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ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE: ZIKA POLITICS

Ross: On Zika, put people over politics



In this frame grab from video provided by C-SPAN, Rep. David Jolly, R-Fla. holds a container of mosquitoes while speaking of the House floor on Sept. 7, 2016.

C-SPAN via AP

By Dennis Ross

Guest columnist (*The Ledger*: www.TheLedger.com) aka: “The Lakeland Ledger,” Lakeland, Fla.

Published: Monday, September 12, 2016 at 12:01 a.m.

Last Modified: Saturday, September 10, 2016 at 1:09 p.m. [editorial note: 818 words raw. ~GWW//]

Last week, the Senate again blocked \$1.1 billion in desperately needed funding to help research, prevent, and fight the spread of the Zika virus — all for political reasons.

The last time I checked, members of Congress are sent to Washington with the duty to protect the American people, not play political games with their lives. Unfortunately, when it comes to passing Zika funding legislation, the lives of those my colleagues and I represent in Florida are being used as bargaining chips for political gain.

The thousands of people throughout our country infected with and threatened by this deadly virus, including pregnant women and babies, do not care about political agendas. They care about the safety of themselves and their children. We have a responsibility to protect these people from this dangerous virus; however, Congress has ignored their pleas. That is why I have consistently called on my colleagues in both chambers to put politics aside, come together and immediately pass a funding measure that provides the necessary resources to eradicate the Zika virus.

This clash over funding has gone on way too long. The gravity of Zika's harmful effects hit Florida more than seven months ago when the Florida Surgeon General declared a public health emergency in response to several confirmed travel-related cases of Zika. Shortly thereafter, President Barack Obama asked Congress for \$1.9 billion in funding to combat the virus. I supported, and still support, the president's request because this issue is solely about saving lives, and protecting children and pregnant women, not anyone's political affiliation.

In May, the House and Senate passed separate Zika funding measures that were resolved in a conference committee, resulting in the agreed upon \$1.1 billion funding legislation that is at issue today. I supported and helped pass this critical funding bill in June so we could swiftly provide assistance and protection to Floridians and all Americans. It is now September, and the Senate still refuses to pass this bill.

Since June, I have called on my colleagues numerous times, in both chambers and on both sides of the aisle, to unite and pass this bill for the sake of the people we represent. I sent a letter to House and Senate Leadership last month, calling for the bill's immediate consideration and passage, as well as a letter to the Center for Disease Control, requesting reconsideration of Zika funding allocations that accurately represent Florida's imminent funding need and greater infection risk compared to the rest of the U.S.

I also recently joined a bipartisan group of Florida congressional members in requesting House and Senate Leadership to end this stalemate and put forth a clean funding package so we can start fighting the Zika virus and stop fighting each other. It is inexcusable that the lives of Floridians are being used as collateral for unrelated measures.

To date, Florida alone has confirmed more than 600 cases of Zika, including infants born with Zika-related microcephaly and more than 80 pregnant women. Florida is also the only state to have locally-transmitted cases of Zika, now at 40 and increasing. These locally-transmitted cases are quickly spreading throughout the state and have even been confirmed right in the backyard of my congressional district in the Tampa Bay Region.

Pregnant women are terrified to step outside their homes in fear that mosquitos carrying the virus will infect them and cause grave harm to their babies, and parents have no idea what the long-term effects are on their children who become infected while simply playing outside. We cannot let people keep suffering this way.

Because Congress has provided no funding relief, Gov. Rick Scott has had to use his emergency executive authority to allocate a minimal \$26.2 million in state money for Zika preparedness, prevention and response. However, this limited funding is quickly running out due to the rapid increase in infections.

Zika is not just a threat to Florida. It is a threat to the entire nation. There are more than 16,000 confirmed Zika cases in the U.S., and health advisory signs are posted throughout U.S. airports, warning travelers to protect themselves from Zika. How are we supposed to prevent this type of medical threat and epidemic when those who were elected to protect our people from harm refuse to do so?

The babies, mothers and fathers, Floridians and all Americans affected by Zika do not care that I am a Republican or that a colleague of mine is a Democrat, and neither do I. They just urgently

need our help, and we were sent to Washington to provide it. We must work together, stop pulling political stunts, and put first the needs of those suffering from this virus, and those who face potential infection.

Let's pass a clean funding bill to provide the essential \$1.1 billion needed to combat and eradicate the Zika virus in Florida and across our country, and let's get it done now.

U.S. Rep. Dennis Ross, a Lakeland Republican, represents Florida's 15th Congressional District.

5 Comments

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Andy Crossfield Rank 0

Dear Mr Ross, I am pleased to hear you are in favor of passing a clean bill to fund the fight on Zika infections. I know from experience just how hard it is to get the ear of those with opposing agendas.

I wish you success in removing the riders that eliminate funding for Planned Parenthood, and the one that permits flying the Confederate battle flag in National Cemeteries.

They should never have been allowed to politicize such a seriously needed bill.

56 minutes ago (edited recently)

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Reply Share

Gordon Wayne Watts Rank 0

(PART 1 of 3)

Dennis, apparently, you got my message (when I phoned to your office this past Thursday, 9-8-16 or Friday 9-9-16, as I recall), and you granted my request: You made it clear (in your Mon.9-12-16 guest column, here) that you are against political games: I told your communications director (whose name I will leave anonymous out of respect) that I appreciated your stance, but that you did not express yourself well, and left your liberal and Democratic constituents confused and concerned. - You heard my complaint, and you acted – good job!! Anyhow:

RE: ["I also recently joined a bipartisan group of Florida congressional members in requesting House and Senate Leadership to end this stalemate and put forth a clean funding package so we can start fighting the Zika virus and stop fighting each other. It is inexcusable that the lives of Floridians are being used as collateral for unrelated measures...Let's pass a clean funding bill to provide the essential \$1.1 billion needed to combat and eradicate the Zika virus in Florida and across our country, and let's get it done now."]

Even though I am a far-right (pro-life, pro-marriage, fiscal conservative, pro-gun, Constitutionalist) Conservative (even more to the right than you), would would LOVE to defund

those baby-killers are Planned Parenthood, I agree with local famous Democratic leader, Andy Crossfield, in his above comment: I believe that Congress (particularly Republicans, but also Democrats) should STOP insisting that 'riders' (either increasing OR decreasing Planned Parenthood funding) NOT be included.

I, too, call for a clean bill, and applaud you for standing up to the GOP and telling them to stop playing games! **(You've almost got my vote, but pay close attention if you DO want to get my vote.)**

see pt.2

(PART 2 of 4)

Again – while this PRIVATE planned parenthood group has NO right to ask for ANY federal or state funding from TAXPAYERS (especially to kill innocent unborn children, knowing that abortion kills minorities and the poor at a much higher per-capita percentage than the general population), – to reiterate: The Congress should NOT (I repeat: Should NOT) entertain bills that have “off-topic” stuff in them, like this. (And, any Democrats who would wish to INCREASE funding with a rider in this ZIKA bill would, if they exists, be EQUALLY guilty of “playing politics,” and not representing the people.)

In like manner, I applaud both Dr. R. Bruce Anderson and Mr. Crossfield, known liberals, for saying nice things about you in spite of their liberal views.

I will meet them half-way, and say something CRITICAL about you, in spite of the fact that you and I are similarly Conservative – but I will try to be polite, OK?

As I said in both my EDITORIAL:

<http://GordonWatts.com/BraveRepublicanBreaksRanksWithGOP-HigheEd.html>

or:

<http://GordonWayneWatts.com/BraveRepublicanBreaksRanksWithGOP-HigheEd.html>

* "Republican Congressman breaks with party, admits college loans deserve bankruptcy," By Gordon Wayne Watts, *The Register*, Published: Wednesday, April 13, 2016 at 12:34 p.m.

you are a man of integrity, and “do the right thing” when no one's looking” in MANY areas.

(Continued to part 3 of 3 - see below)

(Part 3 of 4)

(sorry about "part 1 of 3" header - I couldn't edit it when it became apparent there would be 4 parts)

HOWEVER as I've said in both my editorial (above) and my recent guest column (below)

<http://www.theledger.com/article/20160804/COLUMNISTS03/160809884/1382/edit?p=all&tc=pgall>

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* "A Polk Perspective: Fix our bankrupt policy on student debt," By Gordon Wayne Watts, Guest columnist, *The Ledger*, August 04, 2016

...as I was saying: As I've said repeatedly, you have FAILED to act on our shared fiscal conservative beliefs, namely to restore bankruptcy for college loans (a conservative Free Market check against predatory lending, e.g., part of a "cure," other parts being Truth in Lending, Statutes of Limitations, &N other standard consumer protections), and you have also FAILED to act on the "prevention" measure on which we both agree, namely removal of tax dollars from making or guaranteeing college loans in the first place, since, as the "Bill Bennett Hypothesis" is quite clear: It was these subsidies in the first place that tempted colleges & universities to PRICE GOUGE students in the first place, knowing students had "deep pockets" for loans.

Conclusion: Jim Lange, while not as 'Conservative' as I'd like on key issues, is, nonetheless, VERY Conservative, AND a dedicated person, with excellent listening (and speaking) skills, and a person of honour and integrity, and please realise that he has promised to support H.R.449, the bankruptcy bill in question, which will be a "first step" to reversal of this loan system, backed by taxpayer dollars.

(see part 4 of 4)

(Part 4 of 4 of my reply to your guest column, Congressman Ross) --

Please know, understand, and realise that if you don't represent me on the 2 bills about which we both agree (see above and my editorials), I WILL vote against you and FOR Lange. Remember, Dennis: We already know that College Debt, about 1.5 TRILLION dollars, has for the first time EVER in America's history, surpassed Credit Card Debt, and is a SIZABLE chunk (almost ten percent) of total Nat'l Debt. THEREFORE – in CONCLUSION: Please also rest assured that my prediction stands: If we do not remove tax dollars from college loans (by enacting the 2 bills discussed in my editorials), the U.S. Dollar WILL crash, and we will become like Cyprus Greece: This is a debt that we can NOT continue to sustain! And, while Revelation 6:6 WILL (eventually) come true, insofar as it WILL take a day's wages to pay for a day's food (see a version other than the KJV for plain English, here), I do NOT want it to happen in MY lifetime, but it WILL likely happen if you do not take measures to prevent it, as we've discussed.

I do not make this prediction lightly: You may verify my figures, but, you must keep your word to support those measures you say you support if you wish to retain our trust.

Your friend (and constituent), Gordon Wayne Watts in Lakeland, Fla., (between Tampa & Orlando) ///< less

4 minutes remaining to edit or remove this post.

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