



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 114th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 162

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, APRIL 26, 2016

No. 64

Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray:

Loving Father, You are high above all nations, and Your glory is above the Heavens. The Earth belongs to You. You own the silver and gold and the cattle upon a thousand hills. We confess that we often forget that righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people. We thank You for Your mercies that come to us new each day. May we live lives of gratitude because of Your generous kindness.

Today, use our Senators as instruments of Your glory. Fill them with Your peace as they keep their minds fixed on You.

Lord, bless our Nation. Make it a beacon of freedom and righteousness in these challenging times.

We pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The majority leader is recognized.

THE APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, when the new majority resolved to get the Senate back to work, we knew we would have to get committees func-

tioning first. We believed that would be critical to helping Members on both sides rediscover their voices and find common ground and then develop real stakes in the outcome. That certainly is what we have seen this appropriations season.

The Appropriations Committee has already held dozens of hearings. It has marked up funding bills at a steady clip. It is sending good legislation to the floor.

One of those bills is the energy security and water infrastructure appropriations measure which is before us now. This legislation is important for American energy, for American waterways and ports, and for American commerce and safety. It will also maintain our nuclear deterrence posture by ensuring nuclear stockpile readiness, which is important for national security.

I would like to recognize the bill managers for their diligent work to bring this legislation to the floor for consideration. I would also like to recognize the leadership of the Appropriations Committee for its work in getting this process moving. By returning to regular order, we have opened up the process and empowered Senators—both those who sit on the Appropriations Committee and those who do not—to have more of a say in the appropriations legislation. That is important because these funding bills can affect each of our States.

The progress we have seen already is encouraging. It shows what is possible when the Senate gets back to a productive legislative process.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I appreciate the good work, the exemplary work done on the Energy and Water appropriations bill by Senators FEINSTEIN and ALEXANDER. I managed that legislation for many years. Most of the time, it was with Pete Domenici from New Mexico. I was the chair most of the time but not all of the time. But it didn't matter—our job was to move the bill forward.

What people don't realize about this most important bill is that most of the funding is not for energy and water as we look at it, it is defense related—making sure our nuclear weapons are safe and reliable and things of that nature, making sure our National Labs are funded. So I appreciate their good work. It has been very good. I appreciate it.

Last night the Republican leader filed cloture. Cloture was filed not because of any problems on our side. We should finish the work on the bill tomorrow or maybe Thursday. But I am glad we are going to get it done. It is an extremely important piece of legislation. I am glad we started here. I am glad to hear my friend the Republican leader talk about the appropriations process moving forward. But we have to understand that we have a lot more bills to go. This is only one—one out of many, one out of a dozen.

ZIKA VIRUS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I want to be clear about something else, something that is vitally important, something that is imperative. The Senate must do something now to address the outbreak of the Zika virus. We are not going to interfere with the Energy and Water appropriations bill, but we must do something to confront this scourge that is facing our country and the western part of the world.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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Anyone who has followed the news over the past few months has undoubtedly heard about the spread of Zika. Zika is a virus spread by mosquitos in warmer tropical areas. We have warmer areas in the United States—not tropical but warm—and they breed mosquitos. Zika has been linked to many health problems, but most notable is a terrible birth defect called microencephaly. We have all seen pictures of these babies with these small heads, caused by a mosquito bite.

Dr. Anthony Fauci from the National Institutes of Health—he is the leader of the institute dealing with infectious disease—came to the Capitol last Thursday. He briefed us about this thing called Zika. He described how dangerous it is. He was accompanied by people from the Centers for Disease Control. He is, of course, representing the National Institutes of Health. We also had the Secretary of Health and Human Services. They were here to tell us how serious the situation is, how dangerous it is.

There are a number of problems as a result of this virus, but the one that has been most illustrated is the fact that in infants the skull does not fully form. So the skull never completely pushes out to form around the brain. So when they are born, these babies have tiny, undeveloped skulls. Sometimes the skulls collapse.

Aside from the damaged brains and skulls, these babies also have, of course, developmental delays. Earlier this year a baby in Hawaii was born with this disease, but, sadly, the worst is on its way.

We have seen cases of this virus all over the continental United States. These have been linked to travel or transmitted from someone who has traveled to Zika-affected areas. Most Americans are afraid to travel abroad—and, I am sorry to say, rightfully so—for fear of mosquitos carrying Zika, that Zika will infect them. But Zika is already upon us in Puerto Rico and in Florida, and it is going to spread to other places. These mosquitos can breed in something smaller than a bottle cap of water.

Puerto Rico is battling the local transmission of the virus as we speak. As of last Friday, the island already had more than 500 confirmed cases of Zika, and they are concerned that 1 in 5 Puerto Ricans could have been infected.

Our fellow American citizens in Puerto Rico have limited funding to fight this growing epidemic. We have heard about the financial problems they are having. The Puerto Rican government doesn't even have enough money to pay contractors to empty the septic tanks in schools, which are breeding grounds for mosquito larvae, capable of producing billions of mosquitos—not millions but billions.

Experts tell us it won't be long before the mosquitos carrying Zika are infecting people here in the continental United States. We can't wait for that

before we act. This is an emergency situation, if anything ever were. The Senate must do something now to counter the spread of this virus. The White House has taken money—they asked for money 2 months ago, but during that period of time, they took money from Ebola funding, which is also vitally important. We are doing pretty well stopping the spread of that. But taking that money away, we are going to be right back with the problem with Ebola if it is not replaced.

We have a bill ready to go. Senator NELSON of Florida, who is going to feel this as much as any Senator in the country, has provided a bill to give the President the money he has asked for: \$1.9 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations. Democrats believe this \$1.9 billion is a good start. Our Nation's public health and infectious disease experts say this is roughly how much money they need to fight this virus. We would be irresponsible not to provide this money and do it now. Senator NELSON's bill will bolster our defense against Zika by funding the development of vaccines, mosquito control methods, and testing and services to those who are infected.

So I say to my Republican colleagues, I say to the Republican leader: Do we want to wait until more babies are born with these permanent disabilities—disabilities caused by a virus that the vaccine could help prevent, if not for all children, then for many? Do we want to wait until people in the United States start to suffer from paralysis caused by Guillain-Barre syndrome, which is also linked to Zika? It has already been more than 2 months since the President requested this emergency funding. The longer we wait, the worse it will be.

States are already scrambling to address Zika. A story in the Washington Post highlighted the danger of inaction. I quote:

Cities and states preparing for possible Zika outbreaks this spring and summer are losing millions of federal dollars that local officials say they were counting on, not only for on-the-ground efforts to track and contain the spread of the mosquito-borne virus but also to respond to other emergencies that threaten public health.

Los Angeles County, for example, says it won't be able to fill 17 vacancies at its public health laboratory or buy equipment to upgrade its capability for Zika testing. Michigan is concerned about providing resources to help Flint contend with its ongoing water-contamination crisis. Minnesota plans to reduce its stockpile of certain medications needed to treat first responders during emergencies.

The across-the-board funding cuts are part of a complicated shift of resources that the Obama administration blames on Congress for its refusal to approve the White House's \$1.9 billion emergency request to combat Zika.

The President is right. He is pointing the finger where it belongs—right here at Congress.

So I implore my Republican colleagues, I implore my friend the Republican leader: Let's act now. We have

done the work. We have a bill to provide what experts need to fight this devastating virus. Let's get it done.

For more than a week, we have heard about Republicans and the appropriations folks working toward an agreement. I have yet to see it. I have heard about it. If the Republican leader and Appropriations have an alternative, they should bring it to the floor now. Democrats are happy to work toward a solution, but we have to get started. We need to get the experts the resources they need to prevent the spread of Zika. It is not acceptable to do nothing. The Senate should not leave this week without addressing legislation that fights Zika. We cannot go on break without taking care of this emergency. When the Senate finishes the work on Energy and Water, we must move to the Zika legislation. The National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, the entire Health and Human Services Cabinet office—they need Congress to send them the funding necessary to start working on a solution to Zika.

ADDRESSING DROUGHT CONDITIONS IN THE WEST

Mr. REID. Mr. President, Benjamin Franklin said: "When the well is dry, we know the worth of water."

The drought is here. It has been going on for 15 to 20 years in the western part of the United States. All over the West, we are perilously close to running dry. The water situation is as dangerous as it has been in our lifetime.

The States of California, Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming don't have these huge rivers like we see west of the Mississippi. We have, basically, the little Colorado River. It is a tiny little river. In the past, it has become mighty, but for very short periods of time. That little river is called upon to respond to everything.

One of the things that is happening is that Lake Powell, the largest man-made lake in America, is going dry. There is no end in sight. This drought has dropped Lake Mead, which is the resource for water that goes everywhere in the West. Most of the water in California they get out of the Colorado. It all comes out of Lake Mead.

Lake Mead levels have dropped to levels not seen since the Great Depression. That is, of course, when the lake was born. It hasn't been full in over three decades. To make matters worse, El Nino is supposed to ease the pain, but it hasn't—only a little bit more.

Some say up to 50 million people rely on the Colorado River. We know the State of California, with almost 40 million people, depends on it as much as any other source of water. We have to work to reverse current trends or face a future where water shortages become the new normal. The Federal Government can and should work with States on solutions that make our precious water supplies more sustainable. We