

of months.

The day before my Inauguration, on one of the last days people called me Governor, I had lunch with many of the Governors here and many others with whom I have served over the past 14 years. I pledged to them a partnership between the country's Governors and this administration, rooted in our common experience on the front lines of people's lives.

I've told my friends, my colleagues, that the one thing I hoped that I could actually demand from them was a commitment to keep me rooted in that common experience and the real problems of real people. The White House, after all, only works when it is the people's house.

Today we have continued our partnership in earnest. We agreed to challenge together the one obstacle that could keep us from success in virtually every arena of national endeavor: the twin monsters of spiraling health care costs and the agony of having no access to health care, no health care coverage, or living in fear of losing it.

Left unaddressed, the health care crisis has had devastating impacts on families, businesses, the fiscal conditions of State and local government, and the economic performance of the United States. For 12 years our national Government has ignored the problem, partisan gridlock has prevented action, and Americans are paying the price. The amount we spend on health care has more than tripled. Now we spend far more than any other nation on Earth, about 30 percent more of our income, and we get less for it.

We send American companies out into the world with this 30 percent handicap simply because of high health care costs. The average American car alone includes over \$1,000 in health care costs, twice as much as its Japanese competitor. You know as well as I do that the real people of this country are paying the price: working families who live in fear of losing their insurance; small businesses who have to choose between dropping coverage or going broke; State and local governments who have to balance their books every year and are now choosing between cutting education, raising taxes, or cutting other needed investments just to pay more for the same health care bills.

If every person striving to overcome this challenge will bring to that work the same depth of drive and determination that our Nation's Governors have brought here to the White

House today with their policy position, the American people will have the commitment it takes to solve this problem.

This meeting was a model of everything I want my relationship with our Governors to be. It wasn't scripted or staged. It was simply an honest discussion where real work was done, real opinions were argued and a room filled with women and men who left their partisan banners outside the door. And in that spirit and what I hope is the first of a series of announcements we will make together, I want to announce that I am taking the following steps to help them meet the health care needs of their people in their States.

For years the Nation's Governors have been arguing that the process through which waivers from the Medicaid mandates imposed on them by the Federal Government is Byzantine and counterproductive. They are right. I have today directed the Department of Health and Human Services and its Health Care Financing Agency to take immediately a series of actions designed to streamline the Medicaid waiver process to enable the States of our country to serve more people at lower costs. These include a requirement that from now on the Health Care Financing Agency and its regional centers will have only one opportunity to ask for additional information and clarifications on States' waiver requests. I also want the Health Care Financing Agency to examine the development of a list of standard initiatives for automatic approval for State action.

In consultation with the National Governors' Association, I want a rapid review of the entire waiver request process that produces a list of additional streamlining recommendations within 60 days. And I am directing the Health Care Financing Agency to reopen negotiations with the National Governors' Association to issue new regulations related to how they can use provider taxes and disproportionate share reimbursement to meet the needs of the people in their State.

Finally, I am directing the Department of Health and Human Services to conduct a similar review of the non-Medicaid waiver submissions not addressed in the matters I have just discussed.

I'm also happy to announce that Hillary and the leadership of the National Governors' Association have agreed on a formal process for the Governors to have input into the Health Care Task Force. Their input, their advice, their per-