

against the Zika virus. We have the intellectual capacity to develop faster diagnostic tests, efficient vaccines, and advanced therapeutics with Zika, but what we need now is the financial certainty to support this kind of work in an accelerated way. The next pandemic that awaits the global community is just one frequent flier account away. This crisis demands that Congress pass a Zika funding package as soon as possible. The continuation of vaccine development depends on it, our ability to stop the spread of the virus depends on it, and the lives of millions of people around the world depend on it.

We won the race against polio in the 1950s. With accelerated funding, we have the opportunity today with these three vaccine candidates and others on the way to find a safe and effective solution to combat Zika by 2018. It is time to recognize the threat to humankind and the impact such a harmful disease will have on an entire generation of children by ensuring our 21st century scientists—our Sabins and Salks—have the funding they need to banish this virus to the history books.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

HONORING NEBRASKA'S SOLDIERS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN COMBAT

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I rise to continue my tribute to Nebraska's heroes and the current generation of men and women who have given their lives defending our freedom in Iraq and Afghanistan. Each of these Nebraskans has a powerful story.

CAPTAIN ROBERT J. YLLESCAS

Today I will reflect upon the life of Army CPT Robert Yllescas of Osceola, NE.

Rob's life began in Guatemala, where he was born and raised. His mother Barbara would often bring young Rob to Nebraska during visits to her family in Osceola. When in Nebraska, Rob made plenty of friends, and he fell in love with the good life.

He also met a young girl named Dena, who would one day become his wife. After graduating high school in Guatemala in 1996, Rob moved to Nebraska permanently, and he enrolled at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He also enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard. Rob had always wanted to serve in the military. He hoped to become a general one day. With this in mind, Rob enrolled in Army ROTC at UNL.

Fate had something else in store for Rob during his college years too. He reconnected with Dena. They fell in love, were engaged a year later, and were married on July 29, 2000. Rob continued his studies and training, later graduating from UNL in May, 2001, receiving his commission as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army.

That August, Rob and Dena welcomed the birth of their first daughter,

Julia. A short time later, Lieutenant Rob Yllescas began his first Active-Duty assignment on September 10, 2001. The very next day, everything changed for Rob, his family, and our Nation. America's military priorities transformed dramatically, focusing on a new mission to combat terrorism.

From the beginning of his military service, Rob's commanding officers took note of his character and his leadership. One commander said, "Yllescas was an extraordinary person to be around. He brought that 'lead from the front' mentality into his work."

Another soldier who served with him said Rob "was strong as an ox with a smile as big as Nebraska."

Over the next several years, life became fast-paced for the Yllescas family. Rob deployed to Iraq in 2003 for a year, and then he returned for a second deployment in 2005, when the fighting grew more intense. Returning home to Nebraska in 2006, Rob continued to excel in the military, later graduating from Army Ranger School. Rob achieved the rank of captain and was assigned to the 6th Squadron of the 4th Cavalry Regiment. He took command of Bravo Troop, known as the Blackfoots.

After nearly 2 years of training and earning the respect of his troops, Rob learned he would deploy to Afghanistan. Shortly before his deployment, Rob and Dena welcomed their second daughter, Eva, on February 1, 2008. Upon arriving in Afghanistan, Captain Yllescas and Bravo Troop were stationed at Camp Keating. This outpost, located in the eastern province of Nuristan, was known to many as the most dangerous territory in Afghanistan. Camp Keating had been under constant attack since becoming operational in 2006. Two prior camp commanders had been killed before the Blackfoots arrived.

Once again, Captain Yllescas made an immediate impact. His lead-from-the-front approach earned the respect of his men and improved the relations with the local Afghan leaders. Rob carried himself with a grace that would calm the nerves of these community leaders, and he often met with them unarmed and without that full battle rattle, but his charismatic style and the improved relations quickly became a threat to the enemy forces in the region.

Camp Keating, located in the Kamdesh District, was known to American troops as the "Tip of the Spear." Al Qaeda and militants moved freely through this area from safe havens in Pakistan. They filtered weapons and ammunition through this region to engage with coalition forces throughout Afghanistan.

One soldier described his tour at Camp Keating, saying: "I was either extremely bored or extremely terrified." For months, Captain Yllescas and his Blackfoots continued their focus on improving relations with the local Afghan community, and things

seemed to be moving in the right direction.

As Captain Yllescas made progress, he also drew the attention of the enemy militants. By the fall of 2008, they were coordinating plans to remove this threat to their supply chain. On October 28, 2008, a remotely controlled IED was detonated and seriously wounded Captain Yllescas as part of a planned assassination attempt. Rob was quickly evacuated out of Afghanistan. He was stabilized and moved to the Bethesda Naval Medical Center outside of Washington, DC.

Throughout this time at the medical center, Dena remained at his side. During Rob's second week at Bethesda Medical Naval Center, President George W. Bush visited him on November 10 and personally awarded him the Purple Heart. Rob's best day occurred when his daughter Julia entered his hospital room. Just seeing Julia seemed to ease his mind.

Ultimately, Rob's severe leg and head wounds were too much to overcome. CPT Robert Yllescas died on December 1, 2008. A week later, the auditorium in Osceola, NE, was filled to capacity with people honoring their hometown hero. In the time since, Dena and Rob's mother Barbara have become very active in the Gold Star family activities throughout Nebraska. His daughters Julia, who is now 15, and Eva, now 8, are also active in this cause. The two of them are well known for their beautiful voices and singing of patriotic songs at veterans events.

For his service to our Nation, CPT Rob Yllescas earned many military decorations. Among the many important badges and decorations he earned, Captain Yllescas was awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Iraq Campaign Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, and the Ranger Tab. CPT Robert Yllescas embodied the pride of his State, served his country, and loved his family. I am honored to tell his story.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

ZIKA VIRUS FUNDING

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise to voice my concern as an American and my outrage as a grandfather-to-be about the lack of action to fund our response to the Zika epidemic. Zika has come to Miami, FL, and Congress needs to step up and provide the necessary funds to fight this terrible virus.

Zika is like any other national emergency, and we are a nation that always—always—responds to emergencies. While I am encouraged with the news that Republicans are seeing fit to do their job and drop some of the conditions in their Zika bill, which this body has voted down three times already, there is no excuse for any further delay—no excuse for doing nothing while Americans face a risk that we have the power to mitigate.

The alarms have been ringing for months. We knew Zika wasn't coming, but instead of being proactive and prepared for what was about to hit our shores, Republicans in Congress chose to poison our response with rightwing ideological policy riders that prevented us from appropriately addressing this issue. To make matters worse, rather than removing these unacceptable provisions from the bill, they simply chose to ignore it entirely and send Congress on vacation without acting.

Since that time, we have had at least 43 instances of locally acquired Zika in the Miami area and nearly 16,000 locally acquired cases in Puerto Rico. In the 50 United States, we now have 3,000 total cases, including those that were acquired outside of the country. Most frightening for families throughout our Nation is that we know of at least 1,751 cases of pregnant women infected with Zika—a truly devastating diagnosis for everyone involved.

Today we have heard from the head of the National Institutes of Health's Infectious Disease Institute that without immediate funding, the current ongoing clinical trials into a Zika vaccine will be forced to shut down—putting a halt to any real chance we have of developing a preventive vaccine in the near term.

We, as Democrats, have fought the opposition to pass the President's request for \$1.9 billion to battle Zika. In May, the Senate, in a bipartisan compromise, agreed by a vote of 89 to 8 to fund \$1.1 billion in response funding, but that bipartisan agreement was derailed in the House of Representatives, where Republicans insisted on adding a poison pill provision that had nothing to do with Zika and everything to do with seizing the opportunity to pursue an anti-family political social agenda that would prohibit family planning clinics from getting Zika funds—directly impacting the health of women in the most high-risk areas at a time that we know Zika can be contracted not only by a bite of a mosquito but by sexual intercourse.

Every major health organization, from the Centers for Disease Control to the World Health Organization, to the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, has recommended that the best course of action is to increase access to contraception and family planning services to decrease transmission of the virus.

Today I call, once again, on the majority leader and the Speaker of the House to address this crisis now. Let's do our jobs and help keep the American people safe, healthy, and secure by addressing this crisis with everything we have and all we can provide to women and families who face an emergency situation no less important and no less threatening than tornadoes, hurricanes, wildfires, or superstorms such as Sandy.

We need to quickly and decisively respond. We are already behind. We have lost critical time and sacrificed the

progress we should have already made to political obstructionism that has prevented us from providing what we need to ensure maximum protection. We need to act now, not tomorrow, not the next day, not next week—now. But here we are 7 months after the President's original call for an emergency response to Zika and 5 months—long before Miami had become ground zero for the virus in the continental United States—5 months before the first confirmed cases of locally acquired transmission occurred and began to spread.

My Republican colleagues talk a lot about national security, about defending this Nation and its people and I agree with them, but there are many ways to defend America from the many threats we face, and Zika is one of them. If we believe what we say about keeping America and Americans safe, then quickly passing the necessary funding to defeat Zika is in the personal security interest of the United States.

We are dealing with a virus that has tremendous costs. We do not yet know all the potential birth defects that Zika can cause, and we do not know all the potential effects of microcephaly to a newborn or the life expectancy of a Zika baby, but the health care costs for the 31-year-old mother in Hackensack, NJ, who gave birth to the first Zika baby born in the United States, will, no doubt, be staggering—in the millions of dollars.

At the end of the day, protecting our people from an insidious virus that ultimately can affect the next generation that is being born is in fact protecting the public. In my mind, it is not acceptable to play politics with a national emergency. We can have all the debates in the world about family planning and access to women's health care, but we are delaying the possibilities of a vaccine being prepared, of mosquito abatement to limit the population of infected insects. We are denying care to those women who could be or are infected. We need to act now and pass the necessary funding just as we do in any national emergency, against any threat or any enemy, and Zika is a real and direct threat.

I can talk from personal experience. It has affected my family and me. My daughter lives in Miami. She is now 6 months pregnant with her first child, and I am deeply concerned about her health, her well-being and the well-being of my first grandchild. While this moment is a moment of great joy, every young mother already has concerns about the normal course of events: Will my child be healthy? Will my child be safe and free from illness? These are normal concerns, but Zika adds a new dimension to those normal worries, and we could have done something to stop it if it were not for Republican obstructionism in the House. Shame on us that we have not done all we could to mitigate the fear that young mothers are feeling, and that fear is palpable. It cannot be ignored,

not by me, not by any father, not by any grandfather, and it should not be ignored by Republicans in Congress. This isn't for me or my daughter. It is too late for her to take advantage of a vaccine or cure, but it is not too late for other mothers and their children across this country. How can we, in good conscience, not do all we can to attack this problem as best as we can?

My daughter has taken precautions and is doing everything possible to protect herself, but this issue goes beyond the personal aspect of what is happening in my family, and while having a child is a moment of great joy, any woman who is pregnant in Miami—actually, in reality, this knows no limitations geographically. It will continue to spread across the country. It is an added risk that is very real and should be of deep concern to all of us.

We want to protect our children. We talked about that in many different dimensions in different debates, whether it is about education or health care, and now we are doing something that every person who is a father or may be a grandfather understands very clearly. Every woman who serves in the Senate and has had a child understands very well the whole emotional process that goes on, like worrying about that child, taking care of themselves, having the right nutrition, and doing all the prenatal care they have to do so they can have a child who is born healthy.

Women throughout the country are doing their best to protect themselves to the extent that they can, but not all of them have the ability to do something about it like those of us in this Chamber. It is our responsibility, obligation, and duty to act in the interest of every family who cannot do what we can by simply passing this legislation and doing it now.

The alarms have been ringing for months. We knew Zika was coming, but instead of being proactive and prepared for what was about to hit our shores, Republican leaders in Congress chose to ignore the warning signs and adjourn Congress without acting. Now we are back and our Nation faces an emergency. We are here. There are no excuses. There is no political justification for inaction. At the end of the day, lives are at stake and we swore to protect every American. I call on my colleagues in both Chambers to put this nonsense aside, stop the pointless political posturing, and do your job.

We are living in a political season that has devolved into a race to the bottom. Let's not participate in that race by letting the rigid, fundamentalist social agenda with the most extreme elements in our politics overrule common sense and shared values in the face of a crisis and danger to America.

We know what is right. We know what we have to do, and now is the time to do it. It is with that hope that we break the shackles of this absurd political obstructionist chain that is holding us back from doing what is right and necessary.

I look forward to next week—since it seems we will be out of session now—ultimately addressing the concerns that women and families have across this country. We hear a lot about the protection of the unborn. Well, this is the very essence of being able to protect the unborn from an insidious disease that can affect their lives forever.

I hope the conscience of the Senate will ultimately move itself to its better judgment.

With that, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

WRDA

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I take this time on the floor to first express my appreciation to the leadership for bringing forward the Water Resources Development Act. I know we are going to have a chance to vote on cloture on Monday, and I just want to thank the leadership for making the bill available for floor time.

I also congratulate Senator INHOFE, the chairman of our committee, and Senator BOXER, the ranking Democrat, because I am a proud member of the Environment and Public Works Committee that has recommended the Water Resources Development Act to the full Senate.

The process that was used by Chairman INHOFE and Ranking Member BOXER is the way the legislative process should work in the U.S. Senate. We had a very open process, where many Members—all of the members of our committee and many other Members of the Senate—participated in one of the most important bills that we consider during the congressional session. It deals with the conservation and development of our water resources and authorizes the construction projects for the improvement of rivers and harbors. In other words, this bill very much affects every State in the Nation because it affects our economy, our environment, clean water, and public health. It is an extremely important piece of legislation.

When we look at the content of this bill, we see that the leaders of our committee were able to work out the right types of compromises so that we don't have a contentious bill before the U.S. Senate. We have a bill that is focused on the purposes of WRDA, to conserve and develop our water resources and to authorize the construction projects for our rivers and harbors.

For Maryland this bill is particularly important. When we look at the WRDA bill, so many projects and so many opportunities in my State are involved. In Maryland we have the Port of Balti-

more, which is the economic hub. I was there last week visiting the Port of Baltimore. I am there frequently. There are tens of thousands of jobs there. It is one of the most active ports in our country. It depends on the WRDA bill for the authorizations of the projects to keep the Port of Baltimore competitive and able to do the important economic work of our region. So for the economic impact that our ports have on America, and certainly the Port of Baltimore and Maryland, this bill is particularly important.

I make a point of being in Ocean City, MD, during the Association of County Conferences and had a chance to see firsthand the impact of these re-nourishing programs that are impacted by the WRDA bill. The protection of the Chesapeake Bay in my State, the largest estuary in our hemisphere, is very much impacted by this bill. The public health of the people of Maryland and indeed our Nation are very much impacted by the Water Resources Development Act.

So let me talk specifically about what is included in this bill that will help the people of Maryland and the people of our country. First, to the economic impact—as I said earlier, the passage of this bill will provide for job growth and economic growth in our country. It also will protect our public health. The dredging and maintenance of our rivers and harbors are paramount to this. As a result of the previous WRDA bills and continuing to this WRDA bill, we in our region are able to maintain our channels. We also have been able to find locations where we can put the dredge material.

For example, in Maryland we had a national model for what we did at Poplar Island. Poplar Island was a disappearing island in the Chesapeake Bay that was basically all submerged. It was an environmental negative. It was a liability. Through the use of deposits of dredge material, Poplar Island has been converted not just to a dredge site but an environmental restoration site and has helped very much in dealing with the diversity of species that we find in the Chesapeake Bay region. Through WRDA authorizations and appropriations, we have been able to convert a negative on our environment to a positive and at the same time find a way to use dredge materials to keep our harbors open. That is a win-win situation, and it is those types of projects that are included in the Water Resources Development Act.

But there are many other communities. In Maryland we have the Port of Baltimore—I talked about that—but we have a lot of smaller ports and harbors in Maryland. During the break I visited Salisbury, MD. They have a port. They want to expand their port so they can not only import products as they do, but use it as an export location. In Salisbury, they have Chesapeake Shipbuilding, which is one of the premier shipbuilding facilities we have,

and they benefit from what is done in Salisbury Harbor. By way of example, I want to point out to the people I represent in Maryland the important economic projects that are very much impacted by the passage of the Water Resources Development Act.

The economic impact goes beyond just what we do in our harbors; it also involves our shoreline protection. While I was in Ocean City, I visited with Mayor Meehan, the mayor of Ocean City, who pointed out to me what happened during the last storm. We get storms along the East Coast; we always get storms. But he pointed out to me the impact that the beach re-nourishment programs have had in minimizing damage to property and to the shoreline. We invest in beach re-nourishment as basically an insurance policy against damage that could be much greater. We could have our money back and much more through the investments we make in beach re-nourishment in the Water Resources Development Act. I can state that people who have their homes and businesses in Ocean City, MD, very much appreciate the fact that this Congress is paying attention to this issue.

Then I can go to Smith Island. Smith Island is the last habitable island in Maryland on the Chesapeake Bay. It is eroding, and it has serious issues about its sustainability. For the people who live on Smith Island, it is not only their homes but part of the history of our State and Nation that they are preserving. We have provided in the WRDA bill a way that we can do living shorelines so a community like Smith Island continues to be safe from the devastation we are seeing with erosion. I am proud of all those provisions that are in this WRDA bill that will help us deal with those issues.

As I pointed out earlier, the WRDA bill is important for our Chesapeake Bay. The Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in our hemisphere. I talk about it frequently on the floor of the U.S. Senate. It has been declared by many presidents as a national treasure. It is a national treasure. We have a comprehensive program in partnership with the Federal Government and with the State governments of five States and the District of Columbia. We have a partnership with local governments, with the private sector, and we are making progress.

In this bill, to give one example, we increased the authorization for oyster recovery programs. I was proud to offer this amendment from \$60 million to \$100 million, almost doubling the dollars that are going to be available for oyster recovery programs. Why is that important? I think most Members understand that oysters are cash crops. It is nice to be able to harvest oysters and be able to serve them and to use them as watermen do. So we are increasing dramatically the number of oysters that can be harvested, using new methods, including ways in which we can seed oysters off the bottom, as