from Phyllis Schlafly

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Working at Home is a Growing Movement

Every morning and evening, millions of commuters spend a couple of hours driving bumper to bumper in and out of a crowded city. The only social interaction they have with all those people engaged in the same occupation is that they all listen to the radio traffic report, hoping that an accident won't delay their arrival.

Some millions of Americans have discovered a better way -- working at home. Their "commute" is only from the kitchen to the den. Societal changes, Americans' expectations, and technological innovations have all made working at home the fastest growing type of employment in the United States today. People want the freedom and the flexibility that home-based work affords.

LINK Resources, a New York-based market-research firm, estimates that 26.8 million Americans did some income-producing work at home in 1989, and. that this figure rose to 34.8 million in 1990. This includes full-timers and part-timers, self-employed and company employees.

Some have small businesses or franchises, some are freelancers, some just bring work home from the office. About 3 million are telecommuters who regularly work at home for their employers.

JALA Associates, a Bel Air, California firm that counsels about telecommuting, says that about half the work force could work at home or in a regional office. By the mid-1990s, up to,15 million corporate employees could. be working out of their homes.

The principal factor driving this movement from the big-city office to the home is the desire of parents to spend more time with their children. Employed mothers of young children see telecommuting as one way to have it all, and many young couples are deciding that their families come first, after all.

More and more, men and women like to organize their own schedules, and even to be their own boss. An increasingly popular approach with women with young children is operating a franchise from home.

Companies are becoming more flexible in order to accommodate good workers. The shrinkage of the workforce almost guarantees that more and more companies will try to retain their trained employees by flexible work options. Even restrictive local zoning rules are now being modified in the face of public demand

Other important factors promoting home-based work include the stress and pollution of traffic congestion and high real-estate costs of office and accessible residential space. The government has been encouraging carpooling for years, but this has produced less than a 4 percent reduction in commuter traffic. Telecommuting has the potential to bring about a 5-10 percent reduction.

Above all, workers are now able to bypass the thieves, thugs, gangs, drug addicts, panhandlers and bums who roam our cities with impunity. As liberal economist Robert Reich complains in his new book, The Work of Nations, millions of the most productive Americans have discovered that they can effectively "secede" from our urban centers where municipal unions and political machines keep raising taxes even as their alleged "services" decline.

What has made this movement of workers possible is the explosion in information technology. Low-cost powerful personal computers, electronic mail, voice mail, modems, and fax machines are moving information so that workers can remain in their homes.

About 500 corporations have formally established telecommuting programs for their employees. These include AT&T, IBM, J.C. Penney, Pacific Bell, Levi Strauss & Co., American Express, Johnson & Johnson, Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

Bell Atlantic Corporation in Arlington, Virginia has allowed 5l-managers to exchange a long commute to the office for work at home called "remote control." They are part of a plan to test alternative work schedules and telecommuting technology, such as electronic mail, voice messaging, conference calling, call forwarding, and special phone lines that allow voice and data to come into the home over one line.

AT&T has developed a product ca1led "Home Agent" that enables an airline reservation center, for example, to route incoming customer calls directly to its employees homes. When this technology is implemented, thousands of booking agents, catalog sales workers and insurance claims processors will no longer have

to drive to a dehumanizing “boiler room” with row upon row of computer terminals.

The San Francisco earthquake of 1989 encouraged many workers to try telecommuting when they could not drive over the Oakland-San Francisco Bay bridge. Some observers think that up to 60 percent of California workers are potential telecommuters.

Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich predicts that in five years about 2,000 of the county’s 17,000 employees working in downtown Los Angeles will be part of the telecommuting program. He thinks that benefits of the program include a drop in traffic congestion and pollution, savings in office space, and increased productivity.