STATEMENT OF
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before the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL
SERVICE AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
on

TELEWORK: BREAKING NEW GROUND

November 6, 2007

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss OPM's role in promoting telework in the

Federal Government. Telework and other work/life flexibilities are important tools used

by agencies to recruit and retain employees. Telework is also an important component of

emergency preparedness, helping ensure the Federal government can continue core

operations from remote locations in case of a short- or long-term crisis.

Status of Telework in the Federal Government

According to the latest numbers gathered by OPM, forty-nine of 80 Executive

Branch agencies had more employees teleworking in calendar year 2006 compared to

calendar year 2005. Those who do telework – defined in our annual survey as "any

arrangement in which an employee regularly performs officially assigned duties at home

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or other work site geographically convenient to the residence of the employee" - are teleworking relatively frequently. In fact, over half of them are working from an alternative worksite at least once per week. Despite these successes, there was a slight decrease in the total number of teleworkers reported governmentwide, from 119,248 in 2005 to 111,549 in 2006.

This slight overall reduction was largely due to decreased numbers of teleworkers reported at a few large agencies. According to information OPM was given by these agencies, there are two major reasons for the decrease: data gathering/reporting problems, and data security concerns.

We found that the internal tracking systems used to gather data vary widely in their efficiency and effectiveness, leading to inconsistencies in the information reported to OPM year to year. Issues like automatic tracking vs. hand-counting agreements, changes in the personnel collecting the data year to year, and lack of communication between large sub-agencies have led to problems.

Agencies are developing internal systems to improve their data collection. In addition, OPM has continued to refine the yearly survey tool, based on agency feedback and our own observations about the data. Next year, for instance, we plan to have some of the large agencies break out their data into sub-components, so that we can get a better sense of both their successes and challenges.

We have also been working with payroll service providers as they routinely update their systems to maximize the use of the time and attendance systems to track telework. This will enable us to collect basic telework data more consistently governmentwide.

The second major issue is data security, which had an impact on actual telework participation. Agencies have justifiably become increasingly concerned with the security of information systems overall, and may perceive remote access of any kind as particularly problematic. We are working on various initiatives to address this issue– for example, OPM added two new questions to the 2007 telework survey to further explore what security measures are currently in place and what recommendations need to be made to achieve a teleworking environment that maintains data security. We are also working with several intelligence community agencies to explore how telework centers can be adapted to a more secure environment.

Balancing these challenges are drivers for telework that resulted in program growth at the majority of agencies in 2006. One major driver is the recognition by many organizations that telework is a valuable tool in ensuring that vital operations continue during a Continuity of Operations (COOP) or pandemic influenza event.

OPM strongly recommends in our Telework Guide that agencies have "an effective routine telework program" and that "(a)s many employees as possible should have telework capability (i.e., current telework arrangements, connectivity, and equipment commensurate with their work needs and frequent enough opportunities to telework to ensure all systems have been tested and are known to be functional)."

Using Telework as a Workplace Tool

The U.S. Department of Labor is a good example of the positive impact of COOP/pandemic influenza planning preparedness on telework program participation. From 2005 to 2006 the agency had a 43% increase in the total number of teleworkers. Agency staff credit pandemic influenza planning exercises, which have given employees

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and managers practical experience teleworking, as being key to this growth. In addition, the agency conducts telework briefings for staff and management, and telework is also integrated into new employee orientation sessions. As a result, there is wider acceptance of telework as a viable flexible work option across the Department.

Telework succeeds in other places due to excellent processes and implementation. The use of telework at the U.S. International Trade Commission more than quadrupled from 2005 to 2006, which Commission officials attribute to the ease of administration of their telework program. A well-designed automated application and tracking system makes participation easy for employees and their managers. The telework program's ease of implementation and good reputation – participants report higher levels of job satisfaction and productivity – have led to this rapid growth. The Commission has utilized telework in their recruitment efforts, citing this flexibility as an attraction for younger applicants.

Additional drivers for telework governmentwide include the demographic shifts we are experiencing in the workforce. At OPM, 23% of all eligible employees teleworked in 2006 (compared to a governmentwide average of slightly less than 9%), and the number teleworking three or more days per week more than quadrupled. These gains are largely the result of our in-house implementation of the Career Patterns initiative, a governmentwide program created by OPM to help agencies build environments suited to the 21st century workforce by reviewing individual positions and determining which workplace flexibilities, such as telework, should be offered to job applicants and employees to attract and retain talented people.

Continuing Efforts

Telework is an important tool in emergency planning, and we continue to support agencies in their efforts to integrate telework into COOP and pandemic influenza preparation. In May, 2006 President Bush announced the *Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza* which described critical actions the Federal Government would take to detect and respond to a potential pandemic. The *Implementation Plan* directed OPM to update existing telework guidance to provide additional guidance to Federal agencies regarding workplace options during a pandemic. In response, OPM issued a completely new "Guide to Telework in the Federal Government" on August 3, 2006. This Guide is directed towards Federal employees and managers.

The Guide was distributed to all Federal agencies, and is posted on the interagency telework website, www.telework.gov. OPM integrates telework in its pandemic planning and guidance briefings for agencies and Town Hall meetings for Federal employees. OPM staff visit Federal managers, HR and technical personnel and others to provide a comprehensive review of policy regarding pandemic preparedness.

In addition to issuing the new guidance, OPM is promoting telework on several other fronts. We have been working with the Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCO) Council on several telework-related initiatives. In February 2007, OPM staff helped organize a CHCO Training Academy session focused on agency telework best practices for CHCOs and their designees. There were over 50 attendees representing more than 20 agencies at this session, which highlighted the telework efforts of three Federal agencies. Attendees learned how effective and valuable telework has been for the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA), a DOD component, in preparation for the Base

Realignment and Closure (BRAC) activities. The Director of Administration and the President of the local AFGE union from the U.S. International Trade Commission co-presented their agency's telework tracking system, a technology solution which allows employees to effortlessly establish their telework schedules. And, OPM shared highlights and findings from our agency's September 2006 telework exercise, conducted under the leadership of Director Springer. The goal of this exercise was to test the state of readiness of agency systems and the ability of our employees to conduct mission critical functions and activities in the event of an emergency such as a pandemic influenza outbreak. While we encountered a few small technical difficulties along the way—mainly involving equipment, software, or connectivity—overall, the exercise was carried out smoothly and exposed no serious deficiencies in participants' ability to work from remote locations. The evaluation process is ongoing, and we will continue to monitor telework readiness and take necessary action to make sure employees have what they need to conduct OPM's mission-critical functions from remote locations.

In addition, OPM is working with the CHCO Council Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee, exploring how best to refine current telework definitions and enhance agency metrics in order to strengthen the program.

OPM continues its work with agency telework coordinators by hosting telework meetings that focus on up-to-date issues and topics and staff make agency visits to provide technical assistance on individual telework programs and policies.

Additionally, we are improving the accessibility of information available on telework.gov and identifying ways we can help employees and managers link from our

website back to their own agency resources quickly and easily. OPM is also exploring training to help managers optimize a flexible work environment.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my remarks. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.

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Dan Green has spent 35 years with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in a variety of positions in retirement and insurance operations. Dan is currently responsible for developing Federal employee benefits policy covering the multi-billion dollar retirement and insurance programs administered by OPM and promoting important employee and family support programs, like telework, health promotion and Employee Assistance Programs. Recent accomplishments include issuing the Telework Guide for Federal employees and managers and establishing voluntary dental and vision insurance programs for Federal employees, retirees, and their families.

The current Federal Government civilian workforce is approximately 1.8 million employees (not counting postal workers). The U.S. Office of Personnel Management is the President's agent and advisor for the Government's human resources management systems. OPM's primary responsibility is to ensure the Federal Government has an effective workforce.