

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

need to work together, as the States of California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and even Wyoming, which is a long way away, have worked to solve the issues.

Today the Senate continues deliberation on the Energy and Water bill. Later this morning we will consider three amendments. One is a Reid-Heller amendment, which seeks to address drought conditions throughout the West. Our amendment would build on that spirit of collaboration by trying to address the fact that we need to stretch every drop of water as far as it will go.

This legislation isn't for any one city or region. It will help every State that relies upon the water in the Colorado River system: Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.

I hope this amendment will be adopted. I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. President, will the Chair announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2028, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2028) making appropriations for energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Alexander/Feinstein amendment No. 3801, in the nature of a substitute.

Alexander amendment No. 3804 (to amendment No. 3801), to modify provisions relating to Nuclear Regulatory Commission fees.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 11 a.m. will be equally divided between the two managers or their designees.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

ZIKA VIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, by now we have all seen reports of the neuro-

logical damage that is done by the Zika virus. We have seen the damage it can do to newborn infants. It has been clinically linked to serious birth defects in pregnant women who contract it.

Since the start of the outbreak, nearly 900 Americans in 41 States, Washington, DC, and 3 U.S. territories—including over 80 pregnant women—have already contracted Zika. In my State of Illinois, 13 people have already tested positive, including at least two pregnant women.

But because we have the best scientists and researchers in the world at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we know more today about the virus and prevention measures than we did when most of us first heard the word “Zika” a few months ago.

We know that mosquitoes spread the disease. We know that the arrival of warm weather signals the start of mosquito season, but America is currently unprepared to deal with an outbreak of this dangerous virus. We must improve vector control. We must expand access to family planning, education, and contraception. We must accelerate efforts to develop a vaccine as quickly as humanly possible.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention desperately needs funding to deal with this crisis, and they need it now before the summer months, when mosquitoes spread north across the United States.

Congress has failed to even consider President Obama's emergency Zika funding request. What on Earth is Congress waiting for?

Last week Senate Democrats sent a letter to Senate Republican leadership calling for immediate action to pass the Zika supplemental request. I hope this call for action will be heard by all of my Republican colleagues, but I especially hope that it resonates with my colleagues from the Southern States. These are the States that are the most likely to be hit first and hardest by the Zika mosquito virus: Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, Arkansas, and the list goes on.

In the absence of congressional action—immediate congressional action—the administration has been forced to divert funding and resources away from other important public health efforts in order to respond to Zika.

This morning's Washington Post headline in a few words tells the story: “Zika crisis costs states funds for emergency preparedness.” What does that mean? The President asked for this supplemental request weeks ago. The refusal of the Republican-led Congress to respond to the President's request for emergency public health funds to fight Zika means that we are cutting back on public health preparedness in States all across the Nation. Frankly, we are endangering people whom we represent because the Republican majority in Congress refuses to give the President his supplemental re-

quest to deal with the Zika virus. For instance, the administration just had to divert \$2 million in public health emergency preparedness grants away from Illinois in order to fight Zika in Southern States.

Well, let me tell you, I want to help people everywhere, including those in Southern States who are likely to be hit first, but not at the expense of the public health of the people I represent.

There is an answer. President Obama suggests it—an emergency public health supplemental for the Zika virus.

The Republican majority in Congress has refused to act. Both the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Chicago Department of Public Health received grants to prepare for and to respond to all kinds of public outbreaks, such as Ebola, Zika, and Elizabethkingia, which I will talk about in a moment. These cuts, which are being proposed in order to have the administration have enough resources to respond, are unacceptable and unexplainable.

They come at a time when Illinois, my State, is in the middle of the longest budget crisis in our State's history. This current Governor has been unable to reach an agreement on a budget for almost 11 months, making it difficult for Illinois families and State agencies in ordinary circumstances.

But because congressional Republican leaders have failed to pass a Zika emergency public health supplemental requested by President Obama, the administration has had to divert money away from States such as Illinois to respond to the threat of the Zika virus in other States. Is this any way to govern a great Nation?

Illinois should not have to lose precious funding to deal with public health threats because Republican congressional leaders—from Southern states, I might add—have refused to pass the necessary additional funding to deal with Zika, a virus that will likely impact their States first and hardest.

We have to do both. We should pass the Zika supplemental so Illinois and other States can keep the funding they need to deal with current public health threats and receive additional funding to deal with Zika.

Let me talk about why diverting \$2 million from my State of Illinois to Southern States for Zika is a challenge.

Last week the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed 10 cases of a bacterial infection known as Elizabethkingia. It has resulted in six deaths in my State. This bacterial outbreak is separate from an outbreak in Wisconsin that resulted in over 60 cases of this infection. So in the middle of this outbreak, Illinois is losing 8 percent in core funding for public health contingencies because of the failure of Republican leaders in Congress to pass President Obama's emergency public health supplemental appropriation.