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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Gracious Father, fill our Senators with Your truth and peace. Let Your truth bring them freedom from anxiety, fear, pride, timidity, and sin. Let Your peace guard their hearts, reminding them of the power of Your sovereignty and grace. As they have opportunity, empower them to do good for all people. Thank You for bestowing such love upon us that we can be called Your children. Lord, use us for Your glory as You keep us on the path You have selected for our lives.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

APPOINTMENTS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I understand appointments were made during the adjournment of the Senate. I ask that they be stated for the record.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair, on behalf of the President pro tempore, upon the recommendation of the majority leader, pursuant to Public Law 105-292, as amended by Public Law 106-55, Public Law 107-228, and Public Law 112-75, appoints the following individual to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: Clifford D. May of Maryland.

The Chair announces, on behalf of the majority leader, pursuant to the provisions of Public Law 114-140, the appointment of the following individuals to serve as members of the Evidence-Based Policymaking Commission: Kathleen B. Rice of Indiana (data minimization/personal-identifiable information expert), Robert J. Shea of Virginia (data expert with experience in administering programs), and Kenneth R. Troske of Kentucky (academic researcher/data expert).

ISSUES BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I welcome everyone back from what I hope was a productive State work period. I am sure I speak for all of us when I say that traveling to our States and meeting with those we represent is one of the best parts of this job. It is also one of the most important. That is because it allows us to hear different perspectives on critical issues and reminds us of the real difference good policy can make in the lives of the American people.

From funding the government to supporting our servicemembers and taking action on issues such as Zika, we have a lot to get done in this upcoming work period. I look forward to working with colleagues on these and other important issues in the coming weeks.

As I mentioned, over the State work period, Senators on both sides had opportunities to meet with constituents and talk with them about a number of serious problems facing our country. From combating the Zika virus to addressing an array of national security challenges, Americans such as those I met with back home wanted to know what steps both parties are taking to help.

For our friends across the aisle, that must have been a little bit of a difficult conversation. That is because before the work period, Senate Democrats filibustered funding to combat Zika and to support veterans—not once but twice. They also filibustered funding to provide resources for our servicemembers and national defense priorities. It is hard to explain why, despite their own calls for funding, Senate Democrats decided to block a bill that could help keep pregnant women and babies safer from Zika.

It is also hard to explain why—despite the array of terror attacks we have seen across the world—Senate Democrats decided to block a bill that could help keep the American people safer from threats like ISIL.

Our colleagues across the aisle can point to a series of partisan excuses, but the bottom line is this: There is no good explanation for blocking these public health and national security funding bills.

Over the summer, there were important steps taken to combat the virus. The administration took the guidance of Appropriations Chairmen COCHRAN and ROGERS, and with the advocacy of Members such as Senators BLUNT and RUBIO, HHS shifted funds already available to them to strengthen our defense against the virus.

Aerial spraying also started early in August and has produced positive results. The CDC Director has said he has been “impressed by the effectiveness” of the spraying, noting the “substantial reduction in the number of mosquitoes” in the transmission areas, but

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



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these issues have certainly not gone away. In fact, this summer brought even more cases of Zika, with mosquitoes now spreading the virus in some counties and health officials issuing travel warnings for pregnant women going to Miami.

This summer also brought with it even more ISIL-inspired or directed terror attacks from France to Turkey, as well as more concerns of growing aggression from countries like North Korea, which recently test-launched another missile.

These instances from the summer further underscore the urgency of the challenges facing us and why it is imperative our colleagues end their irresponsible filibusters of these bills.

So today we will give Senate Democrats another opportunity to follow through on their own calls for action on Zika, to support our veterans who deserve the treatment and benefits they have earned, and to provide for our servicemembers who sacrifice so much to protect the country and the people we love.

I hope our colleagues will join us now to finally end their senseless filibusters and help us do our part to address these serious issues.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority leader is recognized.

ISSUES BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I, too, am glad to be back. I appreciate all the people here whom we spend so much time with and all their good work. We have been gone for 7 weeks. Baseball season is about over. I wish it went year-round, but it doesn't. So all good things come to an end, and we will have that over with in about a month.

Today, the Republicans return from the longest summer recess in more than 60 years. I am still stunned that the Republican leader decided to have a 7-week vacation, and it was more important to them than funding our Nation's Zika response or giving Merrick Garland a hearing or even meeting with him or keeping terrorists and criminals from buying guns, and as the New York Times reported in some detail on Sunday, climate change is here. Military installations—like those in Virginia as an example, but they are not the only ones—are in peril of surviving. Whole neighborhoods are under water. Highways and bridges to islands are unpassable for weeks at a time—but 7 weeks of vacation and not a word of debate on the rising seas, and they are here. Just ask anyone in Florida trying to pass a bond issue now for billions of dollars to raise the highways and the roads and the foundations of buildings.

Now, because of the Republican leader's decision to recess for the summer, Congress is floundering because of Re-

publican inaction. The Senate has a mountain of work to do and no time to do it.

First and foremost, the Senate needs to fund efforts to combat Zika. It is a dreaded problem sweeping this country. Earlier this year, Democrats tried in vain to bring Republicans to the realization that Zika was imperiling the health of all but especially women of child-bearing age. We accepted the Senate Zika compromise. Last May, 89 Senators voted to pass that legislation. Republicans in the House said no, and then surprisingly, when we tried to pass it as a stand-alone here, the Republican Senate said we will not agree to what we agreed to a few weeks ago—stunning, to say the least.

President Obama proposed a meeting with Senator MCCONNELL, Speaker RYAN, Secretary Burwell, and Director Donovan to work on the Zika crisis. They said no to the meeting. Democrats offered to negotiate a compromise, but Republicans rejected our efforts to compromise. Republicans were more interested in attacking Planned Parenthood and flying the Confederate flag than protecting women and babies from this awful virus.

As Republicans stalled, Zika spread quickly. Puerto Rico has been ravaged by the virus. Two thousand Puerto Ricans are infected each week—different Puerto Ricans. Remember, Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention predicted that by the end of the year, 25 percent of Puerto Rico's population will be infected by Zika. That is 900,000 people.

Last month, the Department of Health and Human Services declared a health emergency in Puerto Rico due to the Zika virus. Democrats pleaded for Republicans to cut short their 7-week break and return to the Capitol in order to pass emergency Zika funding. Republicans said: No, we are going to stay home some more.

While the Republican Senate insisted on vacation, Zika spread to the mainland in the United States. Local transmission of Zika was confirmed in Florida and elsewhere. Last week, public health officials in Florida even trapped some mosquitoes carrying this virus. To date, nearly 17,000 men, women, and children in the United States and its territories have been infected with Zika, claiming 1,600 pregnant women, and 16 babies have been born with the deforming birth defects caused by Zika.

We still don't understand all the devastating effects of this virus. That is why we need more study. We know, though, about microcephaly—the birth defect that inhibits brain development and prevents the skull from growing. We have all seen the heart-wrenching pictures of babies with tiny heads, but in recent weeks we have also learned newborns with Zika face other problems, such as hearing loss, vision impairment, and joint deformities. Be-

cause of Republican inaction, our entire Nation is exposed to this scourge.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention do not have the resources to fight Zika. CDC Director Thomas Frieden told reporters:

The cupboard is bare. . . . Basically, we are out of money and we need Congress to act.

We must stop the spread of this disease. We need to learn more. We need to pass a bipartisan funding bill that gives doctors, researchers, and public health officials the resources they require to understand and fight the spread of this deadly virus. We passed something here with 89 votes. As I said, it went to the House. They sent it back with all this strange, weird stuff in it. They cut funding for the Veterans' Administration by one-half billion dollars. They tried to disguise the fact that what they were trying to do was to eliminate Planned Parenthood. Remember, last year 2 million American women went to Planned Parenthood for help. Now, with this Zika virus frightening women all over America, they want to cut this off.

As I said, they did other things. When I talk about flying the Confederate flag, I am not kidding. Part of the legislation sent back to us said they could continue flying the Confederate flag over military installations. Is that something we could vote for? Of course not.

The continuing resolution, that has become the kind of thing we do around here since Republicans have perfected filibusters. Continuing resolutions are a way of saying we can't do our regular appropriations work, so let's do something that gets us through the year. We must focus on our efforts to keep the government open. Press reports indicate that Republicans want to pass a continuing resolution that extends into next year. That seems odd—strange. We just completed 7 weeks of doing nothing—none of our country's essential business—and now Republicans are suggesting another 10 weeks of vacation. Speaker RYAN and Senator MCCONNELL should understand that Democrats will not support 10 more weeks away from Washington. We have a lot of work to do. We cannot ignore the Nation's work any longer. President Obama will reject any continuing resolution that extends into 2017.

Notably, Members of Congress received their pay during the 7 weeks we were out of Washington and would receive their salaries during the Republicans' proposed 10-week recess. Let's be clear. A funding resolution that stretches into next year is a permission slip for Congress to refuse to do its job for the rest of the year. The next Senate should not begin months behind because of this Republican Senate's failure to do its job. Once we have ensured that the government is properly funded, we must turn our attention to the important issues that the Republican Senate has failed to adequately address, and these are only some of them.

How about the Supreme Court and judicial nominations? The Senate