

Just a few short weeks ago, Washington, DC was brought to a standstill by an ill-timed, quick-hitting snowstorm that blanketed the region in just a few inches of snow but revealed a mountain of issues in its aftermath. Thousands of commuters in the Washington Metropolitan Area were stranded by a weather event mimicking an emergency evacuation of the Capital city. I myself had a seven hour commute that night to my home in Montross, VA (normally an hour and a half drive), and I had plenty of time to think about how things might be different if more folks tele-commuted.

A public servant's first priority is to provide for the safety and security of Americans. Additionally, be it a national security event, or a snowstorm, both businesses and federal agencies alike face the need for contingency plans to provide for continuity of operations.

Millions of homes in the United States are outfitted with the capability to work from home: to telework. According to the Congressional Research Service, growth has been steep, rising from 2.8 million high speed lines reported in December 1999, to 133 million lines as of December 31, 2009. Of the 133 million high speed lines reported by the Federal Communications Commission, 108 million serve residential users. Today's technology provides a critical solution for continuity of operations, as well as other great benefits for our environment, commuters and families. But barriers exist to telework, including for many the cost of updated technology in their home, office coverage, organizational culture, and management resistance, according to the recently released 2010 Status of Telework in the Federal Government Report to Congress by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

To ease the burden and to foster the use of telework, I recently introduced legislation to give a tax credit for the purchase of technology to telework, creating an incentive for individuals and families to acquire the technology needed to create a complete work environment in their home. Eligible taxpayers would qualify for an annual tax credit for qualified teleworking expenses paid or incurred by the taxpayer that year, up to \$1,000. Under this legislation, those who perform services for an employer under a teleworking arrangement where the employee works at least 75 days per year would be eligible to receive the tax credit. The tax credit would be given for expenses such as furnishings and electronic information equipment which folks need in order to telework.

The telework tax credit aims to break down financial barriers to telework, but there are added benefits: a study by the National Science Foundation found that teleworking increased productivity by 87% and the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 73% of teleworkers felt they accomplished more work on telework days than when they were in the office. In addition, the OPM annual report to Congress states that teleworkers have more clarity about work expectations, are held accountable for results, and have a clearer sense of control over work processes when compared with employees who do not telework. In addition, teleworkers reported greater levels of job satisfaction.

Telework can reduce loss of productivity in critical or difficult situations. After the Washington, DC, "Snowmageddon" last winter, OPM downgraded its initial estimate that the government lost \$100 million worth of productivity each day it remained closed to a projected loss of \$71 million for each day during the closure. After the storm, it was estimated that close to 30 percent of federal workers teleworked during that time.

Time is valuable and telework is a viable component to help improve quality of life in many ways. I commute more than 80 miles each way from Montross, Virginia, to Washington every day that Congress is in session and understand the benefits of avoiding a lengthy, stressful commute. And getting cars off the road reduces traffic congestion, lowers the everyday wear and tear of our transportation infrastructure, and prevents adverse effects on our environment.

What if we were to incentivize and promote telework? Both business and government alike can benefit from telework. And telework can an integral role in support of our nation's security, which is always a top priority. Congress should come aboard and incentivize what can benefit us all.

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