

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.

I listened to my friend, the majority leader. Two words never passed his lips as he talked about the bill—Planned Parenthood. Why? Because he knows saying don't fund Planned Parenthood is a poison pill if there ever was one. He knows it was a poison pill last year when we were negotiating a short-term budget agreement and there would be no budget if it was in there.

Our Republican leaders are engaged in a cynical game. They have to have assure the hard right they are not funding anything, even something as important as Zika, but they know the American people demand funding, and so they put in these poison pills. It is a cynical game and it shall not stand.

My prediction is Republicans will come back after this amendment, as they know this proposal will be defeated—they knew it—and they will come back within a few weeks with their tail between their legs saying: Let's pass something. We know we have to do something on Zika.

Why they don't avoid that embarrassment is beyond me. To say that this Zika legislation is a day late and a dollar short would be a drastic understatement. It is 4 months late, \$800 billion short, and now, to boot, it cannibalizes health care funding from other important priorities.

Then, after all of this, the distinguished majority leader came to the floor yesterday to accuse Democrats of playing politics with the bill because we were concerned with these changes. What a cynical and hypocritical thing to do. All Democrats have ever asked for on Zika was to give the CDC and the other agencies the funding they said they needed to do the job of protecting the American people, pregnant mothers, and their babies from this dangerous virus.

It wasn't Democrats who said: Let's give CDC only about half the money they said they need. No, Republicans did that. It wasn't Democrats who tried to jam through poison pill amendments to the bill in the dead of night with no debate. No, Republicans did that. It wasn't Democrats who dithered for months on end until mosquito season was already upon us to bring a bill forward. No, Republicans did that. And it wasn't Democrats who loaded up the bill with partisan plums, saying that unless the other side passes this bill, they are playing politics. Oh, no, it was Republicans who did that.

Moreover, these tactics mean one thing: Our Republican colleagues and particularly the Republican leadership, in both the House and Senate, are not taking the Zika threat seriously. It is no way to handle an urgent public health crisis.

We will shortly hear from my friend from Florida who can document what is happening in his State and what will happen in many other States as the warmer summer season moves on. There are 2,600 Americans who have been diagnosed with the virus, including over 400 pregnant women. Six preg-

nancies have already been deemed to have birth defects as a result of Zika. Americans in Puerto Rico are especially impacted with 1,800 locally acquired cases. It is a tragedy, and we should be doing something in a bipartisan way—Democrats and Republicans together—working to solve an emergency. But, no, we get a bill riddled with poison pills done by one party, designed to fail in obeisance to the right-wing, which doesn't want to spend any money.

Our public health and safety is at risk. I hope my Republican colleagues will stop this partisan gambit and come around to work with us on the issue in a serious bipartisan way. We are willing to compromise, as the great leadership of the Senator from Washington showed when she came to compromise with the Senator from Tennessee on a proposal that didn't do everything we wanted, but we voted for it. I hope that can happen again. If saner heads are going to prevail, it has to be in this body. I hope Leader MCCONNELL would rethink the strategy of going along with the cynical House bill so we can negotiate something that will do good for America.

I yield the floor.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I am furious and fed up at Congress's inability to act in a bipartisan way to protect us from the Zika virus. The U.S. is facing a public health emergency. Americans are desperate for Congress to respond. Instead, the House of Representatives passed a Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Zika conference report at 3 a.m. with no debate and no Democratic input.

The bill passed by House Republicans doesn't recognize Zika as a public health emergency. It nickels and dimes our efforts to respond. It makes it more difficult for women to access birth control. And it waives safety rules for the use of pesticides. Now the House has left town and expects the Senate to pass this terrible bill.

The facts are clear: Zika is here. It disproportionately affects women and babies. It causes horrible birth defects. And there is no treatment or vaccine. If there was ever a time that Congress should act in a bipartisan way to counter a significant threat, it is now.

We are now considering cloture on the conference report on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Zika appropriations. We began the conference with an open meeting between Democrats and Republicans, the House and the Senate. But when we got down to the last, hardest issues, Republicans decided among themselves and then told Democrats, "take it or leave it."

That means no Democratic conferees signed the conference report, House or Senate. We can't sign it if it means leaving behind veterans, women's health, birth defects prevention, and clean water. I urge the Senate to reject cloture on this conference report and send conferees back to the drawing board.

The Republican conference report is flawed for many reasons, including that it provides \$1.1 billion, which is \$800 million less than what the President requested to fight Zika.

The Republican conference report also doesn't treat Zika like the emergency it is. The World Health Organization declared the Zika virus a public health emergency on February 1. And Zika meets the Budget Act criteria for emergency spending: It is urgent, unforeseen, and temporary. Yet Republicans insisted that we cut \$750 million to pay for the response to Zika, including \$543 million from the Affordable Care Act, \$100 million from the Department of Health and Human Services, HHS, nonrecurring expense fund, and \$107 million from Ebola response funds.

When wildfires hit the West, Congress provided emergency funding. When flooding hit South Carolina and Texas last year, Congress provided emergency funding. Now, we have an infectious disease outbreak that we know causes serious birth defects, and Republicans insist our response be paid for.

The conference report waives Clean Water Act requirements for the spraying of pesticides to control mosquitoes. The need for this provision is a mystery to me, since the Clean Water Act already allows pesticides to be sprayed in pest emergencies.

Under this bill, families can get birth control services from public health departments and hospitals, but not individual doctors or primary care clinics. This is important. The bill would make it more difficult for women to access birth control from their own doctors.

I know the issue of birth control is difficult for some, but we know that Zika has terrible consequences for women and babies. The details about what Zika does to the brains of unborn children are truly horrific. In fact, evidence between Zika and birth defects is so conclusive that some countries are advising women to avoid pregnancy altogether.

So the fact that this bill would make it more difficult for women to avoid pregnancy is truly astonishing to me. Republicans don't want to treat Zika as an emergency, and they don't want to expand access to birth control. It begs the question: Will they be willing to pay the costs associated with every child born in this country with Zika-related birth defects? Dr. Frieden, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, estimated that cost to be \$10 million per child.

Lastly, the conference report is \$500 million short of the Senate-approved funding level for the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA. It cuts \$250 million for needed maintenance for VA hospitals and clinics, more than half of which are 50 years or older. That means more leaking roofs and moldy conditions that make veterans sicker, not better.

In the 4 months since the President requested Zika emergency funds, more

people have been infected, and more babies have been born with birth defects. Today there are more than 2,600 people in the U.S. and its territories infected with Zika, including nearly 500 pregnant women.

The number of those infected is growing, and the costs associated with infection are growing. We can't nickel and dime our way out of this emergency. We know what the threat is, and we know how to respond to it. So, please, whatever differences we have on other bills, let's come together to reach agreement on a better conference report.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

FLOODING IN WEST VIRGINIA

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, wow, I come to the floor of the Senate to talk about a real emergency that just occurred in my State of West Virginia. I know many of you across the country have witnessed and seen the terrible destruction from the sudden flash flood that ravaged West Virginia on Thursday in the late afternoon and evening. I come with such a heavy heart.

When I hear the debate going on again about who is more cynical and who has poison pills, all I can think about is the little boy I saw at the Volunteer Fire Department in Clendenin on Friday. His dad is a fire chief, and he had been going to the fire department all the time since the time he was born. He is about 10 years old. We were standing in 6 inches of mud, with destruction everywhere in his town. I introduced myself to him, and I said: I am SHELLEY. I am your Senator. How are you doing? He just melted into tears because he was so distraught at what he saw, a place he loved, the fire station just ripped apart. People he knows were kicked out of their homes, trying to figure out how to rebuild.

To me, that is a real emergency. That is a real something we in the Senate and those in the State and those local responders are responding to now. I think about our State, I think about all the nicknames of the State of West Virginia. The one I think I like the most is "Almost Heaven." Well, "Almost Heaven" wasn't almost Heaven last Thursday. "Wild and Wonderful." It was wild, all right but not so wonderful.

I think the one that really has come to epitomize our West Virginians, our people, is "West Virginia Strong". I saw the National Guard, the West Virginia Department of Transportation, public elected officials, emergency services personnel, and EMTs who were up all night doing very dangerous boat rescues to get people from the roofs of their homes and the roofs of their cars. It came so fast.

I visited the shelter at Capital High School yesterday. A man told me he, the woman he lives with, and their dog just ran out with nothing. It started at his ankles, and 5 minutes later it was at his waist. That is how fast it was. Yet he still had that West Virginia

strong attitude of: We are going to be OK. We are going to find a way. He had lost his car, his four-wheeler. All of his belongings are gone. He has nothing. Now he has a place to sleep in a high school gym.

You know what. He has the American Red Cross right there, with 400 volunteers from across the country so he has a warm place to sleep or a cool place to sleep away from the hot Sun, meals, the availability of cleaning supplies, and a very generous community that has come together to try to help him. That is West Virginia strong, and that is what fortifies me today.

When I think of the stories of bravery and rescue, when you look at the 23 West Virginians who lost their lives so suddenly—a little 4-year-old boy, Edward McMillion from Ravenswood, WV, was swept away in the rushing water. We just have story after story of people who didn't know what was going to happen to them, who didn't know how to get out, who found a way to brave through this awful thing.

Then there were the stories of the communities coming together. When we were traveling through Kanawha County, I ran into some people from Parkersburg and some people from Martinsburg, which probably doesn't mean much to the folks in the Gallery or to the Presiding Officer because they don't know where that is, but it is 5 hours away. They just packed up their trucks, put water and food in them, and came to the aid of their fellow West Virginians. A lot of faith communities, a lot of churches, the Mountain Mission, all kinds of volunteers have come to help to be West Virginia strong, to be West Virginians helping West Virginians.

The private sector has really stepped up. AT&T, Sprint, Frontier—our telecommunications people have really gone the extra mile to make sure that people have service and are able to charge their phones. When they had to leave their homes, they might have had their phone in their pocket, but they sure didn't have their phone charger. While that might sound like a little thing, it is a big thing. That is your lifeline to your family—to calling for help and for resources.

Walmart, Proctor & Gamble, CSX, and Dow Chemical—I am leaving people out—also helped out. Anheuser-Busch brought a bunch of water in to help. I have more stories of companies that have given their corporate supplies to help West Virginia get back on its feet. I am basically here to say thank you.

Some of the communities, such as Clendenin, White Sulphur Springs, Rupert, and Rainelle—I actually thought Rainelle's name is Rainelle, and, boy, did they get rained on. They are probably regretting the name. They lost a lot of people in Rainelle. That small community has been crushed.

FEMA has been phenomenal. The declaration from the President, for which we are very grateful, came im-

mediately for the three counties. We are hoping to get other counties, such as Webster County, Roane County, Clay County, Pocahontas County, and Fayette County included in these declarations. Fifty-five homes in Webster Springs were totally wiped out. It has a population of 750. We all know and love the beautiful West Virginia mountains, but when the valleys fill, they fill rapidly and disastrously.

FEMA is on the ground. They have opened up their disaster recovery centers in White Sulphur Springs, Greenbrier, and other places. They will be all over the place.

I will tell people that what I have learned from this is that you have to get registered for individual assistance immediately. Call the phone number, go to the Web site, or go to the disaster recovery center because that starts the process, and help is there. The Small Business Administration is there, as well, to try and help.

The various health departments are providing tetanus shots free of charge because, as we know, sitting water and 90-degree temperatures are scenarios for disease.

What I was astounded by was the mud. We know that you can get water in your home and business, but the mud is just so destructively horrifying to look at and so difficult to clean.

West Virginians need help for all types of different things. People from all around the Nation have been offering to help. We have been inundated with people wanting to help. People want to come and lift up another American and lift up another family. I say thank you for that, but this is going to be a long-term project. When you have the kind of destruction we suffered, it goes on for a long time. During the first week you get a lot of help, but the weeks after that, when people are trying to rebuild and trying to get temporary transitional housing—these are the kind of things that families need.

Just to give a little perspective on the situation, the National Weather Service said that the rainfall was historic. There was 10 to 12 inches of rainfall in 8 hours. It was a 1,000-year event in terms of the rising waters. I live a half mile from the Elk River, which crested at 33.37 feet on Friday morning. The water rose more than 27 feet between Thursday afternoon and Friday morning and hit its highest crest in 125 years. This was a record-breaking event and very tragic for many of us.

I wish to thank FEMA for all of the representation they brought forward. I thank all of the faith community, which has been phenomenal. I also thank the nonprofits, the United Way, and the Red Cross. I have such admiration and gratitude in my heart for what I saw firsthand and will see as the days move on.

I will close the way I started. West Virginia people are just phenomenal. They are able to pick themselves up and still have a glimmer of hope in

their eyes. Knowing that they will be OK and will be able to rebuild after having lost everything is just phenomenal.

I was in a meeting yesterday, and the guy leading the charge from the United Way said: Everybody close your eyes and think about the last time you lost everything. I don't think a person in that room had ever lost everything.

I thank you for all the thoughts and prayers that you kept in your heart for us. We feel them, we need them, and we appreciate them. It is a long road to recovery, but we are on our way. With your help and God's help, we will get there.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I want to start by saying how disappointed I was by the comments I heard from Republican leaders last night on Zika. It seems that after months and months of their delaying, after they rejected our bipartisan plan, kicked Democrats out of the negotiating room, and passed a partisan bill in the middle of the night, Republicans are now scrambling to blame anyone but themselves for their own inaction on Zika. It is absurd, it is irresponsible, and people across the country are not going to buy it.

Republicans control Congress. They blocked action for months and months. They fought us at every step, and now that they finally realized that the American people aren't going to stand for inaction, they are desperately searching for excuses instead of honestly looking for solutions. But women and families aren't looking for Republicans to point fingers; they are looking for a serious response to Zika.

We all know very well that Democrats and Republicans don't always see eye to eye, but one thing we should be able to agree on is that when there is a serious, national, and global public health threat, we should put our differences aside and work together to protect women, families, and communities. Unfortunately, when it comes to the Zika virus, Republicans are now doing the exact opposite.

It has been 4 months since President Obama first put forward a strong emergency funding proposal. Even though we are in the midst of mosquito season, the House Republicans chose last week to double down on a partisan, pandering bill when it comes to this frightening virus. Instead of working with Democrats on a serious response to Zika, they voted to end the conference, pass an extremely partisan report in the middle of the night, and leave town.

There is a lot to be concerned about in this legislation, but, critically, this proposal would impose politically motivated restrictions that limit women's access to contraception and health care with providers they rely on. It should go without saying, but in the midst of a public health emergency that impacts women and families, the last

thing Republicans should be doing is playing politics with women's health and making it harder for them to get care when and where they need it. It is truly frustrating, especially since just weeks ago, Senate Democrats and Republicans agreed on a bipartisan downpayment on the President's proposal, and that bipartisan legislation could have already passed the House and Senate, could have been signed into law by the President, and started helping women and families in need by now.

Today, ahead of the Senate's vote on this partisan political proposal that came out of the House in the middle of the night last week, we have a clear message for Republicans: Enough is enough—enough with the partisanship, enough with the poison pills, and enough with using women's health to pander to the tea party. We have a narrow window to get an effective response to this virus under way, and every infection that we prevent now is a potential tragedy averted for a family in the communities we serve.

Democrats are ready to work together, just as we have been for months. I urge Republicans to come back to the negotiating table and work with us on a real response to a truly serious public health threat. Women and families are expecting us to act and have already waited long enough.

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, it was my understanding that the Senator from Hawaii was to speak next.

I ask through the Chair if the Senator from South Dakota will let me go on and make a comment.

Mr. THUNE. And I will follow, correct?

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, we have just a short time before the vote. The President made a request for emergency funding in the amount of \$1.9 billion 4 months ago. This is a time when the Nation has an emergency. It doesn't matter if it is an earthquake, a flood, a wildfire, a hurricane, or a volcano, we have always stepped forward. If you don't believe this Zika crisis is an emergency, well, just wait. The tale tell signs are coming.

We already have 50 confirmed cases of Zika in the United States. There are 2,600 Americans who are infected with the virus, and that includes 500 pregnant women. Obviously, the southern States, such as my State of Florida, are affected much more than other States. Just yesterday there were three new cases of the virus reported in Florida, which brings the State's total to 223, including 40 pregnant women. These numbers are only going to increase.

Four months after the request for emergency funding, the House—in the dark of night, with no opportunity to

have a debate—passed a bill to deal with this virus, and as you have heard from many, it is not serious. Instead, it is another attempt to use an emergency must-pass bill to try to further extremist political agendas. It cuts money for Puerto Rico at a time that Puerto Rico can hardly stand on its own financially, and it cuts money for family planning.

The CDC has confirmed that Zika can be sexually transmitted. What did I say? They cut money for family planning, and there are over 480 pregnant women in the United States who are presently being monitored for signs of the infection. As we look for ways to prevent the spread of this sexually transmitted disease, the fact that this bill limits access to contraceptives that could help curb the spread of the virus is exactly the reverse of what makes sense.

Why can't we grow up and get to the point that we don't have to play partisan politics? This is a real threat, and it is a serious threat. The CDC has confirmed that Zika does, in fact, cause birth defects. There have been four babies born with microcephalus in the country, and two of them died shortly after birth. We have seen the pictures, and we know how horrific and how tragic it is for the families involved. So we need to stop playing these political games. It is time to treat this as a real emergency, and it is time to pass the appropriations bill without all of this political agenda added to it.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, in a few short moments Senate Democrats will have a decision to make. Will they side with American families and expectant mothers dealing with the Zika virus or will they side with their far left political allies? According to media reports, unfortunately, that outcome is increasingly clear. Senate Democrats will once again side with their political allies rather than working with Republicans on a solution to keep women safe from the Zika virus.

Mr. President, Democrats have apparently decided to engage in their favorite game of late—refusing to take yes for an answer. It happened last week with terrorism. Democrats urged us to pass legislation to keep guns out of the hands of terrorists, but when Senator CORNYN offered an amendment to do just that, Democrats opposed it almost unanimously. This week it is Zika funding.

Six weeks ago, Democrats and Republicans from the relevant committees in the Senate got together and agreed on a bill to provide \$1.1 billion to fight Zika. That bill then came to the floor, and every Democrat voted for it on the floor of the Senate—every single Democrat.

Last week, House and Senate negotiators reconciled the House and Senate bills and agreed on Zika funding in the amount of \$1.1 billion—in other

words, the exact same amount that Senate Democrats unanimously supported 6 weeks ago. But now Democrats don't want to support it. Their reason is that the small grant program in this bill, most of which is intended for Puerto Rico, will not provide for more Federal funding for Planned Parenthood.

This bill provides expanded funding for community health centers, public health departments, and hospitals. It actually funds more avenues for access to women's health care than what the President requested. The bill funds research into a Zika vaccine. It funds research into Zika treatments. It streamlines mosquito control efforts, since the best way to protect men, women, and babies from contracting the Zika virus is to make sure they do not get bitten by a mosquito in the first place.

The head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—the lead government agency for fighting diseases—has said that the Republican bill will take care of immediate Zika funding needs. Yet Democrats are holding up this bill because it will not fund a handful of Planned Parenthood clinics in Puerto Rico.

Seriously, Mr. President? Seriously? That is what this is about? Democrats like to position themselves as having the moral high ground. Again and again Democrats suggested that they were fiercely committed to fighting Zika while Republicans were dragging their feet on a public health crisis.

Well, here is what I see today. I see Republicans ready to pass a Zika bill and send it to the President this minute, right now. And I see Democrats who are more interested in pacifying a Democrat special interest group than they are in actually doing anything about Zika. Purely and simply, that is what this is—a Democratic special interest group that snapped its fingers, and the Democrats have all come running.

Forget all that urgency about getting Zika funding passed. Forget the scientists who are waiting for vaccine funding. And forget about mosquito control efforts. Apparently, none of that matters anymore. Republicans are ready to pass Zika funding, the same amount—I will repeat: the same amount—of funding Democrats already voted for unanimously in the Senate. We are ready to pass it right now, this minute, and send it to the President. We are just waiting for Democrats to agree.

Mr. President, I hope they will not keep the American people waiting.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, yesterday I joined millions of Americans in celebrating the Supreme Court's decision that reaffirms a woman's right to access reproductive health care. This was the most important Supreme Court decision in decades to protect a woman's access to reproductive health care.

I listened to my colleague just now, and, yes, the amount in the bill is the same. But this is not the same bill. This bill contains poison pills that will pay for the funding for Zika on the backs of the people of Puerto Rico and funding for Planned Parenthood. So today, in spite of yesterday's celebration of the Supreme Court's decision, it is clear we are reminded once again the fight to protect a woman's reproductive rights is not over.

I was dismayed last week when House Republicans chose to play politics with a national public health emergency to continue their crusade against Planned Parenthood. The package we will be voting on this morning is profoundly irresponsible. Senators from both parties worked hard to forge a compromise Zika funding measure that would have provided the tools we need to prevent an outbreak. Instead, we will shortly be voting on an underfunded measure riddled with poison pills.

This package is not equal to the crisis before us. It fails to recognize the real threat facing American women from Zika this summer. Zika is not just a mosquito-borne disease. It can also be sexually transmitted. That is why attacking Planned Parenthood in this bill is so foolish. Limiting access to family planning services now would put millions more women at risk of contracting Zika and giving birth to a child with microcephaly.

The United States is fortunate not to have a widespread outbreak of Zika yet, but in Hawaii we are already feeling the impact of this virus. So far there have been 10 confirmed cases of Zika in Hawaii, and one child has been born with microcephaly.

To meet this challenge, I have convened key leaders on Zika in Hawaii, including Governor David Ige, Hawaii director of health Dr. Virginia Pressler, health care providers, and Dr. Elliott Parks, who is developing a Zika vaccine on Oahu. They all shared one message: Federal funding right now is critical to get ahead of a widespread Zika outbreak. Dr. Parks has been using private funding to develop his vaccine, which could turn around our fight against Zika, and an infusion of Federal funds now could push him across the finish line.

This summer is a critical moment in the fight against the Zika virus. In Hawaii, we already saw the devastating impact of a vector-borne disease when we confronted a major outbreak of Dengue. We need the same national commitment and investment to fight Zika that we provided to fight Ebola.

Months have already passed since the President sent down his emergency funding request for Zika. We must act now by passing a clean supplemental spending bill, with no harmful riders to women.

Zika is a public health crisis in the making, and I completely disagree with my colleagues who continue to say that we should support this bill because it is what we have already agreed

to. It is not. It is a profoundly different bill that continues the Republican attacks against women's reproductive rights.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, do I understand that we are in the parliamentary procedure where the vote has already been called for at 11 o'clock?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That is correct.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, may I be recognized for 2 minutes?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has no time. That will take consent.

Mr. NELSON. Say again.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That will take consent of the Senate. There is no time remaining for the minority.

Mr. NELSON. Well, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 2 minutes, until the vote at 11 o'clock, in order to bring the Senate up to date on what has happened to the community of Orlando.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. COCHRAN. Reserving the right to object, we are trying to set up a conversation about the conference report, and I wonder, would it be inconvenient for the Senator to defer?

Mr. NELSON. I can certainly—I didn't see anybody on the floor, and that is why—

Mr. COCHRAN. We were just passing through, checking to see what the order was, and I understand there is a standing order.

So we are going to wind up, we hope, with just a few minutes of conversation about the conference report.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I can speak later in the day.

Mr. COCHRAN. I thank the Senator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, we have come to a point where it is timely that we urge the Senate to approve the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs conference report.

This conference agreement increases funding for veterans programs by nearly 9 percent, including a 4.1-percent increase in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs. The agreement provides funding for veterans health care, benefit claims processing, and medical research. The agreement funds housing for military personnel and their families and enhances the capabilities of U.S. military forces.

The conference agreement also includes \$1.1 billion in emergency supplemental funding to fight the Zika virus. This is the same amount previously approved by the Senate. These funds will be used for mosquito control, vaccine development, and health services. The conference agreement also enhances mosquito control efforts by eliminating duplicative permitting requirements for approved pesticides. This provision is specific to combating the Zika virus, and it expires after 180 days.

The conference agreement carries rescissions of previously appropriated funds that are not needed for their original purpose. The fact that rescissions are included is not novel or unique. For example, the appropriations bill that provided funding to fight the Ebola virus included nearly \$5 billion in discretionary rescissions and \$2.5 billion in mandatory rescissions.

This conference agreement is the result of extensive bipartisan negotiations. It is a good bill, and it should be sent to the President without delay. I urge the adoption of the conference report.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time has expired.

CLOTURE MOTION

Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the conference report to accompany H.R. 2577, an act 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.

Mitch McConnell, John Cornyn, Mike Rounds, Thad Cochran, Roy Blunt, John Barrasso, Marco Rubio, Lamar Alexander, Tom Cotton, Bill Cassidy, John Hoeven, Thom Tillis, Jeff Flake, James M. Inhofe, Tim Scott, Shelley Moore Capito, Steve Daines.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the conference report to accompany H.R. 2577, an act 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, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 52, nays 48, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 112 Leg.]

YEAS—52

Alexander	Enzi	Perdue
Ayotte	Ernst	Portman
Barrasso	Fischer	Risch
Blunt	Flake	Roberts
Boozman	Gardner	Rounds
Burr	Graham	Rubio
Capito	Grassley	Sasse
Cassidy	Hatch	Scott
Coats	Heller	Sessions
Cochran	Hoeven	Shelby
Collins	Inhofe	Sullivan
Corker	Isakson	Thune
Cornyn	Johnson	Tillis
Cotton	Kirk	Toomey
Crapo	McCain	Vitter
Cruz	Moran	Wicker
Daines	Murkowski	
Donnelly	Paul	

NAYS—48

Baldwin	Heitkamp	Murray
Bennet	Hirono	Nelson
Blumenthal	Kaine	Peters
Booker	King	Reed
Boxer	Klobuchar	Reid
Brown	Lankford	Sanders
Cantwell	Leahy	Schatz
Cardin	Lee	Schumer
Carper	Manchin	Shaheen
Casey	Markey	Stabenow
Cooms	McCaskill	Tester
Durbin	McConnell	Udall
Feinstein	Menendez	Warner
Franken	Merkley	Warren
Gillibrand	Mikulski	Whitehouse
Heinrich	Murphy	Wyden

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FLAKE). On this vote, the yeas are 52, the nays are 48.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn not having voted in the affirmative, the motion is rejected.

The Republican leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I enter a motion to reconsider the vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is entered.

ORDER FOR RECESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess from 12:30 p.m. until 2:15 p.m. to allow for the weekly caucus meetings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, here is where we are. We have a public health crisis descending on our country. We have been talking about this for 3 months. The administration and the CDC—all involved—said we need to get this Zika funding bill done before the Fourth of July—before the Fourth of July. This conference report, which was just prevented from passage, has exactly the same funding level that every single Democrat voted for when it left the Senate—exactly the same funding level.

We know that if we don't get this job done, we won't have a vaccine within a year and a half. In the short term, we have been told that the single most effective thing we can do is kill as many mosquitoes as possible as fast as possible right here in the United States, in the southern part of our country.

So here we are in an utterly absurd position of playing political games as this public health crisis mounts here in our country. Pregnant women all across America are looking at this with utter dismay, as we sit here in a partisan gridlock manufactured by the other side over issues that it is pretty hard for the general public to understand, refusing to pass the funds needed to address this public health concern.

If that were not bad enough, we have also stopped the passage of the MILCON-Veterans' Administration appropriations conference report, which includes funding for our veterans and funding for construction at military bases.

So here we are going into the Fourth of July and we have impeded the passage of funding to deal with an imped-

ing public health crisis and in the same vote managed to vote against veterans as well. I would say to my colleagues on the other side, that is where we will be when we come back here after this brief break for the Fourth of July. I have moved to reconsider. I have changed my vote and moved to reconsider. I would like to call on my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to think about this, to think about where they have left this issue for the American people. I have been approached in my State—and I know others have as well—by young women concerned about whether we are going to address this issue now, not at some time in the future.

So when we get back, after we have had time to think about it all, we will address this matter again and hopefully respond, as our constituents all across America are asking us to respond, to this pending health care crisis that we all understand. There has been plenty of discussion about this for months. This Republican majority has met the deadline, but we can't pass it by ourselves here in the Senate. I hope our Democratic friends, upon reflection over the course of the few days we will be away, will come back with a different attitude, and I hope we can address this crisis and address it now.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as I said this morning, and I will repeat it, I don't know what universe my friend is living in. What does he think—that we are all stupid, that the American people are dumb? They are not. They understand what is going on here.

We have been trying for months—months. The President asked more than 4 months ago that we would get money to fight Zika. He had already had to take \$500 million from Ebola because the Republicans had done nothing. He said more than 4 months ago: We need money. The CDC needs money. The NIH needs money. We have a crisis on our hands.

So we have been on top of this. We have worked hard. Republicans have objected five times to moving legislation that is meaningful. On April 28, the senior Senator from Texas objected to my request. On May 18, he objected to my unanimous consent request again and to Senator MURRAY's request—all in the same day. On May 24, he objected to Senator MURRAY's request again for funding Zika. On May 24—the same day—Senator ENZI objected to Senator NELSON's unanimous consent request.

He said that we need to reflect. Come on. Listen to this. If Republicans were sitting around, as I assume they were in the House, as we were all watching the takeover of the House floor by House Democrats—there wasn't anything going on on the House floor, so I assume—I assume—they were sitting around thinking: What can we do to fake funding for Zika? What can we do? Well, maybe what we can do is say we

have money for Zika and then we could do everything we can to irritate them.

So what they did is they said: Well, we realize this is a serious issue, but these pregnant women are the ones they are concerned about, so why don't we stop them from going to obtain birth control. We hate Planned Parenthood, so why don't we stop them from going to Planned Parenthood—these desperate women who need birth control and some advice about their situation.

A significant number of American women—especially young women—go to Planned Parenthood. On the bill we have that was just turned down today, the Republicans said: You can't do that. We are not going to allow that.

It restricts funding for birth control provided by Planned Parenthood. How about that one. But if that weren't enough, they cut veterans funding by \$500 million. And then I guess they said: Well, maybe we can do something—we know we hate the environment. We don't like all those greenies, so why don't we do this. We know that it is important that we control mosquitoes. If we are going to do anything regarding mosquitoes, let's kill a lot of those mosquitoes. Oh, here is what we will do. We will exempt the Clean Water Act from the provisions of spraying pesticides.

Against all environmental advice that we could get, they go ahead and do it anyway.

They cut Ebola funding by another \$107 million. They rescind ObamaCare by \$543 million, after they have already failed 70 times to repeal it. But if that weren't enough, listen to this one. How about this one. I guess they said: What else could we do to really stick it in their eye? There is a prohibition now in the law that says that you can't fly the Confederate flag at our military cemeteries. Let's take that away. We want to be able to fly Confederate flags at military cemeteries.

So they put that in there too. What do they think this is?

When we passed here by almost 90 votes a bill that gave not as much money as we wanted, but \$1.1 billion, it was treated as an emergency, as emergencies should be treated. It is no different from a flood or a fire or an earthquake. We passed it here and sent it to the House.

The night they were there on the House floor, there was chaos. One of the Presiding Officers came out and in a matter of a minute said: We are going to pass a conference report funding Zika—funding Zika—but it makes it so that you can't go to Planned Parenthood for birth control. We are cutting \$500 million from veterans, we are going to affect how we spray pesticides, we are going to cut Ebola funding, we are going to cut ObamaCare, and we are going to, just for good measure—just for good measure, we will throw in the Confederate flag thing.

I was here a week ago, and 2,200 women at that time were infected with

Zika. Here it is 1 week later, and it is 2,900. About 100 women a day are being infected with Zika. We don't know how many of these pregnant women—there are about 500 now who are pregnant who have been infected with Zika—we don't know how many of those women are going to give birth to children who are tremendously handicapped. They have shrunken brains, and their skulls are caved in sometimes.

As we sit here dithering because of this foolishness on Planned Parenthood, the Clean Water Act, cutting veterans funding, Ebola funding, ObamaCare, Confederate flag, each day more women are prevented from getting the attention they need for birth control.

It is unbelievable that someone would have the audacity to come to the floor and say: Well, it is the Democrats' fault. It is the Democrats' fault. We think you should get some money for Zika funding. It should be offset; it wouldn't be truly emergency funding. But in the process, go ahead and let's whack ObamaCare, Ebola money, veterans, Planned Parenthood, the Confederate flag.

I mean, I can't imagine how anyone would have the audacity to come to the floor and talk about what a great piece of legislation this is. We know what is in the bill. We have had a woman who has worked so hard on this who is one of the premier Senators ever to serve in this body, Senator MIKULSKI from Maryland. BILL NELSON cares about this in Florida because his State has been hit harder than any other State. But Senator MIKULSKI has worked hard on appropriations bills. We know how important this bill is. We know how much she wants it passed, but she doesn't want it with this awful stuff that they have tried to do with Planned Parenthood, the Clean Water Act, veterans funding, and all of this other craziness, including the Confederate flag.

It is hard to describe. I sat here this morning when the Senate was opening. I have been here a long time. I don't remember anything as outrageous and as shameful as this piece of legislation. Believe me, in the last 7½ years, the Republicans have come up with a lot, but this is the worst.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I will tell you what shameful is. It is allowing more women of childbearing age to contract the Zika virus so their babies can end up looking like this. That is shameful.

Make no mistake about it—our colleagues across the aisle have filibustered on a partisan basis a bipartisan bill that funded our anti-Zika efforts. It also included measures to support our veterans.

So we need to be absolutely clear. I heard the Democratic leader basically saying that, because his party is a sore loser in a conference report they don't love, they are going to block funding to

prevent more babies from contracting the birth defect that is suffered by this baby shown in this picture.

Microcephaly, basically, is a shrunken skull. This baby's prognosis is not good. Women of child-bearing age are scared to death that their baby will end up like this baby. Yet their concerns have fallen on deaf ears among those in this Chamber—largely Democrats—who voted against advancing this legislation.

We are getting closer to mosquito season. The warmer weather means we are going to see more mosquitoes, and we need to get this on the President's desk as soon as possible. The President himself asked for \$1.9 billion in funding and is calling this a public health emergency, but our Democratic friends blocked it because they are sore losers in a conference negotiation report that they don't like.

We know that this virus can affect an entire generation. This birth defect is heartbreaking and life-altering, and we know it has taken a tremendous toll in much of Latin America. Fortunately, so far the only cases of Zika virus in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control, are from people who have traveled to South America and Central America and contracted the virus there and came home. So at least so far, the mosquitoes that carry this disease are not spreading it in the United States, but we know that will change soon. That is why we heard from the Senators from Florida, Texas, and others. They talked about its potential impact in the United States and particularly in our warmer States.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, severe microcephaly like this is associated with seizures, intellectual disability, hearing and vision problems, and developmental delays, and that is assuming this child survives into adulthood, which most, unfortunately, do not. So how can our friends across the aisle who voted against this conference report, which provides Zika funding, look the mother of this baby in the eye and say: We have plenty of good reasons to deny help for more children like yours.

We know this impacts not only children and these babies, but it also impacts whole families. It means mothers and fathers anxious about the welfare of their baby are regularly going to the doctor to gauge progress and check development. It means finding speech, occupational, and physical therapies to help the child live as long of a normal life as they can. One neurologist quoted in the New York Times said: "There is no way to fix the problem, just therapies to deal with the downstream consequences."

So once a baby like this contracts the Zika virus, there is no way to fix the problem. The only defense is to prevent children like this from getting the Zika virus by getting the funding that Democrats just voted down to the medical authorities so they can look for a vaccine and so we can do mosquito

eradication and the other things we know we need to do from a public health perspective to prevent more babies like this one from developing these devastating birth defects.

As I said, there is no cure. Once a baby has it, he or she has it for life. That means that the family will have to live with the great uncertainty about the health and well-being of their child as they consider the lifelong implications of caring for a child with this kind of disability.

We know we don't have to accept this as the outcome. We know there is a way to fight it, and that is by preventing the Zika virus from spreading to the United States, but unfortunately Senate Democrats just voted against that.

As I said, there are already hundreds of travel-related cases of the virus scattered throughout the country, and I hope the administration does more to underscore the real health threats that exist when people travel to areas where Zika is at its worst. That is why I joined with one of our House colleagues who is a medical doctor, Congressman MICHAEL BURGESS, in asking Secretary of State Kerry and the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Frieden, how they are coordinating travel warnings to regions where Zika has run rampant. Texans and all Americans need to understand the risks associated with travel to those areas, and they need real-time, accurate information so they can determine whether they should alter their travel plans.

Over the past few months, the mosquitoes who carry this virus have been inching their way north, and today locally transmitted cases have been reported in Puerto Rico and throughout the Caribbean. In other words, this virus, along with its devastating effects, is at our doorstep.

I had a chance to visit with experts in my State at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston and the Texas Medical Center, and they agree this is a major public health concern and we need to act and act soon. That is why we have to prepare for the arrival of the mosquitoes that carry this virus in the United States, something that our Democratic colleagues have just prevented. Fortunately, counties and cities throughout Texas have already been working hard to counter the spread of the virus.

When I was in Houston recently, public health officials back in April told me about measures they were implementing to track and manage the spread of Zika throughout the Houston area, one of the most populous urban areas in the country, and the efforts to eradicate the breeding grounds of the mosquitoes that transmit the virus. Governor Abbott of Texas is also taking steps to make sure that we are as prepared as possible. But we can't do it alone. Unfortunately, the sort of help that is needed by States like mine for mothers and fathers who could have

children like this has just been blocked.

Governor Abbott invited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to review the State's plan to combat the virus and he appointed an infectious disease task force to make policy recommendations on how to prevent and respond to infectious diseases including Zika. States like mine and communities like Houston are doing their part, but Senate Democrats refuse to do their part. So it should go without saying that now on the frontlines of this major public health concern we need to respond at the Federal level. That is why it is shocking and shameful to see so many Senate Democrats oppose this bipartisan effort to guard against the virus, particularly because they have repeatedly called for an expedited resolution of this appropriations request.

Over a month ago, the minority leader made clear that he viewed Zika funding a major priority and one that demanded action.

Senator REID, the Democratic leader, on May 23, 2016, said: "Instead of gambling with the health and safety of millions of Americans, Republicans should give our Nation the money it needs to fight Zika, and they should do it now. Not next month, not in the fall—now."

Well, of course, Senator REID was advocating bypassing the Senate legislative process, and it was really inappropriate for him to demand a \$1.9 billion spending appropriation that adds to the deficit and debt without letting Congress do its job, but now the House and Senate have both passed legislation and agreed to a conference report that Senate Democrats have just voted down.

Senator REID said for us to fail to meet this crisis would be irresponsible, and yet he just advocated failing to meet that responsibility and address the crisis. We can't gamble with the health and well-being of women and children in this country just to serve partisan political needs, and most of the things that the Democratic leader raised in terms of objections to this conference report are just figments of his imagination.

There is no mention of Planned Parenthood in this conference report. I would challenge anybody to find Planned Parenthood mentioned once. As the Democratic leader knows, Planned Parenthood is a Medicaid provider, and so Medicaid eligible individuals can still seek whatever services they want through Medicaid at Planned Parenthood.

Then there is the Senator from Washington, the top-ranking Democrat on the Appropriations subcommittee, who actually crafted the bipartisan Zika response and then walked away from it and voted against it. She said on May 26, 2016:

Families and communities are expecting us to act. Parents are wondering if their babies will be born safe and healthy. In Congress, we should do everything we can to tackle the virus without any further delay.

Well, I agree, and I frankly do not understand how Senate Democrats, having taken this position previously, can come in here and engage in a partisan filibuster to stop funding for this impending public health crisis.

Just last week, the senior Senator from New York said: "Every day we wait, every day is increasing the risk that we will have problems with Zika."

Well, today we had the chance to send a bill to the President's desk that would meet the demands of Senator REID, Senator MURRAY, and Senator SCHUMER, but they blocked it for fanatical and imagined reasons.

One of the arguments that Senate Democrats make against the bill is that more money is needed, yet this is funded at the very level that the Senate agreed to—\$1.1 billion. President Obama and our Democratic colleagues repeatedly make the argument that throwing money at the problem will fix everything. Well, throwing no money at the problem will fix nothing, which is what they voted for today.

Less than 7 percent—just \$40 million of the \$589 million transferred from the Ebola fund to fight Zika has been obligated as of early June. That translates to easily more than \$500 million the President can still use to fight this cause in addition to the \$1.1 billion included in this bill.

We have heard from our colleagues on the other side of the aisle about this great need to prepare the country for this upcoming health crisis and how essential it is to quickly get resources to those studying the virus and working on prevention efforts and perhaps discovering a vaccine. But when given the chance to do that, Democrats shut it down. They filibustered the bipartisan bill that they themselves have been asking the Senate to pass, which is absolutely disgraceful.

So I hope our colleagues on the other side of the aisle will reconsider their misguided efforts and follow through with what they have been saying we need all along—the funding to fight a real public health threat. It is a public health priority that demands our attention and must be addressed now and not later.

Mr. President, I wonder what the Senators who voted against this bipartisan Zika funding bill would tell the mother of this child or perhaps another woman who is pregnant and wondering whether her child will end up with this virus and this terrible birth defect. Could they possibly look that woman in the eye and justify the reasons they have voted against funding so that other children and families can avoid this terrible devastating birth defect? I bet none of them could look that prospective mother in the eye and say: Well, we voted against protecting your baby and your family for good and sufficient reasons. As I said earlier, many of the reasons stated by the Democratic leader are imagined and not real—like this idea that somehow Planned Parenthood has been targeted,

which is not even mentioned in the legislation.

I can't imagine a more disgraceful vote than what some of our colleagues have cast to deny funding for this impending public health crisis. I hope they will reconsider. I hope the families who worry about the health of their children will call their offices and say: Why did you vote against funding the money necessary to eradicate the mosquitoes that carry this disease? Why did you vote against further scientific research to learn how to combat it? Why did you vote against our developing a vaccine that can prevent the spread of this disease not only here in the United States but around the world?

I will bet none of them could look that mother in the eye because what our Democratic colleagues did today by voting down this funding was absolutely hypocritical, it was cynical, and it was shameful.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, in response to the remarks of the senior Senator from Texas, I just wonder, if we had had a real conference where things were discussed, where would we be. That was impossible because the Republican leadership took the House of Representatives out of session. Had they stayed and done their work, as we are, I am sure we could have worked something out. But that, of course, was their decision.

GENETICALLY ENGINEERED FOOD LABELING

Mr. President, on another matter, this week marks a historic moment in Vermont. This coming Friday, July 1, Vermont's Act 120, the first-in-the-Nation labeling law for genetically engineered—so-called GE—foods will take effect. But unfortunately for consumers everywhere, it could be a short-lived celebration.

Late last week, a so-called deal was reached on a national mandatory labeling law. During the weekend, I had the chance to review this proposal closely. Vermonters have reviewed it closely. I can say this: It falls short.

This is an extremely complex issue—from how we define genetically engineered foods, to how we treat animal products; from the impact on the organics industry, to how small businesses respond.

It is actually not something you just talk about; the details matter here. That is why the Vermont Legislature, Republicans and Democrats working together, spent 2 years debating it. They had over 50 committee hearings featuring testimony from more than 130 representatives on all sides of the issue.

The Senate has not held a single hearing on labeling. They had only one hearing on the issue of biotechnology, and they have had none on the issue of labeling foods or seeds.

I would note that the proposal unveiled late last week—and we were able to review it this weekend—is an im-

provement over the legislation the Senate wisely rejected in March. That bill, the one we rejected, would continue the current status quo. It proposed a meaningless “volunteer-only” approach, a thinly veiled attempt to block Vermont's labeling law and to keep any other State from acting. This current proposal at least acknowledges that States like Vermont have enacted in this area. That is why I stayed on the floor and blocked that first bill. I thank those Senators who joined with me.

We heard from the organic industry, expressing reservations about how they might be treated under a Federal GE-labeling program. Some of those concerns have been addressed, and the proposal reinforces that the USDA Organic seal remains the gold standard.

The proposal follows what Vermont's Act 120 does with respect to animal products, and it addresses the gap in the Vermont law for processed foods inspected by USDA, specifically those foods with meat.

The proposal now before us also acknowledges at long last what I have been saying for the past year. In many rural parts of this country, including most of Vermont, we have significant technological challenges that make it nearly impossible for consumers to access the electronic or digital disclosure methods allowed in this bill. By requiring the Secretary of Agriculture to complete a study on this issue, I believe these difficulties unavoidably will be recognized, and the Secretary should be given the authority the needs to require additional disclosure options. I do hope, however, that proponents of this proposal will not try to put the burden on our retail establishments to install costly digital scanners.

The proponents of this deal were sent back to the drawing board after we derailed them on March 16. As I said, I was very proud to be the Vermonter leading that effort. While it is true that this new attempt is an improvement in several ways, it is clear that this revised proposal is driven more by the perspectives of powerful special interests, than by a commitment to honor consumers' right to know. Consumers' right to know merits only grudging acceptance in this plan; consumers are far from this plan's highest priority. We see evidence of that in the broad loopholes included in the definitions for which GE foods this proposal would apply to.

While this proposal makes some positive, though modest, improvements, I remain deeply concerned that it is not going to offer transparency for consumers. Transparency is something that many companies have already opted to provide.

Look at these products. I bet most Americans can go to their cupboards and find them. Campbell's, General Mills, Frito-Lay, Cheez-It, and the iconic Wonder Bread. All of them are already putting on their labels that

they are produced with genetic engineering or partially produced with genetic engineering. It is easy. Just print it on there. Print it on there in the same way—if you have a child or a grandchild who has a peanut allergy or who requires gluten-free, you can go look for a label, and immediately, you know what you are feeding them.

Thanks to the citizen-led efforts in Vermont, we are seeing more and more consumer-friendly information easily accessible to shoppers. No scanning some code. No calling an 800 number. You don't pick up a product and say, “Gee, I have to scan a code in here” or “I have to call an 800 number.” No. You just pick up the product and look, and you find out what it has in it, everything from water, to celery, corn, cottonseed, and genetic engineered ingredients. We have seen countless pictures sent in by shoppers finding these labels. Labeling is not complicated or cost-prohibitive in practice. They are constantly printing new labels. You just add a line.

Of course, to make matters worse, the bill we have before us has absolutely no enforcement mechanism. The negotiators of this proposal seem to think public pressure would be enough to force these multimillion-dollar corporations to comply. What they are saying is “You guys be the cop on the beat. You be the ones to tell them what to do.” Surely families squeezing every minute out of every day will not have time to hold companies accountable in the court of public opinion. Public pressure is not enough. You cannot ask consumers to go around and try to figure out whether they can buy something and then bring pressure. That is what we have legislatures for.

At the end of the day, each of us have different reasons for wanting to know what is in our food. The fact is that, without labeling of GE foods, consumers cannot make informed choices. This purported deal does not go far enough to give consumers what they are asking for, which is a simple, on-package label or symbol.

Of course, the bill does more than just block States from enacting GE-food labeling laws like Vermont's Act 120; it also blocks a longstanding seed-labeling law in Vermont, one that Vermont's organic farmers appreciate, as do conventional farmers and even backyard-hobby gardeners. This is a law that has been on the books since 2004. It ensures clear, meaningful information for farmers to know exactly what they are buying, and that is why they buy it.

Perhaps in a State such as Kansas, where the last organic farm survey in 2014 counted only 83 organic farms, or Michigan, a State which is 10 times the size of Vermont and has some 332 organic farms—maybe in States that don't have organic farms, having access to that seed information is not considered useful or important, but in a State such as Vermont with only 626,000 people, where, our Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

assures me, we now have over 600 organic farms, our seed-labeling law is important. The industry has complied with it the last 12 years; yet, with no hearings and no debate, this bill will block Vermont's seed law and will prevent any other State from enacting one.

When I was chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I was proud that I wrote the law that set the national organic standards and labeling program. I was proud of that. It started out following a discussion across the kitchen table with organic farmers in Vermont; it is now a \$40 billion industry nationwide.

I continue to closely monitor and work to protect the high standards for the organic program. They have given consumers confidence in the organic label. They have given organic producers the strong, clear, and meaningful standards they have demanded. They have worked hard to follow these standards, but they want to know what the standards are such that those who work hard and follow the rules are not going to have somebody come in and say, "Well, we followed the rules," with no proof that they actually did.

Labeling of genetically engineered products is an outgrowth of the organic movement. As a watchdog of the organic program, I simply cannot support this proposal. I don't support it. We are not saying you cannot have these genetically engineered foods; just let consumers know. Label it. Then they can decide whether to buy it, just as a parent with a child who may require a gluten-free product knows when they come in whether a product is gluten-free when it says so on the label. It doesn't say you outlaw products with gluten in them; it says to give people a choice—the same as those with a peanut allergy. In this case, people want to know how their food was produced, and they want it on the label, not in some electronic code.

Vermonters have a long tradition of leading the debate on issues crossing the spectrum. Vermonters stand for transparency the consumer's right to know. Vermonters want to make informed decisions for their families and with their limited grocery budgets. I acknowledge—we Vermonters acknowledge that powerful interests are allied against Vermont's law and against the Nation's consumers, as has been the fact from the beginning.

The proposal released last week does not respect the work that Vermont has painstakingly done in this space. This Vermonter reflects the feelings of my constituents. I will not and cannot support it. Vermonters deserve better and so do all Americans.

Mr. President, I see my good friend from Oregon, Senator MERKLEY, on the floor. He knows how important Vermont's work has been in this national public debate. I have been proud to cosponsor his legislation that recognizes and respects Vermont's law.

I yield to my good friend from Oregon.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRUZ). The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I appreciate the comments of my colleague from Vermont and the work his State has done to take on this very important issue. I wish to amplify somewhat or add to the remarks he has made.

This debate is about one simple concept; that is, a simple, mandatory label that is consumer-friendly to inform consumers whether a product has been produced with GMO ingredients. That is it. It is the consumer's right to know and nothing else.

It has been quite an interesting journey we have been on to this point. We have had the DARK Act—the Deny Americans the Right to Know Act—about the GMO status of the foods they consume, and now we have the DARK Act 2.0 coming to this floor in a deceptive strategy to persuade Americans that we are doing something important in order to justify the preemption of our State legislators from taking on this issue State by State. Unfortunately, the bill before us is an echo of what we have seen before.

So let's ask the simple question: Does it meet the 1-second test for consumers knowing what is in their foods? That is, by the way, information 89 percent of Americans want to know. This is an issue where if you poll Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, they essentially all say the same thing. Nine out of ten Americans say: We want this information on the package. It is relevant to us. We think consumers should have the right to know.

It is unusual to have an issue 9 out of 10 Democrats and 9 out of 10 Independents and 9 out of 10 Republicans all agree on, but here we are at this moment, with this Senate about to consider a bill written by and for the most powerful agricultural groups in America to deny Americans the right to know.

Let us take a closer look at what is wrong with the bill that is coming before us—the Roberts bill. First of all, it does not require that simple consumer-friendly label. Instead, it says: Well, that can be an option. A company could do that, if they would like to. Well, you know what. They can do that right now, without the permission of our Federal Government.

Then it says it could be an option for a company to put a symbol on a package. Well, that option is there for a group right now. They can put a symbol on a package, if they want to.

So we have granted nothing. Then it says: In lieu of putting actual information on the package, they can put a computer code on the package. A computer code is a square, like this, or it could be a barcode, but when you put that on the package, people say: Well, those are on the packages already. Why is it there?

This bill does have a little information in it. It says: If you put this quick response code or computer code on the package, you have to say it is for addi-

tional ingredient information—no reference to biotechnology, no reference to GMO ingredients. It could be what version of peanuts is in the product, what version of corn, where was it raised. These are all questions a consumer might possibly want to know. All it says is, for more information on the ingredients.

So if you look to the ingredients, and the ingredients say: tomato puree, high-fructose corn syrup and wheat flour and water, you get a little more information about those ingredients. That is what it is suggesting, even with the language in this bill that says "for more information on ingredients," and nothing about the fact that this product was or wasn't produced with bio-engineering, nothing about the fact that this product does or doesn't contain genetically modified ingredients.

So this is a sham because it doesn't give that consumer-friendly information, and it is easy to give that consumer-friendly information. For example, let's take a look at what is happening right now on M&Ms. Here it is. The Mars corporation has said: We want to have integrity with our consumers so we are just going to tell them: partially produced with genetic engineering. It is a simple phrase. It meets the 1-second test. You can grab that candy bar or that bag of M&Ms, you can turn it over, and, boom, there it is, right there.

That is what States have wanted to do in response to their 9 out of 10 citizens who desire simple information on the package. But let's turn back. What does this bill do? This bill says companies can put on a barcode with no reference, no reference to the fact there are GMO ingredients. This is a completely different thing.

The bill also says it can put on an 800 number. We have been through this territory before too. You can put an 800 number on it. OK. That certainly is not consumer-friendly. You have to call up, wait for 20 minutes to go through a phone tree and talk to somebody on the phone. Maybe you are talking to somebody in the Philippines. Maybe they know the answer or maybe they do not. Are you kidding me? A shopper is going to go down the aisle of the grocery store, wanting to know the status of these different options before them, and they are going to make a call for each of them, standing there for 30 minutes, when it could have been answered in 1 second? No, of course not. The authors of this bill know this is a sham.

This is disturbing that we are seeing DARK Act 2.0 coming back again. If you ever do get to that person on the phone line or you ever do get to that computer Web site, there is a provision in this bill that says the information on the Web site has to be on the first page, it has to be presented clearly, but it is being done by the company itself. So how big is that first page going to be, and how is it going to incorporate other information about the ingredients?

This is not something being produced in a standard fashion, easy to use. Let's realize this. In order to use the 800 number, you have to have a phone in your pocket. In order to use the barcode, you have to have a smartphone in your pocket. You have to use up your monthly digital plan. You have to expand your money to find out this information. Furthermore, some of your information is captured by the Web site when you go there. You have to give up your privacy.

Again, we are seeing the sham and the scam brought forward in a new version, and that is not all. This bill has a definition that excludes the food derived from major GMO crops. I have the bill in front of me, and right up front it says what is covered. It says food that contains genetic material—that contains genetic material. Why is that important? Well, when you process crops into the ingredients that go into our food, you basically strip out, in many cases, the genetic material. Therefore, the things that are commonly thought of as GMO ingredients wouldn't be GMO ingredients under this bill.

I have a commentary from the Food and Drug Administration, and here is what it says. It says the phrase "that contains genetic material" means that many foods from GE sources will not be subject to this bill, and it gives the example of genetically engineered soy—oil made from that. It goes into all kinds of products that everyone thinks of as a GMO ingredient that wouldn't be covered.

What about high-fructose corn syrup? What about oil derived from corn? Corn oil. What about sugar derived from GMO beets—the sugar that has the genetic material stripped from it. So in the very start of this bill, it excludes the three major crops or major components of the three major crops that are GMO in America—soybeans and corn and sugar. That is disturbing, but if that isn't disturbing enough, another loophole has been put into this bill. Let's turn back to what the bill actually says. It says not only must it contain genetic material, thereby bypassing the soy oil and the corn oil and the sugar from the three major GMO crops, you also have to prove the ingredient "could not otherwise be obtained through conventional breeding or found in nature." So all a person has to do is to assert it is possible, it could be, and then you have another massive loophole.

To what point? We know it is a GMO ingredient. It is in the food. But they could say: Yes, but you could have possibly developed the same thing from a non-GMO process, and they assert that so they don't put it on their can, they don't put it on their label.

There are two major loopholes undermining this bill, showing there is no serious intent to do a consumer-friendly label that justifies State preemption. I would like to say that is all, but then, as was pointed to by the Senator from

Vermont, there is no enforcement in this bill. There is no authority for the USDA—U.S. Department of Agriculture—to do a recall of products improperly labeled. There is no enforcement power to exercise a fine on companies that fail to use some option under this bill.

We can see the basic facts. This does not give a consumer-friendly label and instead sends people off through a maze, through a rat hole of telephone calls and Web sites, not in any way practical to a shopper in a store. Second, it has a definition that excludes major products from the major sources of GMO crops in America. Third, it has a huge loophole expressing the theory that if you can assert something could have been derived from a conventional breeding program, you don't have to label. Then, fourth, no enforcement.

This is completely different than the power that Vermont has under their existing bill. They have a simple 1-second test label, they have a definition that does not exclude the major crops, they do not have a loophole about some theory you could possibly have reached the same thing through conventional breeding, and they have enforcement. So this represents not even a shadow of what Vermont is doing.

I have supported the idea that you could have a strong case to have a single Federal standard. It makes sense in the production of food in the country not to have different label standards in different States—the food runs through warehouses. It is spread out through different locations. Fair enough, but if you are going to take away a consumer-friendly label—the power to do that from a State—if you are going to preempt that, then we need to replace it with a credible, mandatory, consumer-friendly label at the Federal level.

This bill fails the test in every major way, and that is why we should not strip States of their power. That is why we should reject this bill, and I encourage my colleagues to do so. A consumer's right to know about the food they put in their bodies is a powerful right, and we are taking it away if we pass this bill. Let us not do that.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, may I inquire of the Chair, is the Senator from Connecticut due to speak next?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I would be happy to yield to the Senator from Georgia, as long as I be permitted to follow him for up to 10 minutes.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized for up to 5 minutes, to be followed by Senator BLUMENTHAL for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I find it unbelievable that today the United States Senate said no to pregnant moms and veterans.

The vote earlier to deny cloture on the VA—MILCON legislation and the Zika virus is to say to pregnant moms in America: We don't think the case of the Zika virus is that important; you are going to have to run the risks yourself. To say to our veterans who fought and risked their lives for us that we may not fund their health care is just not the right thing to do.

I deeply regret the fact that the cloture motion was denied this morning. I hope that before we leave town this week, cloture will be granted so we can approve MILCON—VA appropriations and approve our response to Zika. But let me underline how important that is with two quick, brief remarks.

In terms of Zika, I represent the CDC—the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—in Atlanta, GA, the world's health care center. I was there 2 weeks ago for a briefing on the Zika virus. There are more than 1 million Zika cases in Latin America, there are Zika cases in the Caribbean, and there are 150 in the United States of America. The Zika virus is very unique. It attacks a pregnant mom, it attacks the child in the womb, and it attacks the brain and central nervous system, causing manifested, terrible brain problems and deformities, some that we hope we can stop and prevent. But you can't do it if you don't fund the Nation's response, and the \$1.1 billion in this bill, which was denied today, would go to Zika response.

There are two responses we need to fund. One is the research and development for preventive vaccines so we can find them as quickly as possible. That is obviously important. But the other is the education to do the most we can to see to it that Zika is prevented wherever possible.

A lot of people think that if you don't have mosquitoes, you don't have to worry about Zika. Zika is transmitted in two very distinct ways. One is through one of two types of mosquitoes, both indigenous to my State of Georgia and most of the southeastern United States. But Zika is also transmitted by sexual intercourse, which means whether you are in Colorado where there are no mosquitos or Georgia where there are, there is another way to transmit it as well. If we don't have a good education process in terms of how people can protect themselves against transmitting the Zika virus during sexual intercourse or protect themselves against bites by mosquitoes carrying the virus, we are going to be in big trouble. We will have a lot of babies born who will have lives of tragedy because we didn't do our jobs as U.S. Senators.

It is estimated that the cost of a live birth and the lifetime of a child born with the effects of the Zika virus will be \$10 million per child on the taxpayers of America—\$10 million. Think of the cost that adds up to.

We should come to the table immediately, come back, vote again, and vote for cloture on the Zika virus—the

\$1.1 billion response that passed the House—to pass the Senate and see to it that we tell the American people that we understand the dangers of Zika, and we are going to do everything we can to allow them the education they need to prevent it. We are going to respond to it, and do it in the right way.

As far as the VA is concerned, I have never understood how anyone can look at a veteran in the eye and say no. As chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee in the Senate, I know what these people have done. As one who served in the military, I know what sacrifice means in terms of serving in uniform. To say no to the funding of VA health care is just unconscionable, and it is wrong. Our veterans volunteered. We don't have a draft anymore. We don't conscript people anymore. People volunteer. We have had 16 straight years of deployment in the Middle East of Americans who volunteer to protect this country. They deserve to know that when they come home, their health care is going to be provided for, their benefits are going to be provided for, and the promises we made to them to get them to volunteer to join our military are promises we keep to them, regardless of the condition they may be in or the difficulties they have.

So as one Member of the Senate, I can't say no to a pregnant mom, and I can't say no to a veteran. I don't think anybody in here really wants to say no to them at all.

I would encourage members of the Democratic Party to come back to the floor and join all of us in the Republican Party to vote for cloture on the MILCON-VA and cloture on the Zika virus, and do it as soon as possible. Time is wasting. Time is of the essence. Time is important. Our response is important. Our pregnant moms are important. There is nobody more important than the veterans of the United States of America.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

PUERTO RICO

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I strongly agree with colleagues who have supported effective, real measures to confront the spreading toll that Zika is taking around the world and, I assume, will take an even greater number and magnitude in this country. But we need effective solutions that will provide funding for research, eradication of mosquitoes, and education of the public without harmful restrictions that prevent women from seeking family planning services that, in fact, help to prevent the spread of Zika.

Nowhere is the threat of Zika greater than in Puerto Rico. That island has been particularly hard-hit. In fact, the spreading financial crisis is combining with the spreading epidemic of Zika to create a true humanitarian crisis. That crisis will only be aggravated and deepened by a failure to deal effectively with the financial default that faces the island in just a few days from now.

On July 1, \$2 billion of loans will come due, and Puerto Rico simply lacks the resources to pay those debts. It is insolvent, so far as those debts are concerned. If the Bankruptcy Code applied, it could seek relief from its creditors and prevent the race to the courthouse and the enormous litigation costs and other expenses that will ensue.

We have an opportunity to act on behalf of the people of the United States who have a powerfully important stake in the people of Puerto Rico and the welfare of that island. It is Americans who live there—3.5 million American citizens, who have fought in our wars, given of their culture and heritage to all of us, and have helped make America the greatest, strongest country in the history of the world. They are American citizens who are part of the fabric of this Nation, and the people of Puerto Rico will be the ones who pay the price of a failure on our part to act effectively.

The simple fact is that Puerto Rico cannot afford to pay all of its creditors and continue to provide a basic level of services for its people. That fact is undisputed. The question is simply whether this situation is addressed in an orderly and productive way or permitted to enter the sea of chaos—financially and in humanitarian terms—that will ensue without action on our part.

Already we have seen the beginnings of this crisis. The island's only 24/7 stroke center has closed because too many Puerto Rican neurologists have left for the mainland. The Puerto Rican Department of Education has not paid hundreds of firms that provide education and transportation services. Hospitals are barely keeping the lights on. Schools cannot pay bus drivers.

My colleague from Florida, Senator NELSON, told the story yesterday of the neonatal dialysis center that is providing services only to customers who can pay cash up front. Imagine, in the United States—Puerto Rico is part of the United States—children in need of lifesaving services are being turned away and denied basic health care.

There is no need to guess as to what will happen on July 1. Creditors have told us—in fact, they have told us very explicitly in court papers already filed last week. They wrote: "It has long been settled law that Constitutional Debt is constitutionally required to be paid first in times of scarcity, ahead of even what government deems 'essential services.'" They will claim to be paid in advance and in priority over essential services. That is the stark, harsh truth of litigation, and a judgment in their favor will have lasting and irreparable effects on the people of Puerto Rico. If the creditors win, the people of Puerto Rico lose, and they lose tremendously and irreparably.

The Senate has a choice. Instead of allowing a chaotic process that costs tremendously in scarce resources and benefits financially the lawyers and some of the creditors more than any-

one, we can pass legislation before us today. It is not the legislation I would have preferred. In fact, this deal is not one that I find attractive. There are defects and weaknesses in its provisions relating to minimum wage and overtime and pensions and the structure of the board, among others. But the question is, What is the alternative?

With PROMESA, the parties will have a workable judicial mechanism with a stay on litigation, ensuring that chaos is avoided and the current mess is resolved. If we devise a system that only the creditors like and works only for them, it will benefit a small group of wealthy investors that could threaten to block Puerto Rico's economic recovery. In fact, the longest lasting and most alarming effect will be the uncertainty that results from our failure to act, which almost clearly and unavoidably will cause a deep recession in that island. It will, in effect, impede investment in the island and quash economic recovery.

Representative NYDIA VELÁZQUEZ put it best. She has never stopped fighting for her homeland of Puerto Rico. Before PROMESA passed the House she said:

Some would have you believe that if we only yell louder, there will be a third option. But let me tell you, I have screamed so loud that I no longer have a voice.

Like the vast majority of her House colleagues, she voted for PROMESA because it is the best option available now that both sides can support. No amount of wishing or yelling will change that fact.

PROMESA has the support of experts across the political spectrum and editorial boards across the country. It has won support from Puerto Rico's Governor and its sole representative in the U.S. House. It has won support from business leaders in Puerto Rico and in the United States. And, crucially, the Treasury Department says it is an essential step—a first step—to avoid humanitarian catastrophe. We can come back next month, next year, or sooner to try to make it better. But there is no better bill available this week, before July 1, and the impending humanitarian crisis will most affect and most enduringly hurt the people of Puerto Rico. The choice is hope or disaster for the Americans who live in Puerto Rico.

PROMESA could be better, but at the end of the day, we cannot permit the perfect to be the enemy of the good. I will continue to work for a better bill, seeking to offer amendments that improve it, and fighting afterward for still more improvements in this measure.

Today I urge my colleagues to join in supporting PROMESA.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECESS

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