

we would suggest as an alternative. I will acknowledge they are the first, I believe, after all these years, to actually step up with a proposal. But it is important for us to take a close look at this proposal.

This new plan which the Republicans offered does not offer the same protection when it comes to insuring people with preexisting conditions. Does anyone know a person in their family or a friend with a preexisting medical condition? Everybody's hand ought to go up because we all do. Everybody has somebody in their family with some history—a history that, in the old days, would disqualify them from health insurance or end up with premiums they couldn't afford. The new Republican approach to replace the current protection of people with preexisting conditions doesn't give the same opportunity for health insurance for those people. That, to me, is a fatal flaw.

Secondly, we decided we would make prescription drugs under Medicare for seniors more affordable. We used to have something called the doughnut hole. It cost seniors over \$1,000 a year to pay for their prescription drugs. We started closing that doughnut hole, and it saves on average in Illinois, for every senior citizen, \$780 a year. So that is \$780 for these seniors to have in their savings, in their checkbook. The new Republican approach, the Hatch-Burr program, eliminates that and we go back to the doughnut hole. We go back to this debt.

Sadly, it doesn't provide the Medicaid coverage which people in low-income categories need. Take a close look at Medicaid. The vast majority of people receiving Medicaid benefits in America are children and pregnant moms. When we cut back on Medicaid, as this Hatch-Burr proposal does, we do it at their expense. But the largest number in terms of dollars spent who receive these benefits are those in nursing homes who are broke.

Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, keep them alive. When we cut back on Medicaid, cut back on reimbursements to the nursing home, the obvious question is: What is going to happen to grandma? What is going to happen to mom?

So when they start cutting back on Medicaid, look long and hard. The people whom we are protecting on Medicaid Programs are some of the most vulnerable in America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I was listening to what the Senator from Illinois was saying. I could not say it as well as he did, but I agree with every single word he said and I suspect that Vermonters, Republicans and Democrats alike, agree with what he said.

#### LYNCH NOMINATION

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, almost 2 weeks ago the Attorney General nomi-

nee, Loretta Lynch, came before the Senate Judiciary Committee and testified for nearly 8 hours. As one who has heard Attorneys General nominees testify for the past 40 years, I cannot think of anybody who did a better job. She was clear and concise. She is a prosecutor's prosecutor. She has also responded to more than 600 written questions. Many of them have absolutely nothing to do with whether she is qualified for the job or not. But people felt they had to send in these questions for whatever reason—and she responded to them all, whether they were relevant or not. And when she is confirmed, she will be the first African-American woman to serve as the Attorney General of the United States in our Nation's history. A majority of members of the committee, both Republican and Democratic, have said they intend to support her confirmation. I am confident she has the votes to be confirmed by the full Senate.

But as of today it has been 94 days since the President announced the nomination of Ms. Lynch. Her nomination has been pending longer than any modern Attorney General nominee. We should all be able to agree that confirming the top law enforcement position should be an urgent priority of the Senate. At a time when we face all kinds of threats from terrorists—both outside our borders and within our borders—we should all be united in confirming an Attorney General nominee like Loretta Lynch. She has the experience of successfully prosecuting numerous terrorists, people who others said we should be afraid to prosecute and that we should lock them up in Guantanamo in case they are not convicted. Ms. Lynch has obtained those convictions and those terrorist are locked away in Federal prisons right now.

This Thursday, the Senate Judiciary Committee has the opportunity to vote on her nomination. I have heard that even though she has already waited longer than any other modern Attorney General nominee to be confirmed, some Republicans are considering delaying the important vote for her for two more weeks. Under our committee rule, they have the right to do so. But I urge them not to do so.

Loretta Lynch's qualifications are beyond reproach. She has been confirmed by the Senate twice before to serve as the top federal prosecutor based in Brooklyn, NY, one of the most significant prosecutors' offices in this country. Incidentally, she was confirmed both times unanimously. Under her leadership, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York has brought terrorists to justice, obtained convictions against both Republicans and Democrats in public corruption cases, and fought tirelessly against violent crime and financial fraud. It would be hard to find any prosecutor in this country in any administration who has a better record than she does, and her record shows

that as Attorney General, Ms. Lynch will effectively, fairly, and independently enforce the law.

Now, thinking back to 2007 when Michael Mukasey was nominated by President Bush to serve as Attorney General. Now, President Bush was in the end of his term as President. The Democrats had taken over the majority in the Senate that year. I served as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. President Bush talked to me and said: we need, of course, an Attorney General. I agreed. And I knew that like Ms. Lynch, Mr. Mukasey had been confirmed before by the Senate, and I also knew that this was coming toward the end of the Bush Presidency. Now, ultimately I voted against Mr. Mukasey because of his responses relating to questions on torture. But even though I was going to vote against him, I proceeded with his nomination in a very prompt manner.

It took just 53 days from the announcement of Mr. Mukasey's nomination to his confirmation. It has been 94 days for Ms. Lynch. Her nomination is needlessly on track to take more than twice the amount of time it took a Democratic-led Senate to confirm President Bush's nominee. After Mr. Mukasey's hearing, Senate Democrats could have held his nomination over in committee, but we did not. In fact, I had to hold a special markup to report his nomination out of committee as soon as possible. And he was confirmed 2 days later. Republicans should extend the same courtesy to expedite Ms. Lynch's nomination, as we did to Mr. Mukasey's.

Last week the Secretary of Defense nominee testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee—last week—and his nomination will be reported to the floor today. His nomination is expected to be confirmed by the end of the week. Now, I agree the Defense Secretary is a critically important position to fill, and I will vote for him. But so is the Nation's top law enforcement officer. I urge Senate Republicans to allow a vote on Ms. Lynch's nomination before we adjourn for a week-long recess. Please, don't treat her differently than we treated Mr. Mukasey. We were able to give him an expedited procedure. She has already waited much longer than he did. Don't make her wait even longer.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The 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.

#### RECOGNIZING DARN TOUGH SOCKS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, in Vermont, small businesses are the foundation of our State's economy.