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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

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STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Three years ago, I worked with the Congress to pass the Family and Medical Leave Act so that we could help Americans balance their work and family responsibilities. Americans should not have to choose between their job and caring for a sick child or parent. We said we could do that without hurting businesses and we were right. Today, a bi-partisan commission that studied the Act announced its conclusion that this new law has significantly helped working Americans while placing only minimal requirements on their employers.

The Commission found that because we have a Family and Medical Leave Act, fewer workers will have to choose between their jobs and their loved ones if a child or elderly parent should need care. That's tremendously important in an era when most households are headed by two working parents or by single mothers.

And, as we predicted at the time we fought for this legislation, businesses are finding that the new law is easy to administer and costs are non-existent or small. The majority of leaves are short in duration and most workers return to their jobs. In fact, some businesses testified to the Commission that the new law has helped them reduce employee turnover, enhance productivity and improve the morale of their workforce.

The Family and Medical Leave Act has brought many Americans a benefit that was once afforded only to a fortunate few -- the knowledge that they can return to their jobs and keep their health benefits if they need unpaid time off to meet medical or family needs. Thanks to the work of this bi-partisan commission, we now have further proof of what I have always known: the Family and Medical Leave Act was, and is, the right thing to do for America's working families.

**A WORKABLE BALANCE:
FINAL REPORT TO CONGRESS ON FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE POLICIES FROM
THE COMMISSION ON LEAVE
A Series of Questions and Answers**

Who established the Commission on Leave and who are its members?

As part of the Family And Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Congress established the bi-partisan Commission on Leave in 1993. It is composed of Congressional leaders, representatives of labor, the business community including small businesses, and advocates for women and families. The Commission, which commenced its work in November of 1993, includes ex-officio Cabinet members from Federal agencies with direct interest in family and medical leave issues.

What was the Commission's charge?

The Commission's mandate was to study existing and proposed mandatory and voluntary family and medical leave policies of both covered and non-covered employers; their costs, benefits and impact on productivity; the possible differences to employers in costs, benefits and impact on productivity, job creation and business growth based on size; the impact of family and medical leave policies on the availability of benefits provided by covered and non-covered employers; state enforcement of the FMLA with regard to special provisions pertaining to teachers; methods used by employers to reduce administrative costs of policies; the ability of employers to recover health insurance costs from employees who do not return to work; and the impact on employers and employees of temporary wage replacement policies.

Who did the Commission talk to?

The Commission sought feedback on the impact of family and medical leave policies from a wide array of employers, employees and policymakers. To hear directly from businesses, employees and their families, the Commission held three public hearings around the country (in Chicago, San Francisco and the District of Columbia). The Commission also hired two of the nation's leading research firms -- Westat, Inc. and the Institute for Social Research, Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan -- to conduct nationally representative surveys on the experiences of employers and employees with family and medical leave policies generally, and with the FMLA in particular.

Is every worker covered by the Family And Medical Leave Act?

No. The FMLA requires employers with 50 employees or more to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave a year to eligible employees to care for a newborn, newly-adopted or foster child, a child, spouse or parent with a serious health condition, or the serious health condition of the employee, including maternity-related disability. Employees are eligible to take leave if they have worked for a covered employer for at least one year, and for 1,250 hours over the previous 12 months, and if there are at least 50 employees working for their employer within a 75-mile radius of their worksite. Employers must continue employees' health benefits during leave.

Do most Americans now have access to family and medical leave?

Approximately two-thirds of the U.S. labor force, including private and public-sector employees, work for employers that are covered by the FMLA. Slightly more than half (54.9 percent) of U.S. workers (and 46.5

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percent of private sector workers) also meet the FMLA's length of service and hours-related requirements. Only one in three worksites *not* covered by the FMLA offer parental leave and only two in five offer leave to care for a seriously ill child, spouse or parent. Most worksites are not covered because they have fewer than 50 employees.

How many workers take family and medical leave?

Approximately one in seven employees (16.8 percent) took leave for a reason covered by the FMLA during the 18-month period covered by the surveys, and two to 3.6 percent actually took leave under the Act. This means that one and a half to just over three million workers used the FMLA during the 18-month survey period. About 40 percent of employees expect to need leave for an FMLA reason some time in the next five years -- and the leading reason they anticipate needing leave is to provide elder care to a relative.

Which workers take leave for a reason covered by the FMLA? Why do they take leave and for how long?

Employees age 25 to 34 are most likely to take leave, as are employees with children, hourly employees, and those with family incomes of \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year. Almost 80 percent of leave is family leave taken to care for a seriously ill child, spouse or parent, or medical leave to care for one's own health. Most periods of leave are short. The median length of leave for all leave-takers is just ten days.

Do most leave-takers return to work?

The vast majority of leave-takers (84 percent) return to their same employer. Six percent do not, and ten percent remain on leave.

What does it cost businesses to provide family and medical leave?

Most covered employers find minimal costs associated with the FMLA. Between 89.2 and 98.5 of worksites find that complying with the FMLA entails no costs or only small costs. Larger employees are more likely to report costs.

Is it burdensome or difficult for businesses to comply with the FMLA?

More than 90 percent of worksites find it "very" or "somewhat easy" to determine whether the Act applies to them and to determine employee eligibility. A significant majority also find administrative responsibilities to be no trouble. Larger worksites find it somewhat more difficult to administer FMLA than do smaller covered worksites. Managing intermittent leave presents an administrative difficulty for nearly 40 percent of worksites.

What happens to the Commission now? What do you expect from Congress and others?

The Commission has completed the work mandated by the 1993 FMLA. The Commission recommendations include several administrative steps that Congress and Federal agencies can take, as well as voluntary steps for employers and others. These recommendations are designed to ensure that workers know their rights, that employers can implement the FMLA as easily as possible, and that information remains available to assess the impact of this new law. The Commission has urged employers to voluntarily explore family-friendly workplace policies, and the Federal government to lead by example in this regard.

President Clinton is Meeting America's Challenges:
A Report on the Success of the
Family and Medical Leave Act
May 1, 1996

"The law guarantees the right of up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave per year when it's urgently needed at home to care for a newborn child, or an ill family member. This bill will strengthen our families, and I believe it will strengthen our businesses and our economy as well."

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President Clinton, signing ceremony, February 5, 1993

Strengthening America's families, achieving economic security. Today's report shows that the Family and Medical Leave Act, which was the first bill President Clinton signed into law, has been a tremendous success in helping America's families find security in today's economy. By allowing working Americans to take leave of up to twelve weeks to care for sick relatives or new children without fear of losing their jobs, the FMLA provides the peace of mind that Americans will never have to choose between work and their family's health again.

A clear report. The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 established the bi-partisan Commission on Leave to study the impact of the Act. Their comprehensive, national survey concludes that the FMLA is helping families without causing significant hardship to most businesses.

- * Helping our families cope with serious illness. Almost 80 percent of leave is taken to care for a seriously ill child, spouse or parent, or for one's own serious health condition.
- * Easy to administer. More than nine out of ten employers find it "very" or "somewhat easy" to administer the FMLA.
- * Not costly to business. For 89.2 to 98.5 percent of worksites, complying with the FMLA entails either little or no costs.
- * Helping America's businesses. The vast majority of leave-takers (84 percent) return to their same employer, leading some businesses to testify that the new law has helped them reduce employee turnover, enhance productivity and improve the morale of their workforce.
- * A significant effect. More than half of America's workers are eligible to take leave under the FMLA, and more than one in six of all employees have taken leave for a reason covered by the Act.

Helping Americans meet our challenges. The Family and Medical Leave Act takes a significant step with its signature features of guaranteed job protection and maintenance of health benefits. The Act is helping a larger cross-section of working Americans meet their medical and family caregiving needs while still maintaining their jobs and economic security, achieving the workable balance

the President, and the nation, intended.