

September 12, 2008

Michael W. Hager
Acting Director
The Office of Personnel Management
1900 E. Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415

Dear Mr. Hager:

Thank you for your response to my August 4th letter regarding consideration of a 4-day, 10-hour work week for Federal employees. Unfortunately, your response misconstrued the spirit of my proposal and did not provide the useful information or hard empirical data that I had requested.

First, it is not my intention to mandate a 4-day, 10-hour work week for all Federal employees. However, it is my belief that a significant number of employees, if given the opportunity to work such a schedule, would readily accept it. Of course, some employees would rightly remain ineligible: for example, those whose work requires daily, face-to-face interaction and presence. Still, extending an alternative schedule to all other Federal employees could significantly cut traffic congestion in the Washington Metro Area and lead to large fuel savings.

Second, I am certainly well aware that, as you point out, the Federal government already offers flexible work scheduling. To allow Members of Congress to fully understand the scope of flexible Federal work scheduling, I request that you provide agency-by-agency, department-by-department statistics, detailing how many Federal employees are: 1) eligible for flexible work schedules and 2) actually working on flexible schedules. I also request information regarding the nature of these schedules, their impact on productivity, their estimated benefits, and agencies' specific efforts to promote flexible work scheduling. If, as you say, "the current system is effective and is already helping Federal employees reduce consumption," I would like to know exactly how and to what extent. This detailed information, which I request to be provided by October 1st, will be essential as Congress reviews federal workplace policy to cope with economic realities that affect us all.

Rising energy costs have led numerous state and local governments to explore options to save energy and reduce commuting costs for their employees. In fact, Utah, New Mexico, Virginia and Hawaii have all implemented variations of a compressed work week, and other governments across the country are also considering this alternative. Governor Jon Huntsman of Utah recently noted, "As we go forward with this [the 4-day, 10-hour work week initiative], we will conserve energy, save money, improve our air quality, and enhance customer service. We live in a dynamic, ever-changing environment, and it's crucial that we take a serious look at how we can adapt and maintain our state's unparalleled quality of life." I share the perspective of the Governor Huntsman, and I appreciate his leadership on this issue.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that the federal government should follow Utah's policy and close its offices on Fridays. Rather, I am arguing that Federal agencies should, to the maximum extent possible, adopt compressed work schedules so that, on any given workday, 20 percent of eligible employees are not consuming gasoline, contributing to traffic congestion, and taxing public transportation's capacity to commute to and from their offices. The Federal government has a responsibility to seriously examine all options to lower commuting costs for its employees, reduce energy consumption and save money. This should be one of them.

Finally, I am sure you know that, along with Congressman Frank Wolf, I have long championed telework options. However, our efforts to bring flexibility to the 21st-century Federal worker have consistently been met with significant opposition from managers who cling tightly to the historic ideas of workplace supervision and organization.

In the July 7, 2008 memorandum you provided with your letter, OPM Associate Director for Strategic Human Resources Policy Nancy Kichak argues for increased teleworking and the use of alternative work schedules, citing rising gas prices and noting that the lack of an approximate physical presence for workers does not have to mean a drop in output:

With increasing gas prices, this is a good time to increase the use of telework and alternative work schedules (AWS) (i.e. flexible work schedules and compressed work schedules).

With today's technology, many employees can perform at least some of their work functions at their homes or at alternate worksites closer to their homes, eliminating or reducing the need to commute. This will make a significant contribution toward helping employees deal with the increased gasoline prices we are now facing.

Frankly, Mr. Hager, I could not agree more. I simply suggest that we take the premise to its logical conclusion. The focus of my 4-day, 10-hour work week proposal was, as I am sure you can appreciate, spurred by the extraordinary commuting costs currently being incurred by Federal and private-sector employees alike. If we can help them lower their commuting costs, conserve gasoline, and drive on less-congested roads, we should do so.

I look forward to working with you to help our Federal government effectively respond to increased energy prices and the challenge to our area's workers. Because the Federal government employs such a high percentage of Washington's commuters, it can make a large and positive contribution - without adversely affecting work efficiency- to save energy, facilitate commuting and provide recruitment and retention incentives.

With kindest regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

STENY H. HOYER