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Governors Urge Congress to Quickly Pass Health IT Legislation
*Delay in federal action stalls state-level progress on
Improving health care quality and containing spiraling costs*

WASHINGTON – A bipartisan group of governors today called on Congress to quickly pass legislation establishing federal standards and guidance for health information technology (Health IT).

In a press conference at the National Press Club, Governor Chet Culver, Democrat of Iowa, Governor Jim Douglas, Republican of Vermont, and Governor Joe Manchin, Democrat of West Virginia, described the growing state-level demand for health IT. The governors said that progress in every state is limited because the federal government has yet to establish national health IT standards. Such standards must be set by Congress, they stated, and will finally allow care providers, insurers and state programs to know what kind of software and hardware systems to design and purchase so every state can be interoperable with all the others.

"It is important to recognize the impact information technology has had on productivity and efficiency in other industries, and to realize what it can do to improve the quality of health care delivery," said Gov. Manchin. "West Virginia is helping to lead the way and has become a nationwide model for health information exchange. If we make the right investments in information technology for health care, we can make great advancements in medical quality, safety, promotion of good health and savings in West Virginia and across the nation."

As governors of states with significant rural populations, they explained how the benefits of health IT solve acute problems in their states: patients who live far away from doctors and hospitals can receive certain kinds of treatments and examinations without leaving home; poor and underserved communities can more easily get treatment and preventive care, narrowing disparities in outcomes and quality; and rural care providers who live far from big cities can consult with world-class specialists with ease.

"I believe accessible, affordable health care is the right of every Iowan, and every American," said Governor Culver. "Health IT has the potential to improve the delivery of medical services, and will help ensure doctors and nurses have every tool they need to keep our citizens healthy and to prevent disease.

"So, I urge Congress to act immediately to pass comprehensive health IT legislation," Culver stated. "As Governor, I have made it a priority for Iowa to set the standard for electronic medical records and telemedicine. But this is truly a national issue, and leadership at the federal level is

essential."

"Health IT systems have extraordinary potential to make health care more affordable and improve the quality of care we receive," said Governor Jim Douglas. "Governors all across the country haven't waited for Washington to act and like Vermont are paving the way with groundbreaking reforms. In Vermont, we're working toward a health information exchange network that will share real-time clinical information among health care providers everywhere in our state. We will improve patient outcomes, reduce service duplication and reduce skyrocketing health care costs. But the work of governors won't be enough if Washington, D.C., sits this one out and I want to thank the Coalition for their leadership and add my voice to the chorus calling for swift congressional action on this important topic."

Other governors have delivered letters to Congress urging immediate passage of health IT legislation. Governor Christine Gregoire of Washington, Governor Brian Schweitzer of Montana and Governor Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas have all sent letters.

Legislation is necessary to establish a federal foundation for a nationwide electronic system supporting patients and health care professionals. The network would replace paper-based records with a secure system that could prevent as many as 98,000 deaths each year and virtually eliminate most medical errors. Health IT would also create more convenient communication, and faster, more secure access to medical histories, test results and other critical information.

"Rising health care costs are one of the biggest challenges facing manufacturers and their employees," said John Engler, former governor of Michigan, who spoke on behalf of the Health IT Now! Coalition.

"Encouraging the use of cutting-edge technology, whether in the office or in the operating room, is critical to controlling costs, improving quality and increasing access to health care for more individuals," said Engler, president and CEO of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and a leading coalition member.

The Health IT Now! Coalition urges Congress to pass legislation that embraces four principles:

- Establish in statute federal responsibility to lead a public-private process to create standards for system interoperability, product certification, and quality measures and an accelerated process for standards improvement;
- Offer financial incentives to encourage the adoption of Health IT, and offer states, communities and other entities incentives to plan Health IT components and develop Health Information Exchanges;
- Provide federal focus on consumer empowerment through patient education about electronic health; and
- Establish federal leadership to resolve critical policy issues such as privacy and security as this life-saving system is being deployed.

Legislation that meets these principles has been introduced in both the United States Senate and the House of Representatives.

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Health IT Now! unites patients, practitioners and employers, working together to take the steps to adopt Health IT now to dramatically improve quality of patient care, consumer convenience and patient health while lowering health care costs.

Visit www.healthITnow.org to learn more about the coalition, its principles and its membership. Members include:

*American Academy of Nursing
The American Cancer Society Cancer
Action Network
The American Diabetes Association
American Heart Association
American Health Care Association
American Homeowners Grassroots Alliance
The American Telemedicine Association
The Boeing Company
The Bronx Regional Health Information
Organization
Business Roundtable
Consumers for Competitive Choice
The Dow Chemical Company
FasterCures
Genetic Alliance
HealthTech
International Brotherhood of Electrical
Workers
Latino Coalition
Marshfield Clinic
Mercy Medical Center
Montefiore Medical Center
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*National Alliance on Mental Illness
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Underwriters
National Association of Manufacturers
National Disease Clusters Alliance
National Medical Association
National MS Society
National Patient Advocate Foundation
National Retail Federation
New York Presbyterian Hospital
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Association
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Society for Human Resource Management
US Oncology
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Verizon
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Women Work!
World Institute on Disability*

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