

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.