

The News-Times

Telecommuting Proposed For State Workers

By Dirk Perrefort
July 16, 2008

To save time and money, state Rep. David Scribner and other Republican lawmakers are proposing a pilot program to let some state employees work from home.

House Republicans presented the plan during a press conference Tuesday. Scribner, R-Brookfield, joined the conference from a laptop in his living room, an example, he said, of how telecommuting can work.

Scribner said allowing state employees to work from home one day a week would provide efficiencies, because it would save the time workers spend commuting to the office. It would also save energy costs, he said, as well as take some cars off the state's congested highways.

"If we could take 1,000 cars off the road that would go a long way to reducing the traffic congestion," said the lawmaker, a ranking member of the legislature's Transportation Committee.

"It would also provide for a lot of efficiencies. I spend more than two hours a day -- sometimes three -- in the car when I have to drive to Hartford."

Scribner said the program would require a policy change and not a state statute to be implemented. It would use state employees of the legislature as a pilot to see how it works before being offered to all state employees.

"This is a sensible and creative no-cost approach," he said, adding that it could actually save the state money in travel reimbursements. "I am proud to be part of the leadership that is bringing this measure forward. The best part is it doesn't cost money, it actually saves money."

House Deputy Speaker Robert Godfrey, D-Danbury, said he is willing to take a look at the idea, but he has serious reservations about it.

A preliminary assessment for employees of the state Senate, he said, showed a cost savings of around \$1,000. He added only about 450 employees will be included in the pilot proposal, which he doubts would take many cars off the highway.

"Most of the staff members already live in or around Hartford," he said.

Godfrey was also concerned about partisan staff members working from home and the “temptation” to work on campaign activities while telecommuting.

“The partisan employees should be the last to telecommute,” he said. “It would make more sense for nonpartisan employees, such as researchers and lawyers.”

While telecommuting isn’t a new concept, Scribner said the high cost of gasoline is putting momentum behind it. Several towns in the region are looking at four-day work weeks to provide a cost savings, he said.

The town of Redding recently adopted a four-day work week -- Monday through Thursdays -- during the summer months as a pilot program.

New Fairfield First Selectmen John Hodge said that town also considered a four-day work week, but he didn’t foresee a lot of cost savings.

“Town Hall would still be open the same amount of hours, so I don’t see a big savings in our utility bills,” he said. “I’m also concerned about making access more difficult for the residents.”

Contact Dirk Perrefort at dperrefort@newstimes.com or at (203) 731-3358.