

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DANNY K. DAVIS
AT THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM HEARING
ON**

Telework: A 21st Century Solution to Traffic Jams and Terrorism”

July 18, 2006

Chairman Porter, in the late 1990s, the Committee on Government Reform and the Committee on Education and Workforce held oversight hearings to examine the barriers to telecommuting and the federal agencies’ development and promotion of telework programs. It was then thought that the primary benefits of telecommuting were reduced traffic congestion and pollution, improved recruitment and retention of employees, reduced need for office space, increased productivity, and improved quality-of-life and morale of federal employees. These continue to be compelling and valid reasons for implementing agencywide telework programs. Rep. Frank Wolf is to be commended for moving legislation that pushes agencies to increase the number of federal employees who telecommute.

However, with the Oklahoma City bombing, 9-11, a bird flu pandemic, and severe weather conditions, we have other very compelling reasons to push federal agencies to develop and to implement the infrastructure and work processes necessary to support telecommuting. They are emergency preparedness and the continued threat of terrorism. The question we must ask ourselves is this: In the event of an emergency, are we – this Committee, our staffs, and all the federal agencies – prepared to serve the American people, if in an emergency situation, our primary places of work are no longer available to us?

On May 11, 2006, GAO issued a report entitled, “Continuity of Operations: Selected Agencies Could Improve Planning for Use of Alternate Facilities and Telework During Disruptions.” GAO selected six of the alternative operating facilities designated by agencies and evaluated their compliance with FPC 65 guidance. The report, which was requested by Chairman Tom Davis, found that most of the agencies had documented plans and procedures related to these facilities including site preparation and activation plans. However, none conducted all the applicable tests and exercises required by FPC 65, including annual exercises that incorporate the deliberate and preplanned movement of COOP personnel to an alternate facility. Further, agencies did not fully identify the levels of resources necessary to support their essential functions, creating a lack of assurance that their facilities are adequately prepared.

To help improve the preparedness of the federal government to continue to operate in emergency situations, I last month introduced H.R. 5366, the “Continuity of Operations Demonstration Project Act.” The legislation provides for a demonstration project under which at least two federal agencies would perform services and operations during 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. The demonstration project will help inform agencies and Congress about the benefits of telework as a continuity of operations tool, as well as the gaps and deficiencies in the telework system that remain.

The number and types of potential emergency interruptions are unknown and we must be prepared in advance of an incident with the work processes and infrastructure needed to reestablish agency operations.

In a world where anything is possible, we must be prepared for all the possibilities.