

House Republican Press Release

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Press Office: 860-240-8700

A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE
State Representative Ruth Fahrbach



Gas prices, traffic congestion make
telecommuting an attractive
alternative

Last week, I and my Republican legislative colleagues expressed our support for more flexible work weeks for state employees by promoting our own office pilot program to allow for telecommuting, a policy aimed at saving taxpayer dollars, making workers more productive and getting commuters off clogged highways.

Some details of the pilot program:

- House Republican staff members could telecommute one day per week, ensuring that all their legislative responsibilities are covered;
- Staff would use laptop computers that are already available to communicate easily with the Legislative Office Building;
- Because the telecommuting would be staggered throughout the office, no disruption of service for constituents or anyone else who contacts the offices would take place;
- Similar programs have been tried in other states such as Arizona, where state workers have converted 181,000 hours of commuting time into productive working hours and reduced air pollution by 175,000 pounds;
- A 2007 national study by the Consumer Electronics Association estimated that telecommuting saves enough energy in the traditional workplace to power one million households for a year. The same study determined that 3.9 million telecommuters saved 840 million gallons of gas.
- *Telecommute Connecticut* estimates that employees who telecommute save an estimated \$1,200 annually on gasoline.

The pilot program would be evaluated to judge its effectiveness and cost savings after its trial period ends in September. Through modern technology, telecommuters' activities can be and should of course be monitored. The plan can not go forward without the approval of legislative Democrats, who have yet to offer the green light for the pilot program.

By virtue of a 1996 law (S.B. 344) that was unanimously passed by the legislature, Connecticut is one of 13 states that already allows for telecommuting for state workers when it is proved to be “cost effective.” Unfortunately, only 140 state workers participated in a telecommuting program last year. By implementing a telecommuting plan in our legislative office, the House Republicans are leading by example.

As of January 2008, 15 states have enacted telecommuting statutes, and eight Connecticut towns have already switched to four-day work weeks. Under the four-day work week, employees work the same number of hours each week, but are spread out over four days. Translation: lower heating, cooling, energy and transportation costs.

Telecommute Connecticut also reports that traffic congestion has become worse in practically every large metropolitan area. Delays are growing by a 41 percent average since 1990 and commuters are wasting three times as long dealing with traffic delays than they did 20 years ago. Economists say it costs tens of billions of dollars in lost productivity and employee turnover annually as workers, goods and materials are delayed.

After years of talking about reducing congestion on our roadways and working to reduce air pollution, now is the time to take action. Politics should not be allowed to block the legislature from doing what it can to help our residents.

State Rep. Ruth Fahrback represents the 61st District, including Suffield, and parts of Windsor and East Granby, in the General Assembly.