

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

needs to give the U.S. Supreme Court a full complement of nine Justices. The Republicans still refuse to give Chief Judge Merrick Garland a hearing or a vote. ORRIN HATCH, who opened the Senate a few minutes ago, has said Merrick Garland is a consensus nomination. I don't know if he forgot what he said or didn't mean it at the time. I think he did mean it at the time. Republicans want to hold the seat open for Donald Trump to fill. If that doesn't startle you, I don't know what would.

What more do you need to see from Trump to realize that he is dangerous and unfit for the Presidency? How can you hold a Supreme Court vacancy open for this man and his weird ideas?

It is not just the Supreme Court. Republicans have deadlocked our entire system of justice because of the Republican Senate's dysfunction. This Republican Senate has confirmed the fewest circuit and district court judges in many decades. Republicans want Trump to remake the justice system in his image. What an image that would be—a Trump judiciary.

To show the American people's disgust with how Republicans have treated Merrick Garland's nomination, starting today I am objecting to committees meeting for other purposes until the Judiciary Committee schedules a meeting to consider Judge Garland's nomination. If the Republican leader thinks there is a committee that needs to meet because of extraordinary circumstances, I would be pleased to consider his request. But in the meantime, as of today, we are objecting to committees meeting, in line with the rules of the Senate.

In addition to ending the disgusting and repugnant opposition to Merrick Garland's nomination to the Supreme Court, we must also pass legislation to keep guns and explosives out of the hands of suspected terrorists and other dangerous individuals. How many more acts of gun violence must we witness before we need to do something about it? How many more slaughters must we witness? The American people agree with us. Eighty-five percent want to do something about this worsening gun situation. It is gun violence. Eighty-five percent of Americans support legislation to keep guns away from suspected terrorists. This is the case all over America. Sensible background checks—that is all it is.

The Senate Republicans should listen to the American people and stop listening to the National Rifle Association. We must take a stand against violence.

There are many, many other pressing ideas. We need to address the criminal justice system, which is in deep need of repair and renovation. The United States needs to help make college more affordable for American families. The United States needs to address campaign finance reform. We must keep dark money out of politics. It is here and getting bigger every day, principally because of two people—the

Koch brothers. The Kochs today are in hog heaven because they now can secretly funnel money to all their clandestine committees and groups. They are spending hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars, funneling money to the Chamber of Commerce, the National Rifle Association, and many other front groups that no one has ever heard of—none of us have—but they are out running those ads with this secret money.

The U.S. Senate has much to do; I have mentioned only a few of the things. We have to use our time wisely. Sadly, for the last 7 weeks, we have not been using our time in a productive manner, and that is an understatement. That is why I was baffled to learn that the Republicans want to move to the Water Resources Development Act next week. I understand WRDA legislation. I have been chairman of that committee on two separate occasions. I know there is money in this bill for beleaguered Flint, MI. The people of Flint have waited months and months for this overdue relief.

Also in this bill is the Tahoe Restoration Act, which I support. Last Wednesday I had my 20th and last summit on Lake Tahoe. It is a much better place because of what we have done over the last 20 years. Two billion dollars has been spent on that beautiful lake. There is only one other lake like it in the whole world, and that is in Siberia. I know how important this Tahoe Restoration Act is. The fact remains that the Republican House is not going to pass it anyway, but I am willing to do what I can to act responsibly by not blocking this bill, as the Republicans would do, but we will legislate very carefully. Staffs are working to find out if we can have a path forward. I hope we can.

I appreciate the good work of Senators BOXER and INHOFE. I am hopeful that we can find a path forward on WRDA, as well as Zika, funding the government, and other matters about which I have spoken. In the meantime, the Senate has to prioritize. I know the Republican leader sets the Senate schedule, but he should acknowledge the situation for what it is. Now we have a logjam of important legislation that he created by recessing for 7 weeks—7 weeks, everybody.

We have a mess, but the mess is of the Republican leader's own making. Now that the Republicans have finally decided to come back to the Nation's Capital, it is time we move forward on these important issues that have been ignored for 7 weeks. In short, it is time for the Republicans to do their job.

Mr. President, I see no one on the floor. I ask that the Chair 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, 2017—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 2577, which the clerk will report.

The 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.

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

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

OBAMACARE

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, over the past several weeks, I spent a lot of time traveling around my home State of Wyoming. I know the Presiding Officer spent a lot of time traveling around his home State of Oklahoma. I talked to a lot of people in Wyoming, as he did in Oklahoma, about one of the top concerns of the things that are on their minds. To me, and I know to the Presiding Officer, that has been the Obama health care law and the disastrous problems that people are facing. People now tell me that some of them are paying more for their health insurance than they are for their mortgage. That is not just a problem in Oklahoma or in Wyoming; it is a problem all across the country. And that is now.

What they are also doing is reading stories in the papers, front-page stories that are saying the rates next year are going to go up again—not just a little but a lot. I know that my Senate colleagues from all across the country—Republicans and Democrats—are hearing that because of the disastrous problems that the Obama health care law is currently experiencing. In Wyoming, the Obama health insurance exchange has only one company selling insurance—only one. Wyoming is not alone. This wasn't supposed to happen.

The Democrats in Congress who supported this health care law said that they were going to create more competition—bring down prices by lots of competition. I can still remember when the President gave a speech to Congress in 2009, and what did he tell us? He said that in 34 States, 75 percent of the insurance market was controlled by five or fewer companies—five or fewer. Now in Wyoming we are down to one.

The President said that without competition, the price of insurance goes up, and he said that the quality goes down. That is what President Obama said 7