

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 10, 2016

The Honorable Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Secretary Sylvia Burwell,

We write in light of the Zika virus' latest alarming yet predictable development. As you are aware, there are now more than 15 locally transmitted cases of the Zika virus in Florida. We appreciate the dedication of you and your agency in working hard to take all steps possible to combat this disease and protect our constituents.

In your letter to House and Senate Appropriators earlier this month, we were extremely concerned to read that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Biomedical Advanced Research Development Authority (BARDA) will exhaust the resources that they have received through repurposed Ebola funds by the end of August and that without additional resources their efforts to develop a Zika vaccine will be delayed.

As you know well, President Obama sent a letter to Speaker Ryan on February 22, 2016, requesting \$1.9 billion in emergency funding to respond to the Zika virus. We support this request and support legislation to provide these necessary resources. Unfortunately, each attempt to fund the Administration's request has been blocked by the Republican majority.

Before Congress recessed, we repeatedly called on Republican leadership to take meaningful action to appropriate funds to combat Zika. In mid-July, we called on leadership to keep Congress in session until we found an appropriate response. Even now, when the Senate has the opportunity to use a pro forma session during recess to pass Zika funding without having to reconvene the Senate body, Republican leadership still refuses to act. It is unconscionable that Congress would do anything to delay protecting the American people, in particular pregnant women.

In light of these circumstances, we urge you to do what you can as Secretary to ensure that there is a sustainable funding stream for the development of a Zika vaccine, which is desperately needed to stop the spread of the virus. Additionally, it would help ensure that children are not born with Zika-related microcephaly or other birth defects.

We recognize that any options that involve moving resources from other parts of your budget require raiding other vital work that is being done at your Department. And, for this reason, we would only recommend this type of extraordinary step if there were no other choice. Unfortunately, the Republican Congress has left you no other options.


Sincerely,


DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ
Member of Congress


THEODORE E. DEUTCH
Member of Congress


ALCEE HASTINGS
Member of Congress


GWEN GRAMAM
Member of Congress


BILL NELSON
United States Senator


FREDERICA WILSON
Member of Congress


PATRICK MURPHY
Member of Congress


ALAN GRAYSON
Member of Congress