

For 7½ years, Senate Republicans have blocked anything President Obama has proposed, including now a new Supreme Court Justice. Now, by preventing the Court from having nine Justices, Republicans are bringing gridlock in the legislative branch to the judicial branch. Previously, for the whole time Obama has been President, they were blocking what has gone on in the legislative branch. They have now broadened that to deadlock the Supreme Court. This is not acceptable. Justice delayed, we have heard, is justice denied, and that is certainly true. By bringing the Court to a standstill, Republicans are denying the justice all Americans deserve.

There is still time for my Republican colleagues to do the right thing—fill the Supreme Court vacancy—but to do that they must begin to process Garland's nomination. His questionnaire is here. It is filled out. It is done. I wonder how many Republicans have even looked at it. Has there been any? Shouldn't there be a hearing? The reason Republicans don't want a hearing is they know that a hearing, public in nature, would show the American people and the world what a good man Merrick Garland is, what a good lawyer he was, and what a good judge he has been, but they have to start processing this. Republicans seem to be refusing anything dealing with him. I think they should attend the meeting today on the Garland nomination organized by Judiciary Committee Democrats, calling on the finest people we can find to tell us what is going on in the judiciary.

My friend the Republican leader brings up Abner Mikva. Abner Mikva hasn't served in Congress in 40 years. He was a lawyer for President Clinton. We have been through quite a bit since then, but he has nothing else to refer to so he talks about Abner Mikva, who was going to come, who is not going to come. Do you think part of it can be he is more than 90 years old? Republicans should attend today's hearing.

The Judiciary chair, Senator GRASSLEY, should proceed with committee hearings. The American people deserve a full and transparent accounting of Merrick Garland's record and qualifications. After a hearing, of course we should move his nomination for a vote on the Senate floor. Every day that passes without confirmation, without a ninth Justice to serve on the Supreme Court, is another lost day for the Federal judiciary and American justice. Republicans claim their obstruction of President Obama's Supreme Court nominee is to give the people a voice, but their actions are doing just the opposite. Republicans are denying the American people the justice they deserve.

For example, take the cases they referred back to the lower courts. They have already done it and litigants have waited years to get before the Supreme Court. Now, in effect, they have to start over. Republicans are denying the

American people the justice they deserve—the justice we thought was guaranteed by the Constitution. So instead of silencing the Supreme Court and gridlocking our entire judicial system, Republicans should give the Court the ninth Justice it desperately needs.

Focus has been on the Supreme Court, and it should be, but Republicans are doing the same thing with trial court judges. The Federal judiciary has many districts that have declared judicial emergencies. They don't have enough judges to do their work. Republicans are in a state of—the only thing they know to do very well is to block things. We, the American people, know we need to do something about the judiciary. Republicans should do their job and give Merrick Garland a hearing and a vote.

Mr. President, my friend from South Dakota is here. I would ask the Chair, prior to the Senator being recognized, to tell us what the schedule is for today.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein, with the majority controlling the first half and the Democrats controlling the second half.

The Senator from South Dakota.

ZIKA VIRUS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I would like to take a moment to discuss Congress's efforts to combat the Zika virus. Combating Zika is a public health priority, and it is important that this not be turned into a political issue. The administration and Congress need to work together to combat the virus by funding necessary programs, such as mosquito eradication efforts, before the threat escalates further. Congress has already acted to provide incentives for manufacturers to develop new medicines to prevent or to treat Zika. We have also approved the use of nearly \$600 million to initiate a Zika response effort, including research into vaccines and treatments and improving mosquito control, because the best way to deal with any illness is to stop people from getting sick in the first place. We need to make controlling mosquitos a priority.

I introduced a measure to remove burdensome permitting restrictions on mosquito control efforts so we can immediately free up additional resources to keep the mosquito population in check. A vaccine to prevent the Zika virus isn't likely to be available until next year, at the earliest, which means

our primary weapon in combating Zika right now is controlling mosquitoes so people don't get infected. For that reason, we need to prioritize mosquito control programs and provide immediate regulatory relief.

Aggressive mosquito abatement is the most timely step we can take to keep women and children safe. I am pleased my approach was included in the Cornyn amendment the Senate considered yesterday. I only wish it had prevailed. I am hopeful we can still work with both sides of the aisle to get timely regulatory relief for all impacted industries in the final Zika response package. I believe it is important that if we are going to beat this thing, we do it by eradicating mosquitoes and making it possible for those who are responsible and tasked with that responsibility to be able to do that.

OBAMACARE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, back when the President and Senate Democrats were lobbying for passage of ObamaCare, they made a number of promises. The one thing they promised over and over again was that the President's health care plan would lower costs.

"Bringing down costs of health insurance and making it more affordable is job one for this health care reform." That is a quote that was made by the then-Democratic majority whip on the floor in December of 2009. Families will save on their premiums, President Obama pledged that same month. The Affordable Care Act, Democrats made clear, was the solution to the health insurance challenges facing American families. Well, 6 years down the road it is clear the Affordable Care Act was no solution at all.

The President promised that health care reform would reduce premiums by \$2,500 for the average family. Instead, the average family premium for employer-sponsored health insurance rose by \$4,170 between 2009 and 2015. Forty-five percent of Americans report that their health insurance premium has increased over the past 2 years, and 35 percent report that their copays and deductibles have increased over the same period. The President promised that Americans who liked their insurance plan could keep it. Instead, the President's health care law pushed more than 4.7 million Americans off their health care plans.

Then there is the centerpiece of the President's health care law, the exchanges. The exchanges were supposed to offer accessible, affordable health care to those who had struggled to get insurance, but a lot of Americans are finding out the health care offered on the exchanges is neither affordable nor accessible. Last year countless consumers around the country faced massive rate hikes on their exchange plans. One constituent wrote to tell me that her plan would cost \$1,600 a month for