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WASHINGTON UPDATE

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SENATOR RUBIO CALLS ON HIS CONGRESSIONAL COLLEAGUES TO RETURN TO CAPITOL HILL TO VOTE ON ZIKA FUNDING

Florida Senator Marco Rubio is calling on his fellow lawmakers to return to Washington, DC to vote on Zika funding. With the exception of intermittent pro forma sessions, however, Congress is in recess until September 6. In light of the spread of the Zika virus in the Miami, Florida area, Senator Rubio is demanding that Congress pass either the House or Senate Zika funding bills which both authorize \$1.1 billion. The Senate's bipartisan funding request is not paid for – there are no offsets – which is highly problematic for House GOP members. The House version, on the other hand, includes funding cuts to Planned Parenthood and Obamacare – political non-starters for Senate Democrats and President Obama. While the Zika outbreak in Southern Florida is likely to get worse in the next month, House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell are not expected to call members back to Capitol Hill until after Labor Day.

PRESIDENT OBAMA SIGNS GENETICALLY MODIFIED LABELING BILL

Last Friday, President Obama signed a bill mandating companies to label products containing genetically modified ingredients. This comes in the wake of stricter labeling regulations enacted in Vermont, which will now be invalidated because of the new national standard. The federal labeling law will create uniformity for the food industry across the country, but has upset many Vermont voters who feel the law is too weak. The national law would provide three labeling options to companies: a text label, a symbol, or an electronic code which can only be deciphered by smartphones, whereas the Vermont law only allows text labels.

THE SENATE UP FOR GRABS

This upcoming election will determine which political party controls the Senate next year. Right now the Senate is comprised of 54 Republicans, 44 Democrats and two Independents who caucus with the Democrats. If Hillary Rodham Clinton wins the White House, Democrats will need a net gain of four seats in order to take control of the upper chamber. If Donald J. Trump wins in November, Democrats will need a net gain of five seats to take control of the Senate.

In this election cycle, the GOP must defend more than twice the number of Senate seats than the Democrats. Illinois Republican Senator Mark Kirk is reported to be the most vulnerable senator up for reelection. Representative Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), a disabled Iraq war veteran, is vying for this seat and is currently leading in the race. In Wisconsin, GOP Senator Ron Johnson is running for his political life against former Senator Russ Feingold, whom he beat in 2010 in a Republican election wave. If polls at this early stage carry any weight, Senator Johnson's campaign is against the ropes. New Hampshire Republican Senator Kelly Ayotte is in a tough reelection fight as well but may be better positioned to win reelection than some of her GOP colleagues. Ohio Senator Rob Portman, like Senator Kelly Ayotte, is also in a tough reelection fight. Both Senators Portman and Ayotte are banking on their work to secure funding to fight opioid abuse in their respective states to help them return to Congress. Arizona Senator John McCain is once again locked in a close reelection match. Senator McCain's political fate may hinge on whether Arizona ends up in the Trump or Clinton column on November 8. Senators Roy Blunt (R-MO), Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Richard Burr (R-NC) are all running in battleground states and are fighting aggressively to keep their seats. On the Democratic side, Senator Harry Reid's retirement puts the state of Nevada in play and may represent one of the best shots for a Republican take away.

With fewer than 100 days before Election Day, the fate of the Senate is clearly in play. On the other hand, Republican control of the House is not perceived to be in jeopardy. Republicans control 247 House seats. House Democrats would have to win a net gain of 30 seats to reach the magic number of 218 and control of the House chamber.

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