

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

ZIKA VIRUS FUNDING

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I want to come to the floor to say that after a lot of work, the Senate has finally passed funding to take on Zika—a cause I have been talking about since April of this year. I want to say, in full credit to the Senate, that this is actually a very similar proposal that the Senate proposed in May, and it is now the one before us. I am sad that it took so long to get to this point, but at least we are here now.

As I said before, it is better late than never. To the people of my home State of Florida, to the people of the island of Puerto Rico, who have been disproportionately impacted by the outbreak of Zika in the United States, I want to say that despite a long wait, help is finally on the way. Help is finally on the way in the form of a \$1.1 billion anti-Zika package which is part of this larger law—this larger bill that passed today to keep the government open beyond September 30.

Included in the law that passed today is \$15 million that is specifically targeted for States with local transmissions. The only State so far that has had local transmissions is my home State of Florida. Today, \$15 million is, hopefully, on its way to Florida if we can get this done in the House to help with the fight against Zika.

It also includes \$60 million, specifically for territories like Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico has the highest number of infected American citizens with Zika. Today is good news for Puerto Rico.

This took far too long, but I am glad we are finally here. This anti-Zika package rightfully prioritizes Americans in Florida and in Puerto Rico, and I am encouraged that after months of working on this, my calls for action have finally been answered and real assistance from the Federal Government is finally on its way.

I have to reiterate that it is shameful that it took so long and that this public health crisis was made worse by people playing political games in Washington, DC.

If anyone is in doubt about whether that is partisan, I think the games have come from both side of the aisle. It took far too long for colleagues in my own party to understand the gravity and severity of this outbreak, and, sad to say, the Democratic minority in the Senate used this as a political tool for much of the month of August and even as late as yesterday. I am glad that these critical resources are now moving forward so that we can help thousands of Americans suffering from this virus and so that we can step up our mosquito eradication efforts and ultimately so that we can develop a vaccine that eradicates Zika for good.

While the funding is on its way, the problem still continues. In the mainland of the United States, there are

now 3,358 cases of Zika. In U.S. territories, primarily the island of Puerto Rico, there are now close to 20,000 cases. In my home State of Florida, there are now 904 cases—109 of them were locally transmitted, meaning they were not acquired abroad. They were acquired in the State. There are 91 pregnant women in the State of Florida infected by Zika.

While Congress did nothing and while the President refused to fully spend the spending authority it had available to him for weeks, this crisis continued to grow. The health impact of it is well understood, but the economic impact has not been discussed nearly enough.

We know for a fact that there are bookings that are down in Miami Beach. That is not just an inconvenience. My parents worked in the hotel industry. That is how they raised our family—my father in particular. If hotels are suffering because people are canceling trips because they are afraid of Zika, it is the people that work at those hotels who are most immediately impacted.

We have seen restaurants and small businesses associated with visitors report the same thing. Anecdotally, I have had people come up to me over the last month and say: Is it safe to travel to Florida? Is it safe to go down there?

The answer is that it is. It is safe to come to Florida, but that doesn't mean we don't have a Zika problem. It doesn't mean it doesn't need to be addressed. Local communities in the State of Florida and the island of Puerto Rico—the territory, the Commonwealth—had to step forward and fund it on their own until now.

While it is good news that we have finally passed Zika funding in the Senate, it now has to go to the House. I would urge my colleagues in the House to pass this quickly—not just to keep the government open but to finally fund the fight against Zika and to ensure that the research that is going into the development of vaccine is not slowed down.

There are other things we can do to address this. For example, I have proposed opening up the Small Business Administration loan program that is available for businesses that suffer the effects of natural disasters to also be able so that businesses may avail themselves of these loans if they are suffering because of a health epidemic. The SBA has indicated that they are open to that change, and I hope that is something we look at when we return in November.

Suffice it to say that I want to close out here today by telling the people of Florida that, after a wait that took far too long, after months of hard work and focus and bipartisan cooperation, help is finally on the way. Help is finally on the way in the form of \$1.1 billion, including \$15 million for Florida and \$60 million for the territory of Puerto Rico.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TAX AND HEALTH CARE POLICY

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, we are currently in the middle of an election year. Like most Americans, I look forward to the end of the political campaign season and the end of the rhetoric, spin, and constant battle to win the latest news cycle.

Don't get me wrong, I am not saying this election is meaningless. In fact, there is quite a bit at stake this coming November. And the American people have some clear choices to make.

Unfortunately, some of the more complex and consequential policy matters are the ones that most frequently end up in the middle of the political echo chamber, surrounded by hyperbolic rhetoric, empty promises, and overly simplistic answers to some very difficult questions.

This includes, among many other areas, tax and health care policy, both of which fall largely under the jurisdiction of the Senate Finance Committee, which I chair.

Let me be clear: I understand why both tax and health care policy are fertile grounds for political gamesmanship.

When we are talking about the Tax Code or our health care system, we are talking about issues that impact the lives and livelihoods of individuals, families, and businesses throughout our country. As a result, people are particularly sensitive to the notion that one party or candidate might raise their taxes or enact policies that will increase—or decrease—their health care costs.

Politicians are usually more than willing to promise that, if elected, they will make sure that the people in category X will “finally pay their fair share in taxes,” while simultaneously promising that the intended audience will not see their taxes go up.

Similarly, politicians are quite fond of telling people that their policies will bring down their health care costs—or even eliminate them altogether—while promising that the people in category X will be the ones to pay for it.

I suppose the factor that most often separates these politicians from one another is whom they include in category X, whom they choose to slap with an unfavorable label so that their audience has no problem raising their taxes or making them foot the cost of an expanded health care system.

This type of rhetoric—defining enemies and promising to make them pay—may make for good politics, but it almost never results in favorable conditions for meaningful reforms.