

Forces in order to protect our country and our freedom. They don't ask for much, but we ask so much of them.

That is why we must meet our commitment to them by passing this Veterans and Military Construction funding measure as soon as possible. This bill will increase critical resources to help ensure veterans receive health care and the health benefits they rely on. It will improve quality of life on military bases for soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and their families. It will support critical national security projects such as missile defense. It is a bipartisan measure that earned the support of both Democrats and Republicans when it passed the Senate. So let's work together today and pass it again.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

ZIKA VIRUS AND VA-MILCON FUNDING BILL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I don't know what planet my friend the Republican leader is living on. This conference report is the most irresponsible legislation I have ever seen in my 34 years in Congress. That says a lot. I can't think of anything that is close.

This Zika threat is real. It is serious. Every day more and more Americans are being infected. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, right now 2,900 Americans have already contracted Zika. There were 700 just last week alone who were added to that list. It was 2,200, and now it is 2,900, and 481 women have been tested positive for the virus in the United States. Eight pregnancies in the United States have resulted in severe birth defects because of Zika, and when we talk about severe birth defects, we mean it. They have little shrunk heads and their skulls are caved in. Mosquitoes have caused problems forever, but never like this.

In spite of all the evidence of Zika's harm to the American people, Republicans are pushing the conference report as nothing more than the goodie bag for the fringes of the Republican Party. In April, very recently, the Republican leader told reporters:

We are all very much aware that this is a serious crisis. . . . We'll be working with the administration, with the Democrats.

That simply hasn't proven to be true. On the conference committee the Democrats were locked out of negotiations. Then they jammed through this bill. When I say in the middle of the night, it was in the middle of the night. It was during the time they had the sit-in on the House floor. Chaos was there. There was no debate, no discussion. It was just ruled there by the Presiding Officer. It shortchanged the President's request by \$800 million. It

took another \$100 million from the Ebola funding, which is badly needed. All you have to do is talk to anyone at NIH or the Centers for Disease Control, and they will tell you. Ebola is not gone.

Then they proceeded. I don't know if they sat in a room and said: Let's do everything we can just to hit every constituency group the American people like, and let's just poke in their eyes. That is what they did.

How about women's health? How anti-women's health can they make it? I will tell you that we are dealing here with pregnant women and women who want some type of birth control. The Republican conference report restricts funding for birth control provided by Planned Parenthood. My friend says they can go someplace else for it. In America today, there are huge segments of the American people where this is the only place they can go for help. Women need Planned Parenthood, and what do the Republicans do because of their fixation on doing everything they can to hurt Planned Parenthood? They do these phony television interviews. They have fake cameras. The courts have decided that what they did is wrong. They have been sued, but that is OK. Anything they can do to whack Planned Parenthood, they are going to do it, and they tried it here.

How about ObamaCare? They have tried to revoke it almost 70 times, and it didn't work. So what do they do? They just rescind \$543 million dollars and stick it in the conference report. I guess that was just to get the President's attention. Of course he is going to veto this, but they wanted to make sure he was going to have something really substantive in order to do it.

How about the environment? Remember that what we are trying to—in addition to all of the things we have talked about—is that we want to make sure there is a way of getting rid of these pests—these mosquitoes. How do they do that? The only way we have found that is really effective is with spraying to kill these little varmints, these insects. Well, what do the Republicans do? They exempt pesticide spraying from the Clean Water Act. Why? Just because they don't like the EPA. They don't like the Clean Water Act. It has been around for 60 years, and they still don't like it.

How about this? We know the Democrats have a big constituency with veterans. Why not whack them? OK. Let's do that. What we will do is take \$500 million out of veterans health. That should get the Democrats' attention.

They couldn't stop themselves from coming up with every idea. I guess they were waiting around while the chaos was happening on the House floor, saying: Can we think of anything else that would just be really good to do?

I have it. Why don't we rescind the order that is in effect saying you can't fly the Confederate flag on military cemeteries?

Great idea—OK, I am glad you came up with that. We are going to stick that in there too.

Under this legislation the Republicans stuck in there a line to prohibit the legislation that says you can't fly a Confederate flag in a military cemetery. Under their legislation, you can go ahead and do it.

This conference report is disgraceful. It is shameful to use a real-life public health crisis to push the radical Republican agenda. It is radical. I have told you what they are doing.

There is a point of order against the bill also. We could raise that.

Republicans were eager to inject politics in this legislation, even rescinding \$543 million from the Affordable Care Act, making the bill rescindable. For these and other reasons, we are going to vote against cloture.

But it is not just Democrats saying this bill is a disaster. No, don't leave it to us.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a letter from 40 public health care groups, including some of these radical organizations like the March of Dimes, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Easterseals, the American Public Health Association, and 35 more.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

JUNE 28, 2016.

Hon. MITCH MCCONNELL,
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

Hon. PAUL D. RYAN,
Speaker, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

Hon. HARRY REID,
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

Hon. NANCY PELOSI,
Minority Leader, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SPEAKER RYAN, MINORITY LEADER PELOSI, MAJORITY LEADER MCCONNELL, AND MINORITY LEADER REID: The undersigned organizations committed to the health and wellbeing of our nation's children and families would like to express our dismay at Congress' failure to produce bipartisan legislation to provide federal agencies, states and localities with the funds necessary to combat Zika virus.

Let us be clear: Zika is a public health emergency. It is increasingly likely that pregnant women in the U.S. will be infected with Zika this summer and give birth to infants with devastating, preventable birth defects next year.

The conference committee should reconvene immediately to craft a new bill that:

Provides appropriate funding levels for all aspects of Zika response, including contraception for women who wish to avoid pregnancy, and to prevent the sexual transmission of Zika;

Does not draw funds from other important public health priorities, including Ebola efforts;

Does not place unreasonable restrictions on Zika funding, which would hinder the ability of agencies to respond to the virus given that its course is unpredictable;

Lays a foundation with FY2016 funding that can be built upon responsibly in subsequent fiscal years, since Zika will be a long-term challenge; and

Is capable of garnering bipartisan support.

The fact that it is already almost July and Congress has failed to act would seem to reflect an appalling indifference to the lives of infants and their families. Our nation is perilously close to the point where it will be impossible to distribute funding to states and localities in order to make a meaningful difference this year. Many at-risk jurisdictions have been forced to lay off trained staff due to cuts and the lack of new resources, even as they are being asked to battle this new threat. Additional resources are needed immediately to protect pregnant women and their infants from Zika and life-altering birth defects.

CDC Director Tom Frieden has stated that the estimated cost of care for a baby with the severe microcephaly caused by the Zika virus could be up to \$10 million per child. If 100 babies are born with this severe form of microcephaly caused by Zika, their care will cost the U.S. economy approximately \$1 billion—roughly the cost of the bipartisan package passed by the Senate. If the inaction in Congress persists, the U.S. and its territories could easily see dozens or even hundreds of infants born with preventable microcephaly, an outcome that would be not only a human tragedy but a significant economic burden.

Once again, we urge you in the strongest possible terms to reconvene the conference committee to produce a responsible Zika funding bill that can pass Congress as quickly as possible. If this does not take place, Congress will bear the full responsibility for Zika-related birth defects across the nation in the coming years.

Sincerely,

African American Health Alliance, AFSCME, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, American College of Nurse-Midwives, American College of Preventive Medicine, American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Public Health Association, American Society for Clinical Pathology, Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs, Association of Public Health Laboratories, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.

Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses, Big Cities Coalition, Children's Environmental Health Network, Coalition for Health Funding, Easter Seals, Every Child By Two, Genetic Alliance, Healthcare Ready, HIV Medicine Association, Infectious Diseases Society of America, March of Dimes, National Association of Community Health Centers, National Association of County and City Health Officials.

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, National Birth Defects Prevention Network, National Coalition of STD Directors, National Environmental Health Association, National Hispanic Medical Association, National Network of Public Health Institutes, National Organization for Rare Disorders, Public Health Institute, Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Coalition, RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association, Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America, Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine, Trisomy 18 Foundation, Trust for America's Health.

Mr. REID. These organizations are blasting this Republican conference report because they want real legislation to fund Zika. They call on Congress to pass a bill that “provides appropriate

funding levels for all aspects of Zika response, including contraception for women who wish to avoid pregnancy, and to prevent the sexual transmission of Zika.”

They want a bill that “does not draw funds from other important public health priorities, including Ebola efforts.”

They want a bill that “does not place unreasonable restrictions on Zika funding, which would hinder the ability of agencies to respond to the virus given that its course is unpredictable.”

They want a bill that “lays a foundation with FY2016 funding that can be built upon responsibly in subsequent fiscal years, since Zika will be a long-term challenge; and is capable of garnering bipartisan support.”

The letter continues: “The fact that it is already almost July and Congress has failed to act would seem to reflect an appalling indifference to the lives of infants and their families.”

These are not Democrats saying this, these are these public health organizations. They are aghast at what Republicans are doing.

Instead of accepting their bill is a failure that is going nowhere, Republicans are making these threats. Yesterday the assistant Republican leader came to the floor and said Republicans are going to abandon Zika funding negotiations after this vote. The Republican Senate is on pace to work the fewest days the Senate has worked in more than 60 years. Sixty years ago, the country was much smaller. There was a lot less people and a lot less business, but even with that, we are working less than they did 60 years ago. In 2 weeks, the Senate plans to leave Washington for 7 weeks, which is the longest summer recess since we can remember. Is it too much to ask Republicans to work until we have done our job in giving States and territories the resources they need to fight Zika and protect women? Public health organizations don't think so and we don't either. Republicans need to get serious about sending President Obama the full \$1.9 billion that doctors, researchers, nurses, and public health experts say is needed to fight Zika. Every moment Republicans delay, there are other cases of Zika in innocent women, which affects their children more than one can imagine.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will re-

sume consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 2577, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Conference report to accompany H.R. 2577, a bill making appropriations for the Departments of Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until the vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the conference report will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I rise because I want to share a few words on the Zika component of the conference report on the MILCON-VA appropriations bill, which will be on the floor shortly.

Unfortunately, but maybe not surprisingly, my friends on the other side of the aisle very well bowed down to their friends on the hard right and ridged this bill on Zika with poison pill provisions. If there was ever a bill designed to fail, it is what the Republicans have put together on Zika today. This bill is not only going to fail, it was designed to fail from the very beginning.

Democrats have pushed for over 4 months for legislation on Zika, ever since the CDC and the administration requested \$1.9 billion in emergency funding to deal with the threat. We tried to work with our friends on the other side of the aisle, but after we compromised at \$1.1 billion, after we reached a supposed agreement, and passed it in this body with 89 votes—the overwhelming majority from both parties—Republicans turned around, without any consultation with Democrats in the House and Senate, and rammed through a wish list of poison pill riders that defeat the very purpose of the effort. Rather than working with Democrats to produce something both parties can support, Republicans abandoned compromise in favor of an extreme rightwing bill.

These changes reflected in the conference report have poisoned the bill. It now cuts Ebola funding by \$107 million. It cuts funding for the Affordable Care Act by \$543 million. It sets a precedent that emergencies have to be funded when, in the past, they have not been. Worst of all, it restricts funding for family planning services provided by health centers and providers like Planned Parenthood.

We know Zika can be sexually transmitted. We know it poses the biggest danger to pregnant women and their unborn children, many of whom rely on health centers and Planned Parenthood as their primary health care provider, but Republicans cannot miss a chance to whack Planned Parenthood, even if their services are exactly what can help prevent the spread of this debilitating virus.