



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 114th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 162

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2016

No. 22

Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Precious Lord, always faithful and always true, use our lawmakers today as ambassadors of reconciliation and renewal. Open their minds to the counsels of Your eternal wisdom as You fill them with Your peace. Lord, increase their hunger and thirst for right living and lead them nearer to You. As they seek to be agents of Your peace, help them to honor You both in spirit and deeds. Inspire them to reach decisions based on truth, wisdom, compassion, and fairness for all.

Watch over, O God, and care for the men and women in our military, surrounding them with the shield of Your protection and favor.

We pray in Your mighty Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. CAPITO). The Democratic leader is recognized.

ZIKA VIRUS

Mr. REID. Madam President, I was encouraged this morning to hear that President Obama is aggressively responding to the Zika virus. Anyone who has heard the news about this ter-

rible mosquito bite over the last several weeks has heard about the spread of Zika. This virus is primarily spread by mosquitoes in Central America, South America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific islands.

Zika has been linked to birth defects in children, as well as other health problems. To date, there have been no confirmed cases of Americans getting Zika from mosquitoes in the continental United States, but we must not lower our guard. Instead, we must take action.

The President has taken action, and I appreciate that very much. That is why last week the entire Senate Democratic caucus sent a letter to President Obama urging quick action responding to the Zika virus. To his credit, that is exactly what President Obama has done. Today the President announced that he is asking Congress for \$1.8 billion to combat the outbreak. This funding will, among other things, further research of the virus and a potential vaccine; improve mosquito control methods here at home; create rapid-response teams in the United States; enhance treatment for those who are infected; help deploy prevention and education strategies to key populations, including pregnant women and their partners; support international aid activities in affected areas; and train health care workers in affected countries.

It is critical that we approve the funds now, immediately, and give our government the resources it needs to fight the virus. We also need to make sure our Nation's response to the virus includes increasing access to contraceptives for women in Zika-affected regions—for those who choose to use them.

We in the Congress must follow President Obama's direction and aggressively combat Zika. So I call on my colleagues to support this important funding.

I have been called to the White House tomorrow afternoon at the same time

the Republican leader has called a briefing on the Zika virus. I am going to send staff to that meeting. I can't be at the White House and that briefing at the same time, but I will get a thorough, detailed account of what takes place at that briefing. I appreciate Senator McCONNELL arranging that meeting, and I apologize for not being able to be there.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. REID. Madam President, last week marked the end of an open enrollment for the health exchanges created by the Affordable Care Act. The numbers are in, and once again millions of Americans signed up for quality health care. Normally—it is normal now, and each year it keeps going up—nationally almost 13 million Americans selected their plans through health insurance marketplaces. In Nevada, almost 90,000 people enrolled in Nevada's health exchange. That represents a 20-percent increase over 2015 enrollment numbers.

These numbers are further evidence that the Affordable Care Act—ObamaCare—is working. The law is helping Americans get access to quality health care, many for the first time in their entire lives. That is why it is particularly frustrating to watch Republicans continue banging their heads when it comes to ObamaCare. Last Tuesday—Groundhog Day, fittingly—House Republicans voted for the 63rd time to repeal or undermine the Affordable Care Act. That is 63 times House Republicans have ignored all the evidence that proves the Affordable Care Act is helping their constituents.

It is not just House Republicans; it seems as if every day my friend the Republican leader comes to the floor and rails against ObamaCare. He has led Senate Republicans in voting to repeal or defund the Affordable Care Act 17 different times. Yet more than 10 percent of the Republican leader's own constituents are benefiting from the

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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