



[Home](#)>[News](#)>[2005](#)>Telework

For Immediate Release:

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WOLF ENCOURAGES ADMINISTRATION TO MAKE TELEWORK A PRIORITY TO ENSURE CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

Washington, D.C. – Rep. Frank Wolf (R-10th) today released the attached letter to President Bush encouraging his administration to embrace telework as a workplace priority for both the public and private sectors to improve the continuity of operations in the event that a disaster – whether natural or man-made – strikes our country.

September 15, 2005

The President
The White House
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The lessons from the recent Hurricane Katrina tragedy, which has disrupted and destroyed the lives, property and livelihoods of so many fellow Americans, present an opportunity to ensure that governments and private sector businesses can continue to operate if our nation is faced with similar disasters in the future. I write today to urge you to embrace telework as a workplace priority for both the public and private sectors to improve continuity of operations in the event that a disaster – whether natural or man-made – strikes our country .

Many of the nation’s leading security experts have pointed to telecommuting as key to ensuring that the government continues to operate during and after catastrophic events. I appreciate the efforts of the General Services Administration to pay the costs at telework centers for federal employees who wish to telework as a result of high fuel costs and Hurricane Katrina. This is an important step forward in promoting telework.

But I also wanted you to know that I have been contacted by federal contractors which

conduct business in the region impacted by Hurricane Katrina. One of the businesses told me that, "One of the things that would be incredibly helpful to many federal government and private sector employees in the Gulf Coast region would be a statement by the President and the Administration that the federal government is mandating that its agencies and activities actively encourage and support telecommuting." Many of these private sector businesses are utilizing telework in order to continue operations, but unfortunately, they are having a difficult time working with their federal government counterparts who are not being allowed to participate in telework programs.

Telecommuting has proven benefits, not only for continuity of operations, but also energy savings, air quality, employee productivity, and employee cost savings. In short, telework is a winner all around. As the nation's largest employer, the federal government should be the model for telework for every level of government as well as the private sector.

September 11, the anthrax scare, and now Hurricane Katrina have exposed vulnerabilities in our nation which can disrupt government and business operations. In the wake of these events, if a government-wide telework program were established and operational as a cornerstone of the federal workplace, we could ensure that necessary telework habits will be in place in the event of a similar disaster in the future. With a federal telework model, the private sector could also expand its telework options to ensure that the public and private sectors – which operate as partners in so many areas – remain operational during any disaster.

In addition to ensuring continuity of operations, telework is an important energy savings issue. The recent devastation from Hurricane Katrina along the Gulf coast disrupted oil drilling operations, flooded refineries, shut down pipelines and slashed U.S. fuel production by more than 10 percent. As a result, Americans were faced with record high gasoline prices. This experience underscores the necessity of conserving fuel. The United States now imports almost 60 percent of its oil. With telework, employees save energy and the nation's dependence on foreign oil sources are reduced.

Telecommuting also improves the air quality. The district I represent includes the northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C. This area, along with several other major metropolitan areas, has been cited by the Environmental Protection Agency as noncompliant with federal clean air standards. With telework, fewer cars are on the road and air pollution is reduced.

Telework also is a productivity issue. A 2003 report from AT&T, one of the nation's leading telework companies, reported that the company saved \$143 million from increased worker productivity and improved employee morale. I believe the federal government could realize similar savings.

In addition, telecommuting offers an important incentive for employees. As the federal government competes for employees against higher paying private sector jobs, telework provides a benefit to help recruit and retain workers.

Finally, telework is a family-friendly, quality of life issue. In today's society, daily life more and more is dictated by the commute to and from work. With increased commute times, parents miss Little League games or school plays; others may not be able to make choir practice, or do volunteer work. Telecommuting gives people more time to spend doing the things they enjoy rather than wasting time stuck in traffic.

The mandate to federal agencies to allow all eligible employees the opportunity to telework is already in place through my legislation enacted four years ago. Mr. President, your voice of support for a strong telework system can transform the federal government to be able to respond quickly and to continue to operate in the event of an emergency. The additional benefits which come with telecommuting are also worthy of promotion.

I appreciate your attention to this issue.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

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