

UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

For release on  
delivery expected  
at 9:30 a.m.  
March 28, 1985

STATEMENT OF  
ROSSLYN S. KLEEMAN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR  
GENERAL GOVERNMENT DIVISION  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES  
OF THE HOUSE CIVIL SERVICE AND POST OFFICE COMMITTEE  
ON  
FLEXIBLE AND COMPRESSED WORK  
SCHEDULES IN FEDERAL AGENCIES

126573

031625

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

We appreciate your invitation to discuss the subject of flexible and compressed work schedules for federal employees. The Federal Employees Flexible and Compressed Work Schedules Act, which was initially enacted in 1978 and extended in 1982, expires in July of this year.

Flexible and compressed work schedules can take varied forms. For example, a flexible schedule allows an employee to vary (within constraints set by the agency) the time he or she reports for duty and departs from work. A compressed workweek is one that compresses the 40-hour workweek into less than 5 days or, alternatively, the 80-hour bi-weekly pay period into less than 10 working days. A third type of schedule, maxiflex, incorporates features of both flexible and compressed schedules. For our purposes, we will refer to all these varied forms as alternative work schedules.

Although formal alternative work schedule programs have been in effect since 1979, little empirical data or studies is available on the benefits of the program, particularly concerning the effect of the program on the following six areas of congressional interest: efficiency of government operations, mass transit facilities and traffic, levels of energy consumption, service to the public, increased opportunities for full-time and part-time employment, and employees' job satisfaction and non-worklife.

Similarly, concrete evidence does not exist concerning any significant negative effects. However, our analysis of federal

management and employee views and interviews with union officials lead us to believe that, cumulatively, the advantages of alternative work schedules outweigh the disadvantages. In our opinion, the legislation authorizing the program should be made permanent.

We believe that achievement of an effective program is largely dependent on management's commitment to planning, monitoring, and assessing the implementation of alternative work schedules. This commitment is necessary to ensure positive benefits to the government as well as to the employees.

I would like now to briefly discuss our present work concerning alternative work schedules in federal agencies.

In mid-1984 the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families requested us to obtain the views of federal managers and employees on the advantages and disadvantages of the Federal Flexible and Compressed Work Schedules Program. To achieve our objectives we took two approaches. First, we discussed the program with various OPM officials and interviewed officials, such as the Director of Personnel, and the Director of Employee Relations, at 10 federal executive agencies and the Library of Congress that used alternative work schedules. We also interviewed officials of three of the national government employees unions. Second, we sought to obtain federal employees' and supervisors' attitudes on the program by sending a questionnaire to a randomly selected sample of executive branch federal employees and supervisors throughout the continental United States.

While our review is not completed, the preliminary results appear to provide a reasonable framework for the subcommittee to use in deciding whether the program should be made permanent.

AGENCY OFFICIALS' PERCEPTION OF  
THE ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULES  
PROGRAM

According to OPM, 41 federal agencies reported that they have alternative work schedule programs in effect. Approximately 308,000 employees in these agencies are participating in the programs.

In the 11 agencies we visited, about 53,000 employees were on alternative work schedules. With one exception, each agency has had some form of alternative work schedule since 1978. Officials at these agencies say they have generally had positive results with the program and are in favor of continuing it. Overall, they believe efficiency of operations, service to the public, employment opportunities, and employee morale have improved. Most stated that mass transit facilities and energy consumption were relatively unaffected. They did mention some disadvantages, such as inconvenience in scheduling meetings and problems in maintaining full office coverage on certain days, but almost all the agency officials believed the advantages outweighed the disadvantages.

Measuring the effect of alternative  
work schedules is difficult

Most agency officials said it is difficult to quantify the effects alternative work schedules have had on the six areas of congressional interest. Many of the agencies have not

conducted detailed evaluations of their programs. However, some agencies have, either formally or informally, identified and measured changes in leave usage, overtime costs, travel and per diem costs, equipment utilization, energy consumption, and employee commuting habits.

In many instances, agency officials felt that changes in the six areas may have resulted from influences other than this particular program. For example, a measured decrease in overtime hours at an agency could be the result of internal management pressure to reduce overtime and not the agency's introduction of an alternative work schedule. Similarly, a change in employee commuting habits could be attributed to other factors, such as the expansion of the subway system in Washington, D.C., and not the use of alternative work schedules.

The following summarizes the views of the agency officials expressed to us on the effects of alternative work schedules on the six areas of interest.

#### Efficiency of government operations

Officials at 6 of the 11 agencies stated that efficiency of operations had increased in work units participating in the program. Most officials cited improved employee morale and productivity and decreases in overtime, tardiness, and short-term leave usage as contributing factors. Officials at the five other agencies felt there had been no effect.

#### Service to the public

Officials at 6 of the 11 agencies said that alternative work schedules enhanced their ability to provide better service

to the public. Improvements that agency officials cited included extended office hours, better telephone coverage, and greater flexibility to schedule appointments with members of the public. For example, inspectors in one agency found working a flexible schedule gave them enough time to make appointments and perform inspections on the same day, which would not have been possible under a fixed schedule.

Officials at three agencies perceived that their program had no effect on providing service to the public, and officials at two felt that the advantages and disadvantages offset each other. For example, although officials often said their offices were staffed more hours each day, they also said the offices were often understaffed on Friday afternoons, when many employees choose to take advantage of their earned time off. It should be emphasized that none of the officials at these agencies which cited these problems viewed the overall effect of their programs on public service to be negative.

#### Mass transit

Officials at seven agencies stated that they believe alternative work schedules had no effect on mass transit facilities or traffic. However, the officials said they could not make an assessment of the effect on mass transit with any degree of certainty.

The officials at the remaining four agencies cited positive effects to employees. Commonly cited improvements included shorter commuting time due to traffic dispersion and greater ease in forming car pools.

### Energy consumption

Officials at eight agencies stated that their programs had no effect on energy consumption. A reason often cited was that many employees worked late before flexible schedules were initiated so lighting and heating were always available at odd hours. The officials at the remaining three agencies noted slight increases in energy costs associated with their programs.

### Employment opportunities

Officials at the six agencies said that employment opportunities with their agencies were enhanced with the introduction of these programs. These agency officials felt that alternative work schedules were a positive tool, not only in recruiting talented individuals but also in retaining employees who might otherwise have had to stop working or look elsewhere for employment. Other positive effects of flexible schedules cited were that they made it easier for working parents to enter and stay in the workforce and that they aided in the recruitment of part-time and handicapped individuals. The officials at the remaining five agencies stated that the alternative work schedules had no effect on employment opportunities at their offices.

### Employee job satisfaction and nonworklife

All 11 agency officials said there was an improvement in employee morale as a result of alternative work schedules. They said employees had a better attitude, were more satisfied with their job, and were able to devote more time to their families and personal interests.

## INTERVIEWS WITH UNION OFFICIALS

We also interviewed officials at three national government employee labor unions, representing approximately 600,000 employees. They supported the permanent reauthorization of the program. They believed that the advantages of the program far outweighed any disadvantages. They also felt that the program has been especially beneficial for working parents.

## TENTATIVE RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

To obtain federal employees' and supervisors' attitudes on alternative work schedules, we sent questionnaires to a randomly selected sample of permanent federal employees and supervisors throughout the continental United States.

The questionnaire results are still being reviewed and thus are tentative at this time. There was approximately an 80 percent response rate to the questionnaire. Our preliminary analysis indicates a very strong support for the program. Ninety-two percent of the respondents indicated that they support the continuation of the program, and about 60 percent of the respondents believe that advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Approximately 79 percent of the respondents believe the program has had a favorable effect on their morale. Also, about 80 percent of the respondents on a flexible schedule felt that the schedules help them meet family obligations without taking leave (for example, doctor's appointments and school meetings).

- - - - -

Although not complete, our review indicates that alternative work schedules can achieve benefits to both the government and the employee.



However, there are also certain disadvantages associated with these programs. Disadvantages commonly cited by the agencies included difficulty in coordinating meetings because of different employee work schedules; problems in office coverage when too many employees have the same time off, a need for increased supervision to assure that abuses do not occur, a perceived loss of supervisory control when supervisors and employees are not working the same hours, and extra timekeeping functions. However, while these disadvantages can diminish the positive effects of alternative work schedules to some extent, they can be minimized through better management controls. Management can, through better planning or monitoring of the program, assure that the programs are working.

On balance, however, 9 of the 11 agencies said the advantages gained from their programs exceeded any disadvantages. One agency said there was an equal trade-off, and one agency chose not to comment.

Thus, overall the results indicates that alternative work schedule programs can work and be successful if the programs receive the commitment of management and employees.

This concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.