

Opening Statement
Federal Workforce Subcommittee Hearing on Telework
Chairman Tom Davis
July 18, 2006
2:00 P.M.

Telework leverages the latest technology to give significant flexibility to managers and workers alike. It can serve to reduce traffic congestion which, as we all know, is a major problem in this area. But, telework is not just common-sense efficiency, it is an important national security consideration as well. The decentralization of federal agency functions inherent in a healthy telework strategy can greatly increase the survivability of those agencies in the event of a terrorist attack or other disruptive crisis.

Therefore, I have consistently advocated that telework needs to be an integral part of every Federal Government agency Continuity of Operation (or COOP) plan.

To promote my strong commitment to telework and its inclusion in COOP planning, the full Government Reform Committee has held a number of hearings under my chairmanship. We have also engaged the Government Accountability Office to evaluate the Federal Government's COOP planning process, the inclusion of telework in that process, and the adequacy of government-wide exercises of COOP plans and telework.

Our efforts have focused on a number of aspects of telework. A primary concern has been the status of telework in the Federal Government. We have

encouraged the responsible agency for implementing telework policies for Federal employees, the Office of Personnel Management, to increase its efforts to increase the availability of telework programs for Federal workers.

With regard to telework and the COOP planning process, we have monitored Federal agencies' identification of their essential functions and their adherence to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) COOP guidelines. We directed GAO to issue annual "scorecards" to assess how agencies were performing their COOP planning responsibilities. We also obtained GAO's annual evaluations of agencies' inclusion of telework in their COOP plans. The findings consistently recognized that progress had been made, but that most agencies needed additional guidance and should take steps to assure that telework was a more prominent component of their COOP program.

Testing of COOP plans is an essential component of assuring that a plan is realistic and effective. In June, 63 agencies engaged in a combined exercise to test the Federal Government's readiness to respond to disaster, called Forward Challenge 06. I have a pending information request with the Department of Homeland Security to obtain extensive documents about preparation of the exercise and Hotwash/After-Action reports for each agency's exercise. I also am engaging GAO in an expanded post-exercise evaluation. Those post-Forward

Challenge 06 reports and evaluations will provide us with the tools to assess how effective that exercise was and how effectively telework was utilized.

Once I receive those evaluations, we will be in a better position to determine the appropriate role that the Committee and Congress can play in assuring that telework is more effectively utilized by every Federal government agency and is widely available to Federal government employees. Similarly, we will assess how the Committee and Congress can assure that telework becomes an integral part of every Federal agency's COOP plan and that future exercises properly test their telework capability.

I thank Subcommittee Chairman Porter for convening this hearing and I look forward to continuing to work with the Subcommittee on expanding telework opportunities for all Federal employees.