework is not just about managing people, but about accomplishing their missions, we will see significant improvement in the use of this critical management strategy, especially as we prepare for the continuity of Government operations in a post September 11 environment.

In your invitation to testify, you asked me to address four critical questions. First, what is being done to encourage reluctant managers to adopt and implement telework policies? Second, why are some agencies falling short of the law's goals for teleworking? Third, when will the law's

goals be met? And finally, what, if any, legislative steps are needed to further motivate agencies to comply with the law? I hope to provide useful feedback and insights in my responses to those questions.

In response to the first question, let me begin by expressing our appreciation to Chairman Wolf and Rep. Hoyer and other members of the House Appropriations Committee for providing a special appropriation of \$500,000 to help us focus efforts on agencies with less than 2 percent of eligible employees teleworking in 2002. OPM, in collaboration with the General Services Administration, undertook a number of strategic initiatives to address the situation. These initiatives included special consultation and training for those two-percent agencies, and a multifaceted educational campaign designed for them that could be equally useful to virtually all Federal agencies as they worked on developing and enhancing their programs.

With respect to my agency, energetic promotion and support of agency implementation of telework is and remains a critical priority for us. OPM has provided a continuous stream of policy guidance, information, training, products, and support to help agencies implement their telework programs. For example, I have before me today a sample “telework kit” that OPM has provided to agency telework coordinators that gives them professional promotional and informational materials on telework for use within their agencies.

With the recent establishment of a Chief Human Capital Officer for each agency, Congress has provided agencies another strategic tool for addressing critical human capital management issues. A few days before this hearing, I met with the CHCOs on the subject of telework. This

provided an excellent opportunity to reinforce the importance of telework to mission accomplishment and to discuss the solutions to the challenges they face in implementing telework. Perhaps the most visible indication of our efforts to help agencies implement telework is the information from the telework web site we maintain in collaboration with GSA – www.telework.gov – that shows the range of information, assistance, and resources available to agencies including our electronic manual for managers, supervisors, and telework coordinators. Those pages are attached to this testimony. I also have attached a list of OPM’s 2003 and 2004 training activities, presentations, and products that promote telework. I will mention just a few as examples of the comprehensive range of information and assistance available to the agencies and will provide more detail on a few of them later in my testimony.

We now have two interactive electronic courses, one for managers and one for employees, available free on our GoLearn web site. And we are working with our Management Development Centers to add telework content to a wide spectrum of management courses they offer. This will give us the opportunity to connect with new supervisors and managers at the point they are moving into those positions and are beginning to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to be effective.

This past November, we conducted a day-long training conference for telework coordinators and human relations officials that included experiential training with a noted telework expert, policy and technology briefings by OPM staff, intensive sessions with a variety of experts from both the public and private sector, and special sessions for agencies with participation rates under two

percent. At this meeting, the telework kits were introduced and distributed, and participants were given guidance on how to use them effectively.

We have conducted a series of “Webinars”, audio-visual conferences via the Internet and telephone, moderated by a noted telework expert. The most recent one last month was geared specifically to managers and focused on why telework works for them. Participation was at capacity – 300 people signed on.

We are also meeting four times a year with agency telework coordinators to bring them current information, answer their questions, facilitate the sharing of best practices, and make presentations to a broad range of groups interested in promoting telework regionally, nationally, in both the public and private sector.

In addition, we have made a range of products available to the agencies, as you will see on the attached list and have conducted research efforts to guide us as we develop training programs and products to help the agencies implement effective telework programs.

I emphasize our effective collaboration with GSA. Our staffs collaborate and consult on a near-daily basis, and senior staff meet at least four times a year. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) developed in October 2003 between the two agencies has helped to clarify the duties and responsibilities of each.

And, OPM is joining other agencies in an effort to encourage more telework among the 1.8 million Federal workers across the nation. This effort will include the development of public service announcements, educational material found on the agencies' websites along with substantial media involvement.

Commonly expressed concerns from the survey included:

- Maintaining office coverage, especially with some employees already on compressed work schedules
- Finding times when everybody is available for meetings
- Nature of work – information not available in electronic form or the work involves large data bases that most home computer systems can't handle
- Need to say “no” to some aspiring teleworkers while saying “yes” to others; with attendant concerns about perceptions of unfairness and effects on morale
- Adequacy of employees' computer and telephone systems; lack of agency funds to provide broadband and additional phone lines
- Information security
- Perception of teleworkers that they would not advance professionally due to lack of direct contact with supervisors or missing out on choice assignments
- Evaluating employees without being able to see them working

OPM has used these findings to shape training for managers and telework coordinators, offering concrete solutions to the problems identified by the focus group participants. At the day-long training event for telework coordinators in November 2003, that I mentioned earlier, expert

consultant Gil Gordon used scenarios derived from focus group results in experiential training on management consultation skills. Information from the focus groups also contributed to the managers' course on telework now available on GoLearn. It will also be factored into training enhancements on telework now being added to a wide spectrum of courses offered by OPM's Management Development Centers, as well as a revision of the USDA's management course on telework now under discussion.

With respect to the third question - when will the law's goals be met? - I believe we can expect greater progress through the rest of this decade. We have built a strong foundation for progress in the implementation of telework programs with the establishment of central and agency policy, the establishment of agency Chief Human Capital Officers, and the development of more flexible systems of civilian human resource management inaugurated by the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense in close collaboration with my agency. While Federal agencies have fallen short of congressional expectations, I believe it is useful to understand that in the world's largest workforce, there is a learning and acceptance lifecycle we are going through as we implement this important strategy.

It may also help to increase the participation of agencies by focusing on telework as a key component of emergency planning and preparation. As we increase our efforts to ensure the safety of Federal workers as well as the continuity of Government operations during the entire range of situations that can potentially interrupt work in the office environment – from local protests to a terrorist threat – it is becoming clearer to agencies there is, in fact, a business case

for telework from the agency perspective that goes beyond all of the other obviously important reasons for implementing effective programs. I think this message is being heard.

Another strategy we have suggested to agencies is to use situational telework, which we define as occurring on an occasional, non-routine basis, as an introduction and test phase for core telework, in which traffic is greatly disrupted and public transportation is taxed beyond its capacity. We define core telework in accordance with the statute, as occurring on a routine, regular, and recurring basis one or more days per week. Given that both employees and managers have concerns about working in a new and different way, situational telework provides an opportunity for both parties to “test the waters” before making a greater commitment. We have suggested the “test” period be for a pre-defined period of time after which, if both parties agree, a change in category is made and formalized in a telework agreement.

With respect to the last question - what, if any, legislative steps are needed to further motivate agencies to comply with the law? – our view is that further legislation is unnecessary at this time. However, should the Congress believe additional legislation is needed, we stand ready to provide any technical assistance that may be useful.

In 2001, President George W. Bush added telework to his New Freedom Initiative, which focused on expanding job opportunities for people with disabilities. In the aftermath of September 11, telework has attracted greater attention by Federal managers as an essential consideration in agencies’ emergency planning efforts and telework has been integrated into the Federal Government’s Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP). Telework is growing steadily in

the Federal Government. OPM's goal is to make telework an integral part of agencies' functioning, rather than a "new" or "special" program. I assure you we will continue to champion telework as a key human capital strategy and do everything possible to facilitate its acceptance and use.

I would be glad to answer questions you may have.