

Senate blocks Zika funding for third time

September 7 2016

US Senate Democrats blocked a \$1.1 billion bill to combat the Zika virus for a third time Tuesday after Republicans inserted provisions that would end funding for a major abortion provider.

Returning from a seven-week break to the measure with which the last Senate session ended, Democrats voted unanimously to stop the legislation from moving forward and ending debate, opposing measures that would have blocked funding for reproductive health group Planned Parenthood and allowed Confederate flags to fly at military cemeteries.

The vote, which required 60 votes to pass in the Republican-controlled chamber, failed 52 to 46.

Democratic Senator Charles Schumer accused Republicans of loading the [bill](#) with "poison pill riders to assuage the hard right."

"Rather than continuing to work with Democrats, Republicans decided to appease a group so extreme that they didn't even want Zika funding to begin with," he said in a statement.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell accused Democrats of partisanship.

"It's hard to explain why, despite their own calls for funding, Senate Democrats decided to block a bill that would keep pregnant women and babies safer from Zika," he said on the Senate floor before reintroducing the previously blocked measure.

The funding is now expected to be included in a bipartisan stopgap spending bill later this month.

Zika is spread by mosquitoes and sexual contact. A study out Tuesday said the virus may live in eyes and spread through tears.

Zika causes only mild symptoms for most people. But in [pregnant women](#), it can cause microcephaly, a deformation in which babies are born with abnormally small brains and heads.

The disease has also been linked to a potentially fatal disorder known as Guillain-Barre syndrome, which can lead to nervous system problems such as weakness and paralysis.

President Barack Obama urged Congress to fund the fight against Zika last month after health officials expressed deepening worry about the spread of the virus with the first reports of local transmissions in Florida.

In the absence of a [funding](#) bill, the White House has been redirecting funds earmarked to fight Ebola, cancer and other diseases.

"That's not a sustainable solution," Obama said. The delay for more funds "puts more Americans at risk."

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Citation: Senate blocks Zika funding for third time (2016, September 7) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-09-senate-blocks-zika-funding.html>

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