

January 1. And by the way, health care costs are growing at the slowest rate in 50 years.

One more thing: Since I took office, we've cut our deficits by more than half. And that makes it easier to invest in the things that create jobs: education, research, and infrastructure.

Imagine how much farther along we could be if both parties were working together. Think about what we could do if a reckless few didn't hold the economy hostage every few months or waste time on dozens of votes to repeal the Affordable Care Act rather than try to help us fix it.

In the weeks ahead, I'll keep talking about my plan to build a better bargain for the middle class: good jobs; a good education; a chance to buy a home, save, and retire; and yes, the financial security of affordable health care. And

I'll look for any willing partners who want to help.

Because of your hard work and tough sacrifices over the past 5 years, we're pointed in the right direction. But we've got more work to do to keep moving that way. And as long as I'm President, I'll keep doing everything I can to create jobs, grow the economy, and make sure that everyone who works hard has a chance to get ahead.

Thanks, and have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 5:20 p.m. on November 22 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on November 23. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 22, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on November 23.

Remarks on Iran November 23, 2013

Good evening. Today the United States, together with our close allies and partners, took an important first step toward a comprehensive solution that addresses our concerns with the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear program.

Since I took office, I've made clear my determination to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. As I've said many times, my strong preference is to resolve this issue peacefully, and we've extended the hand of diplomacy. Yet, for many years, Iran has been unwilling to meet its obligations to the international community. So my administration worked with Congress, the United Nations Security Council, and countries around the world to impose unprecedented sanctions on the Iranian Government.

These sanctions have had a substantial impact on the Iranian economy, and with the election of a new Iranian President earlier this year, an opening for diplomacy emerged. I spoke personally with President Rouhani of Iran earlier this fall. Secretary Kerry has met multiple times with Iran's Foreign Minister. And we have pursued intensive diplomacy, bilaterally with the Iranians and together with

our P-5-plus-1 partners: the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, and China, as well as the European Union.

Today that diplomacy opened up a new path toward a world that is more secure, a future in which we can verify that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful and that it cannot build a nuclear weapon. While today's announcement is just a first step, it achieves a great deal. For the first time in nearly a decade, we have halted the progress of the Iranian nuclear program, and key parts of the program will be rolled back. Iran has committed to halting certain levels of enrichment and neutralizing part of its stockpiles. Iran cannot use its next-generation centrifuges, which are used for enriching uranium. Iran cannot install or start up new centrifuges, and its production of centrifuges will be limited. Iran will halt work at its plutonium reactor. And new inspections will provide extensive access to Iran's nuclear facilities and allow the international community to verify whether Iran is keeping its commitments.

These are substantial limitations, which will help prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon. Simply put, they cut off Iran's most

likely paths to a bomb. Meanwhile, this first step will create time and space over the next 6 months for more negotiations to fully address our comprehensive concerns about the Iranian program. And because of this agreement, Iran cannot use negotiations as cover to advance its program.

On our side, the United States and our friends and allies have agreed to provide Iran with modest relief, while continuing to apply our toughest sanctions. We will refrain from imposing new sanctions, and we will allow the Iranian Government access to a portion of the revenue that they have been denied through sanctions. But the broader architecture of sanctions will remain in place, and we will continue to enforce them vigorously. And if Iran does not fully meet its commitments during this 6-month phase, we will turn off the relief and ratchet up the pressure.

Over the next 6 months, we will work to negotiate a comprehensive solution. We approach these negotiations with a basic understanding: Iran, like any nation, should be able to access peaceful nuclear energy. But because of its record of violating its obligations, Iran must accept strict limitations on its nuclear program that make it impossible to develop a nuclear weapon.

In these negotiations, nothing will be agreed to unless everything is agreed to. The burden is on Iran to prove to the world that its nuclear program will be exclusively for peaceful purposes.

If Iran seizes this opportunity, the Iranian people will benefit from rejoining the international community, and we can begin to chip away at the mistrust between our two nations. This would provide Iran with a dignified path to forge a new beginning with the wider world based on mutual respect. If, on the other hand, Iran refuses, it will face growing pressure and isolation.

Over the last few years, Congress has been a key partner in imposing sanctions on the Iranian Government, and that bipartisan effort made possible the progress that was achieved today. Going forward, we will continue to work closely with Congress. However, now is not the

time to move forward on new sanctions, because doing so would derail this promising first step, alienate us from our allies, and risk unraveling the coalition that enabled our sanctions to be enforced in the first place.

That international unity is on display today. The world is united in support of our determination to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. Iran must know that security and prosperity will never come through the pursuit of nuclear weapons. It must be reached through fully verifiable agreements that make Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons impossible.

As we go forward, the resolve of the United States will remain firm, as will our commitments to our friends and allies, particularly Israel and our Gulf partners, who have good reason to be skeptical about Iran's intentions.

Ultimately, only diplomacy can bring about a durable solution to the challenge posed by Iran's nuclear program. As President and Commander in Chief, I will do what is necessary to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. But I have a profound responsibility to try to resolve our differences peacefully, rather than rush towards conflict. Today we have a real opportunity to achieve a comprehensive, peaceful settlement, and I believe we must test it.

The first step that we've taken today marks the most significant and tangible progress that we've made with Iran since I took office. And now we must use the months ahead to pursue a lasting and comprehensive settlement that would resolve an issue that has threatened our security—and the security of our allies—for decades. It won't be easy, and huge challenges remain ahead. But through strong and principled diplomacy, the United States of America will do our part on behalf of a world of greater peace, security, and cooperation among nations.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:34 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif-Khonsari of Iran.