

time, and that is not an excuse not to do our work." That is absolutely right. I would ask the Republicans to do their job.

Madam President, on the Zika matter, I would add the following: "The news from the House virtually guarantees that the Republican Congress will provide too little aid, too late to address the looming Zika crisis."

The way things are going around here, the appropriations bills are not going to be finished until right before the end of this fiscal year, late September. The crisis will long have arrived and we will be talking about cases that exist in the continental United States. It is wrong to wait.

I don't see anyone here on the floor, so I would ask the Chair to announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 4:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The assistant Democratic leader.

ZIKA VIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, 3 months ago President Barack Obama asked this Congress for funding to address a public health emergency: combating the Zika Virus. I am pleased that this week, 14 weeks after his request, we are going to respond. We are not responding in full. The President asked for \$1.9 billion to address this serious public health challenge. We are not responding without some theatrics and posturing first, but we are going to vote on some amendments this week, and it is about time.

It has been 14 weeks since representatives from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health testified at the Senate Appropriations Committee on the dire need for immediate action to combat the Zika virus.

I visited the Centers for Disease Control about 14 weeks ago. By then, they had been able to verify that the tissue samples from miscarriages and other serious health problems coming in from Brazil were linked to the Zika Virus. So there was no question that these mosquitoes carrying this virus had serious public health consequences—so serious that the Centers for Disease Control dedicated 1,000 staffers to deal with this issue. That was about 12 or 14 weeks ago.

The President used his authority to come to Congress and say: We have a public health emergency; treat it like

it is an emergency. Here we are 14 weeks later getting around to discussing it.

When I think back in times of American history when Congress has been called on to respond to an emergency, there have been amazing examples where partisanship was set aside and people said: In the interest of America, we need to act and act now. Whether we are talking about mobilizing for a war, whether we are talking about responding to terrorism, we have done it. We can do it. This time we have failed. We have failed for 14 weeks. In that period of time, 1,200 Americans in 44 States, Washington, DC, and 3 U.S. territories, including over 110 pregnant women, have contracted Zika. Six more have contracted Guillain-Barre, an autoimmune disorder that can cause paralysis and death. Recently, the first Zika-caused death and the first Zika-related microcephaly cases were reported in Puerto Rico. In my State of Illinois, 16 people have tested positive for Zika, including at least 3 pregnant women.

Over the past few months, we have learned more about Zika and how dangerous it can be. We now know it is carried by two types of mosquitoes. We now know it is linked to serious neurological damage and birth defects in children. We now know it can be sexually transmitted. We also know that the mosquitoes carrying the Zika virus thrive in the warm summer months, which is why this action should have been taken long ago and must be taken this week.

The best way to fight a public health threat such as Zika is to have a strong, stable public health infrastructure in place. That is what the President asked for. That means reliable and stable funding year after year.

Our public health agencies have to be viewed as the first line of defense, just as we view the Pentagon as the first line of defense when it comes to military and terrorist threats. Our public health agencies are the first line of defense when we are speaking of Ebola, the Zika virus, and a variety of other challenges that could literally threaten the health and lives of innocent Americans.

We must ensure robust and stable funding for agencies like the Centers for Disease Control. These invasive problems can pop up at any time. We can't rally to each and every occurrence after it happens; we have to be prepared. The Centers for Disease Control is not only the best, it is the best in the world, but it cannot operate without adequate funding.

The National Institutes of Health is working on a vaccine right now to protect all of us from the Zika virus. That is the answer, but it takes time—a year. We should have been moving on it sooner.

We must provide critical resources to the Food and Drug Administration. Their reviewers are responsible for ensuring that any Zika treatments or

vaccines are safe and effective, and in order to ensure the safety of those vaccines and treatments, they have to be clinically tested.

For years we have heard congressional Republicans rail against Federal spending and even embrace the notion of a sequester—a blind across-the-board cut. Case in point: Over the past few months, we have heard Republicans protest, stall, and push back on providing funding to help combat the Zika virus. There have been a variety of excuses for their delay, but the outcome has always been the same: We have lost time in responding to this public health emergency.

For years, those of us on this side of the aisle have been arguing that this approach—one of starving funding and endless delays—is shortsighted and irresponsible. Yes, we must be good stewards of the taxpayers' dollars, but I would argue that there is no better use of the taxpayers' dollars than investments in public health—investments in the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Food and Drug Administration. These are investments that prepare our Nation for the unforeseen, such as Zika or Ebola, but they are also investments that help us prepare for the foreseen situations that Americans face every day, such as Alzheimer's, cancer, Parkinson's, and diabetes. That is why I introduced the American Cures Act—legislation that would provide our Federal health research agencies reliable and robust funding increases every year into the future.

We are not going to win a war against Zika, Ebola, Alzheimer's, or cancer if our response is tepid, delayed, watered down, or subject to the whims of political fate. Big budget cuts make a good talking point in a speech somewhere, but the results can be devastating.

I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on the Senate Appropriations Committee to find a path forward to address the funding of these critical Federal health agencies. There is more to do, and we must do it together. If we don't do it together, we will pay a heavy price.

This week we will take up the issue. We will be voting on three Zika-related amendments this week. The first, offered by Senator NELSON of Florida, is one that I fully support. It would fulfill the President's request by providing the \$1.9 billion in needed funding to ensure an immediate and comprehensive response to Zika. We need to treat this public health emergency like a public health emergency. Senator NELSON's amendment would ensure that the CDC has the money they need to support States in conducting surveillance, vector control, emergency communications, and research. It would ensure that the National Institutes of Health has the money to develop this vaccine, and it would ensure that USAID has the money they need to build up a global health response to Zika.