

Bill promoting federal teleworking goes to Obama

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(AP) -- The bureaucratic halls of Washington could get a little quieter under legislation that encourages federal agencies to let more employees work from home.

The bill, passed by the House on Thursday and sent to President [Barack Obama](#) for his signature, instructs each federal agency to come up with policies to promote telecommuting. The goal is to significantly increase the 5 percent of the federal workforce now engaged in some level of teleworking. The vote was 254-152.

"It creates a nimbleness on the part of the [federal government](#) with respect to how the workforce operates," said Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., the lead sponsor. He and other supporters said it would increase productivity, improve morale, help the government recruit the best people, reduce traffic congestion and make the environment cleaner.

The legislation directs the Office of Personnel Management to come up with teleworking guidelines and requires agencies to establish policies within six months under which employees may be authorized to telework.

Agencies must designate a telework managing officer and must seek to better integrate teleworking into Continuity of Operations Planning, procedures for keeping the government operating during emergencies.

Republicans, who overwhelmingly voted against the measure,

complained about the \$28 million implementation cost over five years. Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-N.C., said it would "make it easier for federal employees who already had it much better than the rest of the country to avoid the office."

But supporters said it would save the government millions by reducing needed office space and improving productivity. They cited estimates that telecommuting saved the government \$30 million a day last winter when the capital region was paralyzed by a snowstorm.

The bill is H.R. 1722.

More information: Congress: <http://thomas.loc.gov>

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