

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 9, 2016

The Speaker of the House of Representatives  
United States Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker,

Zika is now well established in the United States with cases of local transmission by mosquitoes being reported in multiple areas of Florida, as well as the U.S. territories. While babies die, pregnant women and communities suffer, adults worry about future long-term neurological risks from Zika, and U.S. service members and military bases are affected, Congress remains deadlocked in partisan politics.

Now is the time to lead and to show the American people that Congress will act to protect them. We strongly urge you to bring to the floor for a vote the bipartisan Senate-passed \$1.1 billion compromise bill to address Zika or the similar bipartisan bill (H.R. 5958) that was introduced in the House of Representatives yesterday. Doing so is the quickest way to ensure essential Zika funding is passed and signed into law by the president.

The longer we delay, the greater the financial toll and irreparable human harm from Zika. We have already seen 2,964 people infected with Zika in the continental U.S., including 671 pregnant women. If we count the U.S. territories, this number increases to 18,833 people infected, 1,751 of whom are pregnant women. It is unconscionable that Congress would deny critical funding to conduct vaccine research, provide technical support and laboratory materials to local and state departments of health, fund the study of potential Zika therapeutics, and prevent transmission of this devastating disease.

The time for partisan games is over.

The Senate showed leadership and bipartisanship by passing a \$1.1 billion Blunt-Murray compromise amendment (S. Amdt. 3900) to the FY17 MilCon-VA appropriations bill on May 19, 2016, by a vote of 68-30, including 23 Republicans voting to support the amendment. We were pleased that a conference committee met on June 15, 2016, to work in a bipartisan way to fight Zika. House Appropriations Chairman Hal Rogers said the following at that meeting: "With mosquito season upon us, these Zika dollars must go out the door now to help control the spread of this disease. In addition, funds are needed immediately to continue long-term efforts to stop the disease such as vaccine and treatment development and deployment."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/06/house-senate-zika-virus/487283/>

However, the final \$1.1 billion House Zika package (H.R. 2577) was anything but bipartisan. Instead, some House Republicans attached a number of highly-partisan provisions to the conference report. The result has been a measure that has failed to win Democratic support in both chambers, having failed to pass the Senate three times, largely along party lines.

The administration has had to reallocate funds from other public health threats like Ebola to the Zika public health threat due to Congressional inaction, but this funding will run out in September.<sup>2</sup>

Members of both parties are calling on Congress to pass legislation to address Zika, including these Republicans:

“As a senator representing a Gulf State that is at a high risk for Zika outbreak, and as a doctor who has worked in public health for nearly 30 years, I am highly aware of the importance of our response. It is time we stop playing politics with the well-being of American citizens and pass funding to combat Zika.”<sup>3</sup> –U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA)

U.S. Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL-27), Carlos Curbelo (R-FL-26), and Dennis Ross (R-FL-15) have all called for Congress to pass Zika funding.<sup>4</sup>

“Another stalemate, another party-line vote. Another failure to combat the Zika virus is unacceptable when Congress returns to Capitol Hill...Our medical researchers are the best in the world, but they cannot stop the spread of this virus or find a cure without resources. Progress has been made possible by reprogramming CDC funds, but that funding is only sufficient through September. Congress must make certain our experts have what they need to protect the health of mothers and children.”<sup>5</sup> –U.S. Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS)

“We’re going to get some additional funding here by the end of September...I promise.”<sup>6</sup> –U.S. Senator John Cornyn (R-TX)

Additionally, more than 50 health, public health, provider and other organizations wrote a letter to congressional leadership stating, “On behalf of the millions of Americans we represent, we urge Congress in the strongest possible terms to craft a Zika funding package that can be passed with broad support and signed by the President immediately.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.rollcall.com/news/policy/zika-funding-gone-end-september-hhs-says>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2016-08-12/congress-needs-to-compromise-on-zika-virus-and-public-health-legislation>

<sup>4</sup> Rachael Bade, “Worried Florida Republicans Push Ryan for Zika action,” POLITICO Pro, August 19, 2016

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.kansas.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/article97679467.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://m.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Senator-Cornyn-advocates-for-9193681.php>

<sup>7</sup> Letter sent via Jaimie Vickery, March of Dimes, to Speaker Ryan, Minority Leader Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Reid on September 6, 2016.

Despite these bipartisan calls for action, we are concerned about the lack of movement on a bipartisan Zika package over the long August recess. We need leadership, and we need to act quickly.

With the current funds for Zika expiring soon, we urge you to pass immediately the bipartisan Senate-passed \$1.1 billion Zika bill. Your constituents—the American people—are depending on you.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ  
U.S. Senator



BILL NELSON  
U.S. Senator



SHERROD BROWN  
U.S. Senator



EDWARD J. MARKEY  
U.S. Senator



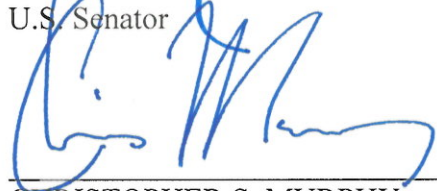
PATRICK LEAHY  
U.S. Senator



JOE MANCHIN III  
U.S. Senator



JEANNE SHAHEEN  
U.S. Senator




CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY  
U.S. Senator



RICHARD J. DURBIN  
U.S. Senator



BARBARA BOXER  
U.S. Senator



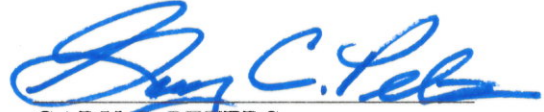
AL FRANKEN  
U.S. Senator



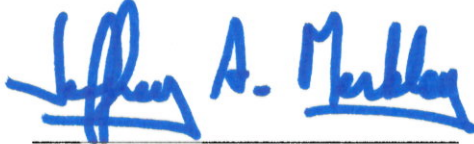
ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.  
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SHELDON WHITEHOUSE  
U.S. Senator



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JEFFREY A. MERKLEY  
U.S. Senator



ROBERT MENENDEZ  
U.S. Senator



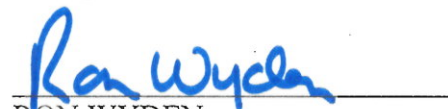
TAMMY BALDWIN  
U.S. Senator



ELIZABETH WARREN  
U.S. Senator



MAZIE K. HIRONO  
U.S. Senator



RON WYDEN  
U.S. Senator



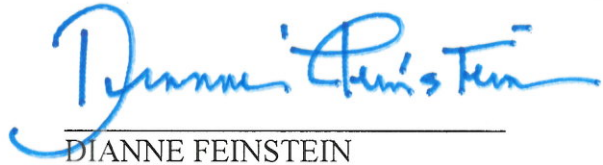
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
U.S. Senator



AMY KLOBUCHAR  
U.S. Senator



TOM CARPER  
U.S. Senator



DIANNE FEINSTEIN  
U.S. Senator



KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND  
U.S. Senator



JACK REED  
U.S. Senator



DEBBIE STABENOW  
U.S. Senator



BENJAMIN L. CARDIN  
U.S. Senator



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MICHAEL F. BENNET  
U.S. Senator