



Cincy-area lawmaker pushes bill to 'relocate' all federal agencies

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Rep. Warren Davidson says he wants to help the Trump administration “drain the swamp.”

So the Troy Republican introduced legislation that would require “all federal agencies” to move their headquarters outside of the Washington region. Under his bill, no agency could have more than 10 percent of their employees working in Washington.

Davidson said it would result in lower payroll and overhead costs, citing Washington pricey real estate market and high cost of living. More importantly, he said, it would shake up the status quo and take federal “bureaucrats” out of their Washington bubble.

But critics say there’s a big problem with Davidson’s idea: Most federal employees already work far from the nation’s capital--whether in airport security, or railroad safety, food inspection or environmental enforcement.

“This proposal must be based on ‘alternative facts,’ because in reality 85 percent of our federal workforce live outside of Washington, D.C.,” said Rep. Gerald Connolly, a Democrat who represents Virginia, home to many federal workers. “This is yet another mindless approach to management devoid of facts and another shameful attack on our federal workforce.”

In an interview, Davidson said he didn’t know what percentage of the federal workforce was currently employed in the D.C. region. But his spokesman said Connolly’s opposition to the bill is not a surprise since “it will move government bureaucrats out of his district closer to the Americans most affected by their work.” Davidson, who represents Butler County, occupies the seat held for decades by former House Speaker John Boehner, a West Chester Republican who resigned in 2015.

Where are federal workers?

Connolly's 85 percent figure comes from the Federal Executive Boards, a government network for federal workers based in different parts of the country and established so they can communicate and collaborate.

Other data, assembled by the nonpartisan magazine Governing, shows there were an estimated 75,700 federal workers employed in Ohio in 2013, and another 38,200 in Kentucky.

By comparison, there were 203,500 employed in the District of Columbia, the Governing data shows.

Davidson's spokesman, Alexie Woltornist, conceded that some federal agencies may already have less than 10 percent of their workforce in Washington.

"If they are, that's a good thing," he said. "Every single agency should be under 10 percent."

The concept behind Davidson's bill has been kicking around conservative circles for a while.

"Why must the headquarters of the Department of Homeland Security be in Washington, D.C.?" Paul H. Kupiec, a scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, wrote in a June op-ed. "Why not in Texas or Mississippi?"

The FBI could "just as easily relocate to Utah or Vermont instead of to an expensive site in the nearby D.C. suburbs," referring to the agency's plans for a new headquarters in the Washington area, Kupiec wrote. "Shouldn't the Department of Agriculture be situated in a state that grows something besides home-use marijuana?"

It's not clear how much it would cost to relocate entire federal agencies to new digs, but Kupiec argued it would result in long-term savings. "If you moved (some federal agencies) to Cincinnati," he said, "the cost of living is less ... so you get a reduction in the cost of the payroll" for the rest of that agency's existence.

But other conservatives said while the intention might be good, the cost would be exorbitant.

"It would seem like a huge waste of assets to build grand new buildings," said Chris Edwards, an expert on federal and state budget issues at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, and editor of downsizinggovernment.org, where he writes about ways to reduce federal spending and reform government. "So practically, it doesn't make much sense."

Davidson said the bill has already attracted interest from Rep. Jason Chaffetz, a Utah Republican and chairman of the House Oversight & Government Reform Committee, who has sponsored a similar measure. But even if it gets traction in the House, it would likely meet fierce resistance in the Senate.