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“FAMILY FRIENDLY WORK BILL” — PROMOTING TELEWORK IN MISSOURI

Years ago it was thought that new technological advancements would allow the American worker to work less and have more leisure time. The reality of today’s fast-paced world is that new technology has usually ended up providing more ways for us to spend time at the office without decreasing the workload.

During the Industrial Revolution, America underwent a transformation in the way we work, and though most of its effects were good, society will never be quite the same as it was before. Where once family farmers and small business operators worked alongside their families and passed their craft on to their children, we now find that work almost always takes parents away from home. Although no one would argue for a return to the America of the 1800s, it is clear that many parents would love to have the opportunity to spend more time at home and to craft work, to some degree, around their families. From the perspective of the State of Missouri, many social problems, such as juvenile crime, teen pregnancy and high drop-out rates, would be lessened if parents had the time and opportunity to be more involved with their children during their formative years.

If the Industrial Revolution might be faulted for taking parents out of the home, a new revolution, the technological revolution, is again altering the marketplace, giving us the opportunity to move beyond the 8-to-5 workday spent at an office across town.

This session I am pleased to file the “Family Friendly Work Act” in the Missouri Senate. This “telework” bill will encourage our state to take advantage of modern technologies and business practices to provide incentives for parents to work from home and spend more time with their children.

Not only is this concept useful for working parents, but it has tremendous potential in other areas. For example, encouraging people to work from home instead of commuting to an office will decrease traffic congestion, gasoline consumption, air pollution from auto emissions and will reduce wear on our roadways. Another benefit is that businesses will be more resilient in the event of a natural disaster or major winter storm like we experienced last month, or even potential terrorist attacks. Telework also opens new opportunities to disabled citizens or parents with small children who find it difficult to leave the house. Finally, telework has been found to lower overhead expenses for businesses — making it an attractive option from the perspective of the “bottom line.”

There are a number of “telework” technologies and developing business practices already in use. Technologies such as the Internet, laptop computers, and telephone, fax and e-mail communications are making it increasingly common for people to work from home.

Likewise, flexible work schedules are also benefiting both businesses and employees. “Flextime” allows employees to work longer hours during busy seasons in exchange for hours off during slower periods. “Compressed schedules” allow employees to work longer shifts in order to spend fewer days per week at the office, such as working four 10-hour days instead of five eight-hour days. Offering “job sharing,” where two part-time employees share one position, to workers with small children is another attractive option, as are onsite daycares that allow parents and children to spend more time together and reduce time lost by commuting to and from traditional child-care centers.

My legislation introduces several provisions offering incentives to get more companies to allow employees to work from home or to work more flexible schedules. The measure provides tax breaks for qualifying businesses offering a mix of flextime, telecommuting, compressed schedules or onsite daycare to employees. It also offers low-interest startup loans for home-based businesses.

Telework is a “win-win” concept for employers, employees, families and even government. I look forward to working with my colleagues to pass this legislation in the coming year.

If you have comments or questions about any matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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