

Republicans Fail to Address Zika Virus

Seven months ago, President Obama requested \$1.9 billion in emergency funding to combat the spread of the Zika virus in the United States. Since then, despite a growing number of cases reported in the U.S. and its territories, Republicans have refused to take action to address the Zika virus.

In May, the Senate advanced the bipartisan Murray-Blunt Amendment to the MilCon-VA bill, providing \$1.1 billion in emergency funding to fight the Zika virus. That same month, House Republicans introduced legislation that provided less than a third of the funding requested by the Obama Administration to tackle the immediate and growing crisis. In June, House Republican leadership brought to the Floor a partisan Zika conference report with poison pill offsets that was not signed by a single Democrat serving on the conference committee. Instead of working with Democrats to fund a bipartisan response to the crisis, Republicans in Congress left for a seven-week recess without taking serious action.

As a result of Republicans' inaction, the Zika virus continues to infect Americans in the United States and its territories, with locally transmitted cases confirmed in Florida. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), as of August 31:

- 14,094 people have been infected with locally acquired mosquito-borne cases;
- 2,737 people have been infected as a result of travel to countries where the Zika virus is present;
- 1,595 pregnant women have been infected by the virus; and
- 17 babies have been born in US with birth defects related to the Zika virus.

On August 30, Dr. Thomas Frieden of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [warned](#) that the \$222 million in federal funds borrowed to fight the spread of the Zika virus would be depleted by September 30, leaving states without the means necessary to combat the growing public health crisis. Without action by Congress to pass emergency supplemental funding, there will soon be no money to fight the outbreak. Dr. Frieden stated:

"Basically, we are out of money and we need Congress to act." [NBC News, [8/30/16](#)]

Several Republicans in Congress have called on their party's leaders to respond to the Zika crisis by fully funding President Obama's request for \$1.9 billion in emergency funding, but serious action to fund the President's request has yet to be taken:

Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-FL): "The time to address this national health crisis is long overdue... Congress must put aside partisan differences and come together immediately to protect the public." [Morning Consult, [9/1/16](#)]

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL): "Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen asked Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) to convene an emergency session of Congress to pass a Zika bill immediately." [Politico, [8/19/16](#)]

Rep. Dennis Ross (R-FL): “I support the President’s funding request so we can efficiently fight against and prevent the dangerous effects of the Zika virus... **this is a matter of protecting and saving lives.**” [Tampa Bay Times, [5/11/16](#)]

Since Congress adjourned for the August district work period, editorial boards across the country have called on Republicans to stop their political posturing and act to address the Zika virus:

“Failure to pass emergency funding to fight the spread of this disease is a **major dereliction of duty by Congress.**” [Omaha World Herald, [8/27/16](#)]

“...Instead of acting, **Republican majorities in Congress have taken the emergency as another occasion to grandstand and squabble.**... Congress ought to be embarrassed for starving the Zika budget in a purely political tiff.” [Washington Post, [8/23/16](#)]

“...The **U.S. Congress should make Zika funding its priority** next month, following its recess. Investments in research, including a vaccine that will take at least two years to develop, must be prioritized along with widespread public-education campaigns aimed at preventing the spread of Zika.” [Sarasota Herald Tribune, [8/24/16](#)]

“Last winter the **Obama administration requested \$1.9 billion to fight Zika. It got nothing.**... There had better be more urgency — and a more serious effort by Republicans — to fight Zika.” [Chicago Sun Times, [7/24/16](#)]

“**Congress has dithered** over the funding level, attached unrelated, politically charged riders, and engaged in partisan finger-pointing. This impasse, which threatens to continue into Congress’ recess for the fall campaign, is totally irresponsible... The minute Congress returns after Labor Day, **it should pass a clean, nonpartisan bill providing \$1.9 billion for Zika — before the crisis gets even worse.**” [Gainesville Sun, [8/5/16](#)]

“Congress needs to quit playing around with people’s lives **and send money to the CDC for Zika research** and the state response.” [Seattle Times, [8/5/16](#)]

“Congress has yet to pass a measure to fight Zika. This should **be Job No. 1 when lawmakers reconvene** next week.” [Columbus Dispatch, [8/31/16](#)]

“Congress had its first chance to respond in February, when Obama requested \$1.9 billion to fight the spread of the virus... **Continuing to ignore a serious public health crisis is exponentially more costly.**” [Tampa Bay Times, [8/5/16](#)]

As Congress returns from the August district work period, Republicans must work with Democrats to immediately, and adequately, fund a response to Zika virus. Congressional inaction is putting lives at risk, and we must act without further delay to address the growing public health crisis.