

spent at least some time without insurance. Forty-one million lacked coverage for the entire year. Among them are 8.5 million children who are indeed being left behind.

We can do better.

This is a national problem and it demands national leadership to fix it. Medical research is producing miracles. And yet, Washington's neglect has allowed a crisis to emerge.

Doctors and nurses are dedicating their lives to the care of their patients. And yet Washington cannot seem to dedicate any of its attention or its resources to helping Americans who are suffering.

This is a critical moment in our Nation's history. As our attention turns back toward the troubles of our economy and the Americans who are struggling to work and raise families, I intend to do everything I can to keep the Senate's attention focused on the crisis in health care.

Our citizens are asking for our leadership, and we have an obligation to answer their call.

I yield the floor.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, before the Democratic leader leaves the floor—if I could just engage in a colloquy with him—the leader is so on point. We need to do something about health care. In my office today was a 13-year-old girl from Reno, NV. Her best friend's mother has lupus. This little girl didn't know what to do. As you know, we are way behind the ball on trying to determine what causes lupus and how to cure it. It is a very serious disease, and mostly a disease of women. This little girl on her own painted little lady bugs and sold them for \$2 each and made \$2,000 for research into lupus. She got a national award.

With all that has been going on—Iraq and Afghanistan are terribly important issues—and as we focus on this tax cut, which is a very important issue, I hope this Congress can devote some time to the 44 or 45 million Americans who have no health insurance and the millions of others who are underinsured. The State of Nevada, I am not proud to say, leads the Nation in uninsured. It has created tremendous problems for the State of Nevada because those people who are uninsured drive up health care costs for everybody. Indigent care and hospital and doctor bills have increased. And, of course, insurance costs more for those people who are fortunate to have it.

I hope the country has heard the message delivered by the Democratic leader—that we need to do something about health care.

This little girl is so desperate in helping her best friend's mother that she painted lady bugs. Her heart is bigger than her body, I am sure. But we need to make sure the National Institutes of Health has all the money they need to do all they can.

In addition, people should have basic health insurance. All the research in the world is important, but it is not

the answer for people to have the ability to go to the doctor when they need it.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I thank the assistant Democratic leader for his excellent comments. He is absolutely right. Of all the priorities our country faces—as we look to the well-being of our youth, and as we look to the extraordinary challenges we face to remain competitive—our country cannot remain competitive if our youth do not have good health and access to health care in rural areas as well as in the inner cities. We can't stay competitive with businesses that have to expand costs by double or triple every 2 or 3 years. We have a financial crisis in health care today. It is a crisis that is being felt by thousands and thousands of people who were not affected the last time we addressed this issue. They had health insurance. But we can no longer afford to ignore it. We can no longer afford to postpone it. We can no longer afford to minimize the extraordinary impact this problem is having on society and our economy today.

I appreciate very much the Senator's comments. I know he feels as deeply as I do and as our caucus does about the importance of putting this high on the priority list as we consider the legislative agenda for the remainder of this Congress.

I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SESSIONS). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. In my capacity as a Senator from the State of Texas, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will stand in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, at 12:30 p.m., the Senate recessed until 2:16 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. VOINOVICH).

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF CECILIA M. ALTONAGA, OF FLORIDA, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination of Cecilia M. Altonaga, of Florida, to be United States District Court Judge, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Cecilia M. Altonaga, of Florida, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Florida.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 15 minutes evenly divided for debate on the nomination.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise in support of the nomination of Cecilia Altonaga to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida. Judge Altonaga has enjoyed a stellar legal career on both sides of the bench.

Upon graduating from Yale Law School, Judge Altonaga clerked for the Honorable Edward B. Davis of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida—the very court she will join upon her confirmation.

Judge Altonaga then spent 10 years as an assistance county attorney for the Miami-Dade County Attorney's Office. During her tenure, she specialized in construction litigation, reviewing and drafting construction contracts, and advising the County Commission in the awarding of government contracts, including bid disputes handled in administrative quasi-judicial hearings. She also handled tort suits, defending the County ordinances and actions taken by County Commissioners in State and Federal courts.

From 1996 to 1999, Judge Altonaga served as a County Court Judge of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit of the State of Florida. While on the County Court, Judge Altonaga served in the Domestic Violence, Civil, and Criminal Divisions. Since 1999, she has served as a Judge for the Circuit Court of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit of the State of Florida, where she has been assigned to the Court's Juvenile, Criminal, and Appellate Divisions.

Notably, Judge Altonaga will be the first Cuban-American woman to serve as a Federal judge. I have every confidence that she will serve with distinction, and I am pleased to join with my colleagues from Florida in supporting her nomination.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, we will soon be voting on the nomination of Judge Cecilia Altonaga to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Florida. I believe that Judge Altonaga will be the first Cuban-American woman to sit on the Federal bench.

Judge Altonaga comes to us with bipartisan support after being unanimously approved by Florida's bipartisan Judicial Advisory Committee. I commend Senators GRAHAM and NELSON for insisting that a bipartisan selection commission be implemented in Florida. This shows how well it works.

We are moving down judicial vacancies. As we can see, starting in 1994, judicial vacancies increased actually