

The President's Weekly Address

August 27, 2016

Earlier this year, I got a letter from a South Carolina woman named Ashley, who was expecting her third child. She was, in her words, "extremely concerned" about the Zika virus, and what it might mean for other pregnant women like her.

I understand that concern. As a father, Ashley's letter has stuck with me, and it's why we've been so focused on the threat of the Zika virus. So today I just want to take a few minutes to let you know what we've been doing in response and to talk about what more we can all do.

Since late last year, when the most recent outbreak of Zika started popping up in other countries, Federal agencies like the Center for Disease Control and Prevention have been preparing for it to arrive in the U.S. In February, more than 6 months ago, I asked Congress for the emergency resources that public health experts say we need to combat Zika. That includes things like mosquito control, tracking the spread of the virus, accelerating new diagnostic tests and vaccines, and monitoring women and babies with the virus.

Republicans in Congress did not share Ashley's "extreme concern," nor that of other Americans expecting children. They said no. Instead, we were forced to use resources we need to keep fighting Ebola, cancer, and other diseases. We took that step because we have a responsibility to protect the American people. But that's not a sustainable solution. And Congress has been on a 7-week recess without doing anything to protect Americans from the Zika virus.

So my administration has done what we can on our own. Our primary focus has been protecting pregnant women and families planning to have children. For months now, the CDC has been working closely with officials in Florida and other States. NIH and other agencies have moved aggressively to develop a vaccine. And we're working with the private sector to develop more options to test for and prevent infection. For weeks, a CDC emergency response team has been on the ground in South Florida, working alongside the excellent public health officials there, folks who have a strong track record of responding aggressively to the mosquitoes that carry viruses like Zika. They know what they're doing.

Still, there's a lot more everybody can and should do. And that begins with some basic facts. Zika spreads mainly through the bite of a certain mosquito. Most infected people don't show any symptoms. But the disease can cause brain defects and other serious problems when pregnant women become infected. Even if you're not pregnant, you can play a role in protecting future generations. Because Zika can be spread through unprotected sex, it's not just women who need to be careful; men do too. That includes using condoms properly.

If you live in or travel to an area where Zika has been found, protect yourself against the mosquitoes that carry this disease. Use insect repellent, and keep using it for a few weeks, even after you come home. Wear long sleeves and long pants to make bites less likely. Stay in places with air conditioning and window screens. If you can, get rid of standing water where mosquitoes breed. And to learn more about how to keep your family safe, just visit CDC.gov.

But every day that Republican leaders in Congress wait to do their job, every day our experts have to wait to get the resources they need, and that has real-life consequences. It

means weaker mosquito control efforts, longer wait times to get accurate diagnostic results, delayed vaccines. It puts more Americans at risk.

One Republican Senator said that "there's no such thing as a Republican position on Zika or Democratic position on Zika, because these mosquitoes bite everyone." I agree. And we need more Republicans to act that way, because this is more important than politics. It's about young moms like Ashley. Today, her new baby Savannah is healthy and happy. And that's got to be priority number one.

That's why Republicans in Congress should treat Zika like the threat that it is and make this their first order of business when they come back to Washington after Labor Day. That means working in a bipartisan way to fully fund our Zika response. A fraction of the funding won't get the job done. You can't solve a fraction of a disease. Our experts know what they're doing. They just need the resources to do it.

So, to all Americans out there, make your voices heard. And you should know that as long as I'm President, we're going to keep doing everything we can to slow the spread of this virus and put our children's futures first. Thanks, everybody.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 11:10 a.m. on August 26 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on August 27. In the address, the President referred to Clinton, SC, resident Ashley Young, and her daughter Savannah; and Sen. Marco A. Rubio. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 26, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on August 27.

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