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Week Ending Friday, February 7, 1997

The President's Radio Address

February 1, 1997

Good morning. As a parent, I know how important it is to take responsibility for our children when they need us most; when they're sick, when they need to go to the doctor, or when there's a parent-teacher conference at school. Fortunately, Hillary and I have never had to risk our jobs to be there for our daughter. We've never had to make the choice between being good parents and good workers.

Today I want to talk with you about what we have done and what more we must do as a people to give that same assurance to every American family. One of the things I wanted most to do when I became President was to help parents succeed both at home and at work. That's why I was so proud to make the Family and Medical Leave Act the very first bill I signed as President, exactly 4 years ago this Wednesday. Family and medical leave allows people in companies with 50 or more employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a newborn or a newly adopted child or to be with a family member who is seriously ill without fear of losing the job.

Today over half of all American workers share this important benefit. People like Christy Sens, a first-grade teacher from Fairfax, Virginia, who is here with me today. Christy was among the first Americans to make use of the new family leave law in 1993 when she and her husband were expecting their first child. She thought she would be forced to choose between the 6 weeks her school allowed her for new mothers or taking a whole year off without pay. Because of our new law, she was able to spend 12 full weeks at home recovering from her pregnancy and spending precious time with her new daughter. Christy used the benefit again in 1995 for the birth of her second child.

Family leave is not only family-friendly, it's employer-friendly as well. Also with me today is Stan Sorrell, president and CEO of the Calvert Group, an investment firm in Bethesda, Maryland, and two of his employees who have also used family leave. The Calvert Group started a family and medical leave program 3 years before it became the law of the land. Like almost 90 percent of the businesses covered by the law, they found that family leave is easy to administer and costs them little or nothing. So we know it's working for both families and businesses. After all, in these past 4 years, American business has created over 11 million new jobs, more than any other 4-year term in our history.

Now we must make it even easier for parents to live up to their responsibilities to their children and to their employers. Today I call upon Congress to expand the family leave law, to give parents an additional 24 hours of unpaid leave each year to take a child or an elderly relative to a regular doctor's appointment or to attend parent-teacher conferences at school. In so doing, we'll make our families stronger and our workers more productive, building the kind of country and economy we all want for our children.

We also must address the fact that too many workers still do not know about the family leave law. That's why I'm pleased to announce that we're launching a multimedia, public education campaign to spread the word about family leave to make sure employers and employees have the facts and to make sure everyone knows how to make this law work for them. It's simply not enough to help people have the tools to succeed; we also have to make sure they know what those tools are.

The centerpiece of this campaign is a new 800 number that any American can call to learn about family and medical leave. It's 1–800–959–FMLA. That's 1–800–959–FMLA. You can also get information through our

Labor Department's web site on the Internet: www.dol.gov. That's www.dol.gov.

By expanding family leave to cover children's doctor visits and parent-teacher conferences and by helping more Americans to learn about the opportunity of family leave, we can enable millions of more of our fellow citizens to meet their responsibilities both at home and at work. That's how we must prepare our people for a new century full of new promise and possibility.

As parents, teachers, and business people, as members of the work force and members of our communities, we all share a stake in the strength of our families. Our society can never be stronger than the children we raise or the families in which we raise them. That's why family leave is more than just a single issue or accomplishment. It is at the heart of our approach to preparing America for the 21st century by ensuring that we can all meet our obligations and make the most of our God-given gifts.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Statement on the Death of Herb Caen

February 1, 1997

Hillary and I were saddened to learn of the passing of Herb Caen, the San Francisco Chronicle's legendary columnist, and we extend our condolences to his family, friends, and most of all, the city he loved. Maybe it's not right to call an "institution" someone who deflated many overstuffed institutions with a brisk three dots, but surely no one knew better the vibrancy and eccentricities of the city, his city, San Francisco, than did Herb Caen. If we listen carefully on those cool mornings when the fog has boiled through the Golden Gate, out beyond the clattering of cables underfoot and the low moan of the horn at Alcatraz, maybe we will still hear Herb Caen's wonderful, witty, irrepressible voice. Herb Caen . . . he will be missed . . . a lot.

Proclamation 6971—American Heart Month, 1997

February 1, 1997

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

More than 700,000 men and women die each year of heart disease, making it the leading cause of death in our country. Annually, about 1.5 million Americans suffer heart attacks, one-third of which are fatal. Collectively, diseases of the heart and blood vessels claim about 960,000 American lives annually. These statistics only hint at the individual and collective tragedy brought on by heart disease and stroke and underscore the need for us to do everything possible to combat cardiovascular diseases.

Research has brought dramatic improvements to our knowledge of heart disease and how to combat it. We have learned much in recent years and now know that the processes leading to heart disease typically begin early in life and worsen over the years; symptoms often do not appear for decades. We also better understand the effects of genetics, gender, and lifestyle. High blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking, diabetes, and obesity increase the risk of developing heart disease; physical activity can reduce the risk of suffering from cardiovascular disease, including stroke.

Additionally, research has brought improved diagnostic methods and treatments for those afflicted with heart disease. Noninvasive imaging devices can now show the heart at work inside the body, giving doctors more precise information about their patient's condition. And new tests and therapies allow us to detect and treat a heart attack more effectively and minimize damage to the heart muscle.

These striking developments in biomedical techniques and increased public awareness and education have helped reduce the death rate from heart disease by nearly 60 percent in the past 30 years, and deaths from stroke by about 65 percent.

The Federal Government has contributed to these advances by supporting research and public education programs of the National