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the Commission's efforts to move beyond cooperation between federal governments to foster regional and local ties between the peoples of their countries. They noted the Commission's important achievements in the fields of trade and investment, energy, environment, health, defense conversion, agriculture, space, and science and technology. They recognized the Commission's leadership role in carrying forward bilateral relations into the twenty-first century.

Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin expect that as the century turns, their joint initiative will result in a strategic economic partnership between the United States and Russia that will decisively strengthen bilateral ties and positively shape changes in the world economy. They look forward to a prosperous and market-oriented Russia as a full partner in the premier organizations that will define economic and trade relations for the twenty-first century. This will allow Russia to take its place among the community of nations contributing to a new international economic order where open markets and free trade foster global prosperity and the well-being of American and Russian citizens alike.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

The President's Radio Address
March 22, 1997

Good morning. I'm glad to be back at the microphone this morning after relying on the Vice President to fill in for me last Saturday. My knee is healing just fine, and I'm happy to report that I've just completed a successful summit meeting with President Boris Yeltsin of Russia in Helsinki, Finland. Together we're building a strong United States-Russia relationship to meet the challenges of the 21st century: building a democratic, undivided Europe at peace; leading the world away from the nuclear threat; forging new ties of trade and investment that will benefit all our people.

Today I want to talk with you about how we can work together to strengthen America's working families and to help them meet their responsibilities both at work and at home. We have made significant progress in this area with the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993. That was landmark legislation, and I was very proud that it was the first bill I signed as President. But I'm even more proud of the impact this law has had on the everyday lives of working families.

Since its enactment, millions of Americans have been able to take unpaid leave to care for a newborn child or to be with a family member who's sick. I know that many Americans would have lost their jobs if it weren't for the family leave law.

With new pressures on families in the way they work and live, we have to do even more to give people the chance to be good workers and good parents. That's why I proposed expanding the Family and Medical Leave Act so that workers can take time off to attend teacher conferences or to take a child for a medical checkup. I have challenged the Congress to pass legislation that will do just that this year, and I have high hopes that they will.

This morning I want to talk about another way to strengthen our working families. I have a plan that offers employees this simple choice: If you work overtime, you can be paid time and a half, just as the law now requires, or if you want, you can take that payment in time, an hour and a half off for every hour of overtime you work. Simply put, you can choose money in the bank or time on the clock. Comp time can be used for a vacation, an extended maternity leave, or to spend more time with your children or your parents.

We can give employees in American business more flexibility. That serves everyone's interests. But we must make sure that as we give greater flexibility, we do it in a way that's good for both business and employees.

Unfortunately, a version of comp time legislation that is moving through Congress now would take the wrong approach. It could actually leave working families worse off than today. Strong comp-time legislation gives employees the choice of when to take their overtime pay in money or in time off from work. But under

the congressional majority's proposal, employees aren't really guaranteed that choice. There are no effective safeguards to stop an employer from telling an employee who needs a paycheck more than family time that he or she has no choice: ''You work overtime this week, then I'll give you less time next week.''

Strong comp-time legislation would give employees the choice of when they take time off. That's the best way to strengthen families and to give parents more flexibility. But the congressional majority's plan would make it simply too easy for employers to tell workers they cannot take the comp time they have earned.

Under strong comp-time legislation, the time off you have earned is just that, time off. But under the congressional majority's plan, employees who take comp time could be forced to work extra hours at night or on the weekend to make up the time without any overtime pay. That means if you take off a Friday that you have earned by working overtime, your employer could simply make you work Saturday without paying overtime because you haven't worked your full 40-hour week.

Above all, strong comp-time legislation preserves the protection of our 40-hour week, which has been the law now for most of this century. Today the law says if you are an hourly worker and you work longer than 40 hours, you get paid time and a half for overtime. Our plan would give you the choice of taking an hour and a half off for every hour you work instead. But under the congressional majority's plan, some employees who work an extra hour would get only an hour off, less overtime than they would be eligible for today. That's money out of their pocket.

The vast majority of our employers will be fair to their workers under any system. But as we modernize our laws to fit a changing workplace, we have to uphold historic safeguards for all our employees. Giving workers the real choice of taking time off as overtime pay is good for our families. It will help all Americans balance the demands of home and work. But it's employees and their families, not employers, who should choose if, when, and how they take and use comp time.

Congress should pass expanded family leave and a strong comp-time bill. The moment a responsible comp-time bill hits my desk, I will gladly sign it. It will be good for workers, good for business, good for the economy, and strong in the building of our families. But let me also be clear: I will have to veto any legislation that fails to guarantee real choice for employees, real protection against employer abuse, and real preservation of fair labor standards including the 40-hour week.

It's time for us to join together to give America's families the help they need to succeed on the job and in the home. Let's pass comp-time legislation, but let's do it right.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 2:10 p.m. on March 21 at Mantyniemi, the residence of President Martti Ahtisaari of Finland in Helsinki, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 22.

Remarks Announcing Proposed Medicare and Medicaid Fraud Prevention Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters

March 25, 1997

The President. Thank you very much, Governor Chiles. And thank you, Secretary Shalala. Ladies and gentlemen, I also want to thank the representatives of the AARP who are here and others who have been very interested in this program.

As all of you know, and as I have given further evidence of here today, I was recently reminded the hard way that our doctors and medical care are the best in the world. That is certainly true. I can vouch for the doctors and nurses in the hospital in Florida that cared for me when I was recently injured. I've worked hard to give all America's families access to quality health care, and as Governor Chiles and the Secretary have made clear, a critical part of that mission has to be to make sure that our system is free of fraud.

Over the past 4 years, we have made real progress in our efforts to expand access to health