

For anyone who is watching this debate today, I encourage you to share this information about Bob Levinson, to tweet about Bob Levinson, to use the hashtag #whataboutbob.

For those in south Florida, I encourage you to come to support the Levinson family this Saturday in Coral Springs. We must keep talking about Bob. We must raise the level of awareness about Bob's case.

Our government and the government of our friends and allies must continue to work tirelessly to find Bob and to bring him home. The newly elected Parliament in Iran must know that we will never rest until Bob is home.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), who is the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairwoman of the Subcommittee on The Middle East and North Africa and chairwoman emeritus of the full committee, ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, for her leadership on this issue. I also thank TED DEUTCH, who authored this very, very important resolution. I also thank TOM RICE and ELIOT ENGEL for quickly bringing this legislation to the floor so that Members can vote on it in anticipation of the ninth anniversary of Bob Levinson's being held by the Iranians.

Almost 9 years ago, the Levinson family wrote, in part, on helpboblevinson.com. I quote them, in part. They said:

"If you pray for Bob, we thank you. If you frequently follow the news stories and blogs about Bob's situation, we thank you. If you have spread the word about his story and continue to do so, we thank you. We thank you all from the bottom of our hearts. Please continue to pray for Bob. We would love to have him home for Father's Day."

That was May 25, 2007. That, Mr. Speaker, was almost 9 years ago.

In a letter to Dad, also in May of 2007, Bob Levinson's children wrote:

"Dad . . . your seven children love and miss you very much. We are writing you this letter in the hopes that you will be able to read it wherever you are and know that you are in our thoughts and prayers every minute of every day."

The seven children continued:

"As you know, Mom is our rock. She has encouraged us to take each day one day at a time. While we are sure it will come as no surprise to you, she has amazing strength and has been an inspiration to all seven of us."

"We are all looking forward to your welcome home party. It cannot seem to come soon enough. We pray for you every day and look forward to having you come home to us safe and sound."

The seven Levinson children continued:

"Dad, you are the best dad anyone could ever ask for, and we love and miss you more than words can say. We are so proud of you, and the world now knows what we have known all along—what an intelligent, kind, and gentle man you are."

Again, that letter was from Bob's kids, and it was posted almost 9 years ago. Despite the emotional pain, Christine, his wife, and the entire family tenaciously press for Bob Levinson's freedom.

No one in American history, as Mr. DEUTCH pointed out a moment ago, has been held hostage longer than Bob Levinson. His ordeal and the agony and the heartbreak of his family must end.

When the reports that most of the Americans held by Iran were released but no freedom or even information about Levinson, the family was indeed crushed. In response, the family wrote: "We are happy for the other families. But once again, Bob Levinson has been left behind. We are devastated."

Devastated, yes, but they are absolutely committed to the return of their husband, father, grandfather, relative, and friend. Both the administration and Congress must not rest until this good, decent, and honorable American is returned to his family, friends, and a grateful Nation.

So I again thank Representative TED DEUTCH for sponsoring H. Res. 148 so all of us can express our deepest concern for Bob Levinson and press, as never before, for his return.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I thank Mr. SMITH for his powerful words and for sharing the very powerful and very moving words of Bob's family.

I ask my colleagues to think about the Levinson family as if they were your own and to use the opportunity that we have here today to send what is the most powerful message that this House can send—these days especially—and that is a message of unity.

Mr. Speaker, with this resolution today, we have an opportunity to recognize that, when a proud American has been missing from his family, has been missing from his community, he is missing from our family and he is missing from our community and our country. Our country is missing Bob Levinson. It is our country that will be made whole when Bob is returned.

I urge my colleagues in the strongest way that I can to stand together with me, with Bob's family, and on behalf of every person in this great country in moving this resolution forward and continuing to work tirelessly to bring Bob home.

I yield back the balance of my time. Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I thank my good friend, Mr. DEUTCH, for his eloquent proposals time and time again in our committee, on the House floor, and in every public gathering on behalf of Bob Levinson's fam-

ily. I am sure that the Levinson family feels a great sense of relief that they have such a tireless advocate by their side.

I hope that the administration continues to press the Iranian regime to do more to assist with the Bob Levinson case, and it needs to continue to raise the issue with the Iranian regime at the highest level and at every opportunity.

As Mr. DEUTCH pointed out, the community in south Florida will be rallying in support of Bob and his family this coming Saturday, March 5. It will be held at the Center for the Arts in Coral Springs at 2 in the afternoon.

What a powerful message it would send to the family were the House to adopt this resolution without dissent. It will also send a strong message to the Iranian regime that we will not relent until Bob is home with his family and Iran has honored its commitments and its promises.

I commend, again, my good friend and south Florida colleague, TED DEUTCH, for authoring this resolution, and I am honored to be his Republican lead. I have worked alongside Mr. DEUTCH for so many years in support of Bob and his family.

Bob, a south Florida resident, as you heard, is a constituent of Mr. DEUTCH's district. As I said, the Levinson family is so fortunate to have such a wonderful Representative, because TED has shown unwavering commitment to the family, for Bob in his fight to be reunited with his loving family. I can only say that we all support TED in his mission. We support the Levinson family. We will continue to work with Mr. DEUTCH in this effort.

I urge my colleagues to strongly support this measure, support Bob and the Levinson family in this one more anniversary of being in captivity who knows where.

I yield back the balance of my time. The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 148, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

The title of the resolution was amended so as to read: "A resolution calling on the Government of Iran to follow through on repeated promises of assistance in the case of Robert Levinson, the longest held United States hostage in our Nation's history."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

FEMA DISASTER ASSISTANCE REFORM ACT OF 2015

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1471) to reauthorize the programs and activities of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.
The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1471

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) **SHORT TITLE.**—This Act may be cited as the “FEMA Disaster Assistance Reform Act of 2015”.

(b) **TABLE OF CONTENTS.**—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

TITLE I—FEMA REAUTHORIZATION

Sec. 101. Reauthorization of Federal Emergency Management Agency.

TITLE II—COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF DISASTER COSTS AND LOSSES

Sec. 201. Comprehensive study of disaster costs and losses.

TITLE III—STAFFORD ACT AND OTHER PROGRAMS

Sec. 301. Reauthorization of urban search and rescue response system.

Sec. 302. Statute of limitations.

Sec. 303. Action plan to improve field transition.

Sec. 304. Simplified procedures.

Sec. 305. Management costs.

Sec. 306. Debts owed to the United States related to disaster assistance.

Sec. 307. Statute of limitations for debts owed to the United States related to disaster assistance.

Sec. 308. Technical assistance and recommendations.

Sec. 309. Local impact.

Sec. 310. Proof of insurance.

Sec. 311. Authorities.

Sec. 312. Responsibilities.

Sec. 313. Earthquake and Tsunami Inter-agency Task Force.

Sec. 314. Mitigation assistance.

Sec. 315. Additional activities.

TITLE I—FEMA REAUTHORIZATION

SEC. 101. REAUTHORIZATION OF FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY.

Section 699 of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-295; 6 U.S.C. 811) is amended—

(1) by striking “administration and operations” each place it appears and inserting “management and administration”; and

(2) in paragraph (2), by striking “; and”;

(3) in paragraph (3), by striking the period and inserting “; and”; and

(4) by adding at the end the following:

“(4) for fiscal year 2016, \$946,982,000;

“(5) for fiscal year 2017, \$946,982,000; and

“(6) for fiscal year 2018, \$946,982,000.”.

TITLE II—COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF DISASTER COSTS AND LOSSES

SEC. 201. COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF DISASTER COSTS AND LOSSES.

(a) **ESTABLISHMENT.**—Not later than 30 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency shall commence, through the National Advisory Council, a comprehensive study related to disaster costs and losses (referred to in the subsection as the “Study”).

(b) **ADDITIONAL MEMBERSHIP.**—For the purposes of the Study, as soon as practicable after the date of enactment of this section, the Administrator shall appoint additional qualified members to the National Advisory Council from the following:

(1) Individuals that have the requisite technical knowledge and expertise on issues related to disaster costs and losses.

(2) Representatives of the insurance industry.

(3) Experts in and representatives of the construction and building industry.

(4) Individuals nominated by national organizations representing local governments and personnel.

(5) Academic experts.

(6) Vendors, developers, and manufacturers of systems, facilities, equipment, and capabilities for emergency management services.

(7) Representatives of such other stakeholders and interested and affected parties as the Administrator considers appropriate.

(c) **CONSULTATION WITH NONMEMBERS.**—The National Advisory Council shall consult with other relevant agencies and groups that are not represented on the National Advisory Council to consider research, data, findings, recommendations, innovative technologies and developments, including—

(1) entities engaged in federally funded research; and

(2) academic institutions engaged in relevant work and research.

(d) **RECOMMENDATIONS.**—Not later than 120 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the National Advisory Council shall convene to evaluate the following topics and develop recommendations for reducing disaster costs and losses:

(1) **DISASTER LOSSES.**—

(A) **COST TRENDS.**—Trends in disaster costs including loss of life and injury, property damage to individuals, the private sector, and each level of government (State, local and tribal) since the enactment of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.), to the extent data is available.

(B) **CONTRIBUTING FACTORS.**—Contributing factors such as shifting demographics and aging infrastructure and their impacts on the trends in disaster losses and costs.

(2) **DISASTER COSTS.**—

(A) **TRENDS IN DECLARATIONS.**—Trends in disaster declarations, including factors contributing to the trends.

(B) **DISASTER ASSISTANCE.**—Disaster assistance available from all Federal sources, including descriptions of programs, eligibility and authorities, where assistance has been used geographically, how quickly the funds are used, how that assistance is coordinated among the various agencies and departments, and recommendations for ways to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of such assistance.

(C) **COSTS.**—Disaster costs borne by the private sector and individuals.

(3) **DISASTER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITY.**—Fundamental principles that should drive national disaster assistance decision making, including the appropriate roles for each level of government, the private sector and individuals.

(4) **REDUCTION OF COSTS AND LOSSES.**—

(A) **MECHANISMS AND INCENTIVES.**—Mechanisms and incentives, including tax incentives, to promote disaster cost reduction, mitigation, and recovery, including cost data, projections for the return on investment, and measures of effectiveness.

(B) **IDENTIFICATION OF CHALLENGES.**—Identify fundamental legal, societal, geographic and technological challenges to implementation.

(5) **LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS.**—Legislative proposals for implementing the recommendations in the report compiled pursuant to the requirement in section 1111 of the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act of 2013 (Public Law 113-2).

(e) **REPORT TO ADMINISTRATOR AND CONGRESS.**—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this section, the National Advisory Council shall submit a report containing the data, analysis, and recommendations developed under subsection (d) to—

(1) the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency;

(2) the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives; and

(3) the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate.

The Administrator shall make the data collected pursuant to this section publicly available on the Agency’s website.

TITLE III—STAFFORD ACT AND OTHER PROGRAMS

SEC. 301. REAUTHORIZATION OF URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE RESPONSE SYSTEM.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Title III of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5141 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“SEC. 327. NATIONAL URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE RESPONSE SYSTEM.

“(a) **DEFINITIONS.**—In this section, the following definitions apply:

“(1) **ADMINISTRATOR.**—The term ‘Administrator’ means the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

“(2) **AGENCY.**—The term ‘Agency’ means the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

“(3) **HAZARD.**—The term ‘hazard’ has the meaning given that term by section 602.

“(4) **NONEMPLOYEE SYSTEM MEMBER.**—The term ‘nonemployee System member’ means a System member not employed by a sponsoring agency or participating agency.

“(5) **PARTICIPATING AGENCY.**—The term ‘participating agency’ means a State or local government, nonprofit organization, or private organization that has executed an agreement with a sponsoring agency to participate in the System.

“(6) **SPONSORING AGENCY.**—The term ‘sponsoring agency’ means a State or local government that is the sponsor of a task force designated by the Administrator to participate in the System.

“(7) **SYSTEM.**—The term ‘System’ means the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System to be administered under this section.

“(8) **SYSTEM MEMBER.**—The term ‘System member’ means an individual who is not a full-time employee of the Federal Government and who serves on a task force or on a System management or other technical team.

“(9) **TASK FORCE.**—The term ‘task force’ means an urban search and rescue team designated by the Administrator to participate in the System.

“(b) **GENERAL AUTHORITY.**—Subject to the requirements of this section, the Administrator shall continue to administer the emergency response system known as the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System.

“(c) **FUNCTIONS.**—In administering the System, the Administrator shall provide for a national network of standardized search and rescue resources to assist States and local governments in responding to hazards.

“(d) **TASK FORCES.**—

“(1) **DESIGNATION.**—The Administrator shall designate task forces to participate in the System. The Administration shall determine the criteria for such participation.

“(2) **SPONSORING AGENCIES.**—Each task force shall have a sponsoring agency. The Administrator shall enter into an agreement with the sponsoring agency with respect to the participation of each task force in the System.

“(3) **COMPOSITION.**—

“(A) **PARTICIPATING AGENCIES.**—A task force may include, at the discretion of the sponsoring agency, one or more participating agencies. The sponsoring agency shall enter into an agreement with each participating agency with respect to the participation of the participating agency on the task force.

“(B) OTHER INDIVIDUALS.—A task force may also include, at the discretion of the sponsoring agency, other individuals not otherwise associated with the sponsoring agency or a participating agency. The sponsoring agency of a task force may enter into a separate agreement with each such individual with respect to the participation of the individual on the task force.

“(e) MANAGEMENT AND TECHNICAL TEAMS.—The Administrator shall maintain such management teams and other technical teams as the Administrator determines are necessary to administer the System.

“(f) APPOINTMENT OF SYSTEM MEMBERS INTO FEDERAL SERVICE.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator may appoint a System member into Federal service for a period of service to provide for the participation of the System member in exercises, preincident staging, major disaster and emergency response activities, and training events sponsored or sanctioned by the Administrator.

“(2) NONAPPLICABILITY OF CERTAIN CIVIL SERVICE LAWS.—The Administrator may make appointments under paragraph (1) without regard to the provisions of title 5, United States Code, governing appointments in the competitive service.

“(3) RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER AUTHORITIES.—The authority of the Administrator to make appointments under this subsection shall not affect any other authority of the Administrator under this Act.

“(4) LIMITATION.—A System member who is appointed into Federal service under paragraph (1) shall not be considered an employee of the United States for purposes other than those specifically set forth in this section.

“(g) COMPENSATION.—

“(1) PAY OF SYSTEM MEMBERS.—Subject to such terms and conditions as the Administrator may impose by regulation, the Administrator shall make payments to the sponsoring agency of a task force—

“(A) to reimburse each employer of a System member on the task force for compensation paid by the employer to the System member for any period during which the System member is appointed into Federal service under subsection (f)(1); and

“(B) to make payments directly to a non-employee System member on the task force for any period during which the non-employee System member is appointed into Federal service under subsection (f)(1).

“(2) REIMBURSEMENT FOR EMPLOYEES FILLING POSITIONS OF SYSTEM MEMBERS.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to such terms and conditions as the Administrator may impose by regulation, the Administrator shall make payments to the sponsoring agency of a task force to reimburse each employer of a System member on the task force for compensation paid by the employer to an employee filling a position normally filled by the System member for any period during which the System member is appointed into Federal service under subsection (f)(1).

“(B) LIMITATION.—Costs incurred by an employer shall be eligible for reimbursement under subparagraph (A) only to the extent that the costs are in excess of the costs that would have been incurred by the employer had the System member not been appointed into Federal service under subsection (f)(1).

“(3) METHOD OF PAYMENT.—A System member shall not be entitled to pay directly from the Agency for a period during which the System member is appointed into Federal service under subsection (f)(1).

“(h) PERSONAL INJURY, ILLNESS, DISABILITY, OR DEATH.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—A System member who is appointed into Federal service under subsection (f)(1) and who suffers personal injury, illness, disability, or death as a result of a

personal injury sustained while acting in the scope of such appointment shall, for the purposes of subchapter I of chapter 81 of title 5, United States Code, be treated as though the member were an employee (as defined by section 8101 of that title) who had sustained the injury in the performance of duty.

“(2) ELECTION OF BENEFITS.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—If a System member (or, in the case of the death of the System member, the System member's dependent) is entitled—

“(i) under paragraph (1) to receive benefits under subchapter I of chapter 81 of title 5, United States Code, by reason of personal injury, illness, disability, or death, and

“(ii) to receive benefits from a State or local government by reason of the same personal injury, illness, disability, or death, the System member or dependent shall elect to receive either the benefits referred to in clause (i) or (ii).

“(B) DEADLINE.—A System member or dependent shall make an election of benefits under subparagraph (A) not later than 1 year after the date of the personal injury, illness, disability, or death that is the reason for the benefits or until such later date as the Secretary of Labor may allow for reasonable cause shown.

“(C) EFFECT OF ELECTION.—An election of benefits made under this paragraph is irrevocable unless otherwise provided by law.

“(3) REIMBURSEMENT FOR STATE OR LOCAL BENEFITS.—Subject to such terms and conditions as the Administrator may impose by regulation, in the event that a System member or dependent elects benefits from a State or local government under paragraph (2)(A), the Administrator shall reimburse the State or local government for the value of those benefits.

“(4) PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICER CLAIMS.—Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to bar any claim by, or with respect to, any System member who is a ‘public safety officer’, as defined in section 1204 of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, for any benefits authorized pursuant to section 1001(a)(4) of that Act.

“(5) TECHNICAL AMENDMENT.—Section 1086(d) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 is amended as follows (which amendments shall take effect as if enacted on January 2, 2013)—

“(A) in paragraph (1)—

“(i) by striking ‘paragraph (1)’ and inserting ‘paragraph (2)’; and

“(ii) in subparagraph (B) by striking ‘filed or’ and inserting ‘filed (consistent with pre-existing effective dates) or’; and

“(B) in paragraph (2)(A), by striking ‘amendments made by this Act’ and inserting ‘amendments made to section 1204 of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3796b) by this Act’.

“(i) LIABILITY.—A System member appointed into Federal service under subsection (f)(1), while acting within the scope of the appointment, is deemed an employee of the Federal Government under section 1346(b) of title 28, United States Code, and chapter 171 of that title, relating to tort claims procedure.

“(j) EMPLOYMENT AND REEMPLOYMENT RIGHTS.—With respect to a System member who is not a regular full-time employee of a sponsoring agency or participating agency, the following terms and conditions apply:

“(1) SERVICE.—Service as a System member is deemed ‘service in the uniformed services’ for purposes of chapter 43 of title 38, United States Code, relating to employment and reemployment rights of individuals who have performed service in the uniformed services (regardless of whether the individual receives compensation for such participation). All rights and obligations of such

persons and procedures for assistance, enforcement, and investigation shall be as provided for in such chapter.

“(2) PRECLUSION.—Preclusion of giving notice of service by necessity of appointment under this section is deemed preclusion by ‘military necessity’ for purposes of section 4312(b) of title 38, United States Code, pertaining to giving notice of absence from a position of employment. A determination of such necessity shall be made by the Administrator and shall not be subject to judicial review.

“(k) LICENSES AND PERMITS.—If a System member holds a valid license, certificate, or other permit issued by any State or other governmental jurisdiction evidencing the member's qualifications in any professional, mechanical, or other skill or type of assistance required by the System, the System member is deemed to be performing a Federal activity when rendering aid involving such skill or assistance during a period of appointment into Federal service under subsection (f)(1).

“(l) ADVISORY COMMITTEE.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall establish and maintain an advisory committee to provide expert recommendations to the Administrator in order to assist the Administrator in administering the System.

“(2) COMPOSITION.—The advisory committee shall be composed of members from geographically diverse areas, and shall include—

“(A) the chief officer or senior executive from at least three sponsoring agencies;

“(B) the senior emergency manager from at least two States that include sponsoring agencies; and

“(C) at least one representative recommended by the leaders of the task forces.

“(3) INAPPLICABILITY OF TERMINATION REQUIREMENT.—Section 14(a)(2) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App.) shall not apply to the advisory committee under this subsection.

“(m) PREPAREDNESS COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to the availability of appropriations for such purpose, the Administrator shall enter into an annual preparedness cooperative agreement with each sponsoring agency. Amounts made available to a sponsoring agency under such a preparedness cooperative agreement shall be for the following purposes:

“(A) Training and exercises, including training and exercises with other Federal, State, and local government response entities.

“(B) Acquisition and maintenance of equipment, including interoperable communications and personal protective equipment.

“(C) Medical monitoring required for responder safety and health in anticipation of and following a major disaster, emergency, or other hazard, as determined by the Administrator.

“(2) AVAILABILITY OF APPROPRIATIONS.—Notwithstanding section 1552(b) of title 31, United States Code, amounts made available for cooperative agreements under this subsection that are not expended shall be deposited in an agency account and shall remain available for such agreements without fiscal year limitation.

“(n) RESPONSE COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS.—The Administrator shall enter into a response cooperative agreement with each sponsoring agency, as appropriate, under which the Administrator agrees to reimburse the sponsoring agency for costs incurred by the sponsoring agency in responding to a major disaster or emergency.

“(o) OBLIGATIONS.—The Administrator may incur all necessary obligations consistent with this section in order to ensure the effectiveness of the System.

“(p) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out the System and the provisions of this section \$50,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2016, 2017, and 2018.

“(2) ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES.—The Administrator may use not to exceed 6 percent of the funds appropriated for a fiscal year pursuant to paragraph (1) for salaries, expenses, and other administrative costs incurred by the Administrator in carrying out this section.”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

(1) APPLICABILITY OF TITLE 5, UNITED STATES CODE.—Section 8101(1) of title 5, United States Code, is amended—

(A) in subparagraph (D) by striking “and” at the end;

(B) by moving subparagraph (F) to appear after subparagraph (E);

(C) in subparagraph (F)—

(i) by striking “United States Code.”; and

(ii) by adding “and” at the end; and

(D) by inserting after subparagraph (F) the following:

“(G) an individual who is a System member of the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System during a period of appointment into Federal service pursuant to section 327 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act;”.

(2) INCLUSION AS PART OF UNIFORMED SERVICES FOR PURPOSES OF USERRA.—Section 4303 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(A) in paragraph (13) by inserting “, a period for which a System member of the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System is absent from a position of employment due to an appointment into Federal service under section 327 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act” before “, and a period”; and

(B) in paragraph (16) by inserting after “Public Health Service,” the following: “System members of the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System during a period of appointment into Federal service under section 327 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act.”.

SEC. 302. STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 705(a)(1) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5205) is amended—

(1) by striking “Except” and inserting “Notwithstanding section 3716(e) of title 31, United States Code, and except”; and

(2) by striking “report for the disaster or emergency” and inserting “report for project completion as certified by the grantee”.

(b) APPLICABILITY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—With respect to disaster or emergency assistance provided to a State or local government on or after January 1, 2004—

(A) no administrative action may be taken to recover a payment of such assistance after the date of enactment of this Act if the action is prohibited under section 705(a)(1) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5205(a)(1)), as amended by subsection (a); and

(B) any administrative action to recover a payment of such assistance that is pending on such date of enactment shall be terminated if the action is prohibited under section 705(a)(1) of that Act, as amended by subsection (a).

(2) LIMITATION.—This section, including the amendments made by this section, may not be construed to invalidate or otherwise affect any administration action completed before the date of enactment of this Act.

SEC. 303. ACTION PLAN TO IMPROVE FIELD TRANSITION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the

Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency shall report to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate regarding the plans the agency will undertake to provide the following:

(1) Consistent guidance to applicants on FEMA disaster funding procedures during the response to an emergency.

(2) Appropriate record maintenance and transfer of documents to new teams during staff transitions.

(3) Accurate assistance to applicants and grantees to ease the administrative burden throughout the process of obtaining and monitoring assistance.

(b) MAINTAINING RECORDS.—The report shall also include a plan for implementing operating procedures and document retention requirements to ensure the maintenance of appropriate records throughout the lifecycle of the disaster.

(c) NEW TECHNOLOGIES.—Finally, the report shall identify new technologies that further aid the disaster workforce in partnering with State, local, and tribal governments and private nonprofits in the wake of a disaster or emergency to educate, assist, and inform applicants on the status of their disaster assistance applications and projects.

SEC. 304. SIMPLIFIED PROCEDURES.

Section 422(a) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5189) is amended—

(1) by striking “\$35,000” the first place it appears and inserting “\$1,000,000”; and

(2) by striking the second sentence.

SEC. 305. MANAGEMENT COSTS.

Section 324 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5165b) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a) by striking “any administrative expense, and any other expense not directly chargeable to” and inserting “direct administrative cost, and any other administrative expense associated with”; and

(2) in subsection (b)—

(A) by striking “Notwithstanding” and inserting the following:

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding”.

(B) by striking “establish” and inserting the following: “implement the following”; and

(C) by adding at the end the following:

“(2) SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT COSTS.—The Administrator shall provide the following percentage rates, in addition to the eligible project costs, to cover direct and indirect costs of administering the following programs:

“(A) HAZARD MITIGATION.—A grantee under section 404 may be reimbursed not more than 15 percent of the total amount of the grant award under such section of which not more than 10 percent may be used by the grantee and 5 percent by the subgrantee for such costs.

“(B) PUBLIC ASSISTANCE.—A grantee under sections 403, 406, 407, and 502, may be reimbursed not more than 10 percent of the total award amount under such sections, of which not more than 6 percent may be used by the grantee and 4 percent by the subgrantee for such costs.”.

SEC. 306. DEBTS OWED TO THE UNITED STATES RELATED TO DISASTER ASSISTANCE.

(a) DEFINITION.—In this section, the term “covered assistance” means assistance provided—

(1) under section 408 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5174); and

(2) in relation to a major disaster or emergency declared by the President under sec-

tion 401 or 501 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5170; 42 U.S.C. 5191) on or after October 30, 2012.

(b) WAIVER AUTHORITY.—Notwithstanding section 3716(e) of title 31, United States Code, the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency—

(1) subject to paragraph (2), may waive a debt owed to the United States related to covered assistance provided to an individual or household if—

(A) the covered assistance was distributed based on an error by the Federal Emergency Management Agency;

(B) there was no fault on behalf of the debtor; and

(C) the collection of the debt would be against equity and good conscience; and

(2) may not waive a debt under paragraph (1) if the debt involves fraud, the presentation of a false claim, or misrepresentation by the debtor or any party having an interest in the claim.

(c) MONITORING OF COVERED ASSISTANCE DISTRIBUTED BASED ON ERROR.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Inspector General shall monitor the distribution of covered assistance to individuals and households to determine the percentage of such assistance distributed based on an error.

(2) REMOVAL OF WAIVER AUTHORITY BASED ON EXCESSIVE ERROR RATE.—If the Inspector General determines, with respect to any 12-month period, that the amount of covered assistance distributed based on an error by the Federal Emergency Management Agency exceeds 4 percent of the total amount of covered assistance distributed—

(A) the Inspector General shall notify the Administrator and publish the determination in the Federal Register; and

(B) with respect to any major disaster declared by the President under section 401 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5170) after the date of the determination, the authority of the Administrator to waive debt under subsection (b) shall no longer be effective.

SEC. 307. STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS FOR DEBTS OWED TO THE UNITED STATES RELATED TO DISASTER ASSISTANCE.

Notwithstanding section 3716(g) of title 31, United States Code, and unless there is evidence of civil or criminal fraud, the Administrator, on behalf of the President, shall not initiate new administrative action in any forum to recover—

(1) payments made to an individual or household under section 408 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5174) more than 3 years after the last date on which such payments were made; or

(2) funds owed by an individual or household for assistance provided under section 408 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5174) more than 3 years after the last date on which such funds were determined to be owed.

SEC. 308. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

(a) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency shall provide technical assistance to a common interest community that provides essential services of a governmental nature on actions that a common interest community may take in order to be eligible to receive reimbursement from a grantee that receives funds from the Agency for certain activities performed after an event that results in a disaster declaration.

(b) RECOMMENDATIONS.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator shall provide recommendations to the House Committee on

Transportation and Infrastructure and the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs on how common areas of condominiums and housing cooperatives may be eligible for assistance, including any progress the Agency has made in its explorations of this issue and the potential challenges identified since the Agency issued its report on May 22, 2014.

SEC. 309. LOCAL IMPACT.

In making recommendations to the President regarding a major disaster declaration, the Administrator shall give greater weight and consideration to severe localized impact. Further, the Administrator shall make corresponding adjustments to the Agency's policies and regulations. Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this section, the Administrator shall report to the Committees on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate on the changes made to regulations and policies and the number of declarations that have been declared based on the new criteria.

SEC. 310. PROOF OF INSURANCE.

A State shall be deemed to have proven that an applicant has satisfied the purchase of insurance requirements under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et. seq.) when an encumbrance requiring the purchase and maintenance of insurance has been placed on the title of the property receiving the benefit of the grant or assistance. This section in no way removes or reduces the insurance requirements on an applicant under the Act and in no way limits the requirement that assistance provided under the Stafford Act be reduced or eliminated when the requirements are not met.

SEC. 311. AUTHORITIES.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency shall not, pursuant to consultation with another Federal agency or otherwise, expand its statutory authorities as they relate to floodplain management or floodplain mapping unless the requirement to do so is explicitly and specifically stated in statute, nor shall the Agency's authorities be construed to impute the privately-funded actions of private parties on private land to such Agency for the purpose of extending the requirements of any Federal law applicable to Federal agencies to such actions.

SEC. 312. RESPONSIBILITIES.

The Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency shall be responsible for the Nation's efforts to reduce the loss of life and property and to protect the Nation from an earthquake, tsunami or a combined earthquake and tsunami event by developing the ability to prepare and plan for, mitigate against, respond to, recover from, and more successfully adapt to such an event.

SEC. 313. EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The President shall establish a Federal Interagency Task Force for the purpose of developing a comprehensive strategy and recommendations on how the Nation should prepare and plan for, mitigate against, respond to, recover from, and more successfully adapt to an earthquake, tsunami or a combined earthquake and tsunami event in the Cascadia Subduction Zone, including identifying potential administrative or legislative changes required to implement the strategy, the funding required to implement the strategy and recommendations, and the priority in which the strategy should be implemented.

(b) CHAIRPERSON.—The Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or his designee, shall serve as the chairperson of the Task Force.

(c) MEMBERSHIP.—The membership of the Task Force shall include a cross section of subject matter experts representing the following:

(1) Relevant Federal agencies.

(2) The States of Oregon, Washington, and California.

(3) Indian tribes, local governments, and private sector representatives that may be impacted by a mega-thrust earthquake, tsunami or a combined earthquake and tsunami event in the Cascadia Subduction Zone.

(4) Universities, academia and research institutions with expertise in topics relevant to the work of the Task Force.

(d) DETAILED EMPLOYEES.—Members of the Task Force may detail employees to assist the Administrator, or his designee, in fulfilling the responsibilities of the Task Force.

(e) CASCADIA SUBDUCTION ZONE.—The term “Cascadia Subduction Zone” means the approximately 684 miles long landward-dipping fault that separates the Juan de Fuca and North America plates and that stretches along a portion of the western coast of the United States beginning off Cape Mendocino, California, along the State of Oregon, the State of Washington, to Northern Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

(f) STRATEGY.—The comprehensive strategy, which may build upon existing plans, studies, or other resources, shall include the following:

(1) Define how Federal agencies will coordinate to develop the ability to prepare and plan for, mitigate against, respond to, recover from, and more successfully adapt to the impacts of a mega-thrust earthquake, tsunami, or a combined earthquake and tsunami event in the Cascadia Subduction Zone.

(2) Ensure collaboration between the Department of Transportation, the Department of Energy, the United States Coast Guard, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and other Federal agencies as appropriate to complete a needs assessment of Federal facilities in need of hardening for an event and develop a strategic plan to mitigate and retrofit Federal, State, tribal, and local critical assets for freight, energy, and transit purposes to withstand an event and to help save lives during and immediately after an event.

(3) Assist State, tribal, and local governments in developing and implementing a coordinated and comprehensive plan to prioritize Federal, State, tribal, local, and private investments and activities to develop the ability to prepare and plan for, mitigate against, respond to, recover from, and more successfully adapt to the impacts of a mega-thrust earthquake, tsunami, or a combined earthquake and tsunami event in the Cascadia Subduction Zone, and to link to any existing State-wide mitigation plan, including examining the feasibility of the public and private sector and individuals to acquire earthquake insurance.

(4) Identify existing funding opportunities across Federal agencies and other sources to implement the comprehensive strategy and any recommendations made by the Task Force and make recommendations for new funding opportunities.

(5) Identify barriers to obtaining funding and implementing the comprehensive strategy and to develop recommendations on how to remove such barriers.

(6) Collaborate with and assist State, tribal, and local governments in developing recommendations for cost-effective mitigation alternatives for aging State, tribal, or locally owned critical infrastructure.

(7) Assist State, tribal, and local governments with developing a recovery plan prior to an earthquake, tsunami, or combined earthquake and tsunami event in the Cascadia Subduction Zone as to how State,

tribal, and local governments may want to rebuild after the event;

(8) Identify steps taken to date to develop an onshore and offshore earthquake early warning system and define the purpose and scope of an onshore and offshore earthquake early warning system.

(9) Evaluate types of offshore earthquake early warning systems and provide recommendations and a cost estimate for an earthquake early warning system appropriate for the Cascadia Subduction Zone.

(10) Make recommendations about how an earthquake early warning system should operate, including whether and how a system should interface with the private sector.

(11) Define appropriate roles and responsibilities for Federal, State, local, and tribal governments, including who should operate and maintain an earthquake early warning system, the cost of a system, and possible funding sources for a system.

(12) Develop a plan on how to integrate an earthquake early warning system into existing and new public alert warning systems and technologies, including mobile systems.

(g) COLLABORATION.—The Task Force shall work simultaneously and collaboratively with the National Academies.

(h) NATIONAL ACADEMIES.—The Task Force shall enter into an agreement with the National Academies under which the National Academies shall develop recommendations for a Federal research strategy to advance scientific understanding of a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and resulting tsunami preparedness, including the following:

(1) Geologic conditions, ground motions, and tsunami hazard.

(2) Implications of an effective automated early warning system.

(3) Effects of mega-earthquake and tsunami events on the built and natural environment.

(4) Social and behavioral factors for effective disaster preparedness and response.

(5) Cost-effective mitigation alternatives for legacy and aging infrastructure.

(6) Strategic planning for freight, energy, and transit network robustness.

(7) Tools that help communities invest its resources for the greatest benefit.

(8) Any other topics identified as necessary by the Task Force or the National Academies.

(i) REPORT.—Not later than 18 months after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency shall submit to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate a report of the Task Force that provides the following:

(1) The comprehensive strategy identified in subsection (f).

(2) Recommendations on administrative actions that may be taken to further the strategy.

(3) Recommendations for legislative changes that may be necessary to further the strategy.

(4) Recommendations on funding necessary to carry out the strategy.

SEC. 314. MITIGATION ASSISTANCE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 420 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5187) is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsection (d) as subsection (e); and

(2) by inserting after subsection (c) the following:

“(d) HAZARD MITIGATION ASSISTANCE.—Whether or not a major disaster is declared, the President may provide hazard mitigation assistance in accordance with section 404 in

any area affected by a fire for which assistance was provided under this section.”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.) is amended—

(1) in section 404(a) (42 U.S.C. 5170c(a))—

(A) by inserting before the first period “, or any area affected by a fire for which assistance was provided under section 420”; and

(B) in the third sentence by inserting “or event under section 420” after “major disaster” each place it appears; and

(2) in section 322(e)(1) (42 U.S.C. 5165(e)(1)), by inserting “or event under section 420” after “major disaster” each place it appears.

SEC. 315. ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES.

Section 404 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5170c) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(f) USE OF ASSISTANCE.—Recipients of hazard mitigation assistance provided under this section and section 203 may use the assistance to conduct the following activities to help reduce the risk of future damage, hardship, loss, or suffering in any area affected by—

“(1) a wildfire, including—

“(A) reseeding ground cover with quick-growing or native species;

“(B) mulching with straw or chipped wood;

“(C) constructing straw, rock, or log dams in small tributaries to prevent flooding;

“(D) placing logs and other erosion barriers to catch sediment on hill slopes;

“(E) installing debris traps to modify road and trail drainage mechanisms;

“(F) modifying or removing culverts to allow drainage to flow freely;

“(G) adding drainage dips and constructing emergency spillways to keep roads and bridges from washing out during floods;

“(H) planting grass to prevent the spread of noxious weeds;

“(I) installing warning signs;

“(J) establishing defensible space measures; and

“(K) reducing hazardous fuels; and

“(2) earthquake hazards, including—

“(A) improvements to regional seismic networks in support of building a capability for earthquake early warning;

“(B) improvements to geodetic networks in support of building a capability for earthquake early warning; or

“(C) seismometers, GPS receivers, and associated infrastructure in support of building a capability for earthquake early warning.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BARLETTA) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CARSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 1471, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

Mr. BARLETTA. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman SHUSTER for his tremendous support and leadership on this bill. Few Members of Congress have had a greater impact on reforming our disaster programs since

Hurricane Katrina than Chairman SHUSTER. This bill represents another important step in that effort, and I greatly appreciate the chairman's help.

I also want to thank Ranking Member DEFAZIO and Ranking Member CARSON for their bipartisan support of the bill.

The FEMA Disaster Assistance Reform Act has two primary goals: to help save lives and to save taxpayer money.

□ 1715

The bill helps save lives by fixing a longstanding problem that hinders the deployment of critical search and rescue teams between States. These reforms will help ensure our constituents receive the help they need when disaster strikes.

Additionally, this bill helps save money by improving the cost-effectiveness of FEMA's existing disaster assistance programs. For example, there are provisions that will speed up reconstruction and lower administrative costs. The bill also saves money by encouraging smart recovery practices and mitigation to lower the costs of the next disaster.

The bill commissions a comprehensive review of the growing disaster losses the Nation has experienced over the past decades. Experts estimated over \$1 trillion of disaster losses have occurred in North America since 1980. FEMA alone has spent almost \$200 billion on over 1300 major Presidential disaster declarations since 1989. These numbers are going up, and we should try to find ways to bring those costs down over time.

It has been over 20 years since we have had a comprehensive look at disaster spending. It is time for a big picture assessment of what is driving these costs and to review if we, as a Nation, are responding in the most appropriate and cost-effective way.

Right after I became a Member of Congress, my district was hit hard by Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. I saw homes destroyed, lives and livelihoods upset. Disaster relief is critical at times like these, and people need help to rebuild their lives and rebuild their communities.

As I witnessed the recovery, I was amazed that folks were rebuilding back in the very same place, in the very same way, leaving themselves just as vulnerable to the next storm. We have to be compassionate and responsive to our citizens, but we also have a duty to be a good steward of the taxpayer dollars.

I am committed to establishing this study to see if we can tackle these tough issues and find solutions that are driven by facts and data rather than the emotion that inevitably follows a disaster. These reforms are one of my top priorities this Congress.

At the end of the day, the purpose of this bill is to ensure help will be there when disaster strikes and our constituents need that help the most.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
Washington, DC, February 26, 2016.

Hon. BILL SHUSTER,
Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN SHUSTER: I am writing to you concerning the jurisdictional interest of the Committee on Homeland Security in H.R. 1471, the “FEMA Disaster Assistance Act of 2015.” The bill contains provisions that fall within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Homeland Security.

I recognize and appreciate the desire to bring this legislation before the House of Representatives in an expeditious manner, and accordingly, the Committee on Homeland Security will not assert its jurisdictional claim over this bill by seeking a sequential referral. The Committee takes this action with the mutual understanding that by foregoing consideration of H.R. 1471 at this time, we do not waive any jurisdiction over subject matter contained in this or similar legislation, and that our Committee will be appropriately consulted and involved as this bill or similar legislation moves forward so that we may address any remaining issues in our jurisdiction.

This waiver is also given with the understanding that the Committee on Homeland Security expressly reserves its authority to seek conferees on any provision within its jurisdiction during any House-Senate conference that may be convened on this or any similar legislation, and requests your support for such a request.

I would appreciate your response to this letter confirming this understanding with respect to H.R. 1471, and ask that a copy of this letter and your response be included in the Congressional Record during consideration of this bill on the House floor.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL T. MCCAUL,
Chairman,
Committee on Homeland Security.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,
Washington, DC, February 26, 2016.

Hon. MICHAEL T. MCCAUL,
Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security,
Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN MCCAUL: Thank you for your letter regarding H.R. 1471, the FEMA Disaster Assistance Act of 2015. I appreciate your willingness to support expediting the consideration of this legislation on the House Floor.

I acknowledge that by waiving consideration of this bill, the Committee on Homeland Security does not waive any future valid jurisdictional claim to provisions in this or similar legislation. In addition, should a conference on the bill be necessary, I would support your effort to seek appointment of an appropriate number of conferees to any House-Senate conference involving provisions within this legislation on which the Committee on Homeland Security has a valid jurisdictional claim.

I will include our letters on H.R. 1471 in the Congressional Record during House Floor consideration of the bill. I appreciate your cooperation regarding this legislation, and I look forward to working with the Committee on Homeland Security as the bill moves through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

BILL SHUSTER,
Chairman.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
Washington, DC, February 25, 2016.

Hon. BILL SHUSTER,
Chairman, Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN SHUSTER: I am writing with respect to H.R. 1471, the "FEMA Disaster Assistance Reform Act," which was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

As you know, H.R. 1471 contains provisions that fall within the Rule X jurisdiction of the Committee on the Judiciary. As a result of your having consulted with the Committee and in order to expedite the House's consideration of H.R. 1471, the Committee on the Judiciary will not assert its jurisdictional claim over this bill. However, this is conditional on our mutual understanding and agreement that doing so will in no way diminish or alter the jurisdiction of the Committee on the Judiciary with respect to the appointment of conferees or to any future jurisdictional claim over the subject matters contained in the bill or similar legislation.

I would appreciate a response to this letter confirming this understanding with respect to H.R. 1471, and would ask that a copy of our exchange of letters on this matter be included in the Congressional Record during Floor consideration of H.R. 1471.

Sincerely,

BOB GOODLATTE,
Chairman.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COM-
MITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE,
Washington, DC, February 26, 2016.

Hon. BOB GOODLATTE,
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your letter regarding H.R. 1471, the FEMA Disaster Assistance Act of 2015. I appreciate your willingness to support expediting the consideration of this legislation on the House Floor.

I acknowledge that by waiving consideration of this bill, the Committee on the Judiciary does not waive any future valid jurisdictional claim to provisions in this or similar legislation. In addition, should a conference on the bill be necessary, I would support your effort to seek appointment of an appropriate number of conferees to any House-Senate conference involving provisions within this legislation on which the Committee on the Judiciary has a valid jurisdictional claim.

I will include our letters on H.R. 1471 in the Congressional Record during House Floor consideration of the bill. I appreciate your cooperation regarding this legislation, and I look forward to working with the Committee on the Judiciary as the bill moves through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

BILL SHUSTER,
Chairman.

Mr. CARSON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the bipartisan measure before us today. H.R. 1471, the FEMA Disaster Assistance Reform Act of 2015, as amended, contains several provisions important to State and local governments and emergency managers. I will only highlight a few of them. I also want to acknowledge Chairman BARLETTA and my good friend, Ranking Member DEFAZIO.

Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, the most important aspect of this bill is that it

clarifies compensation and liability issues for urban search and rescue team members. These members provide critical services and put themselves in harm's way to help others involved in a disaster.

In Indianapolis, my city, our own urban search and rescue team, which consists of firefighters, paramedics, civilians, and others responded to Hurricane Sandy. They did so despite the uncertainties that they would be covered for any injuries. These protections, Mr. Speaker, are long overdue. Team members can now rest assured that they will be taken care of when activated for Federal service if they are injured.

Another important provision grows out of the individual States' and local governments' need to know that they can rely on FEMA's decisions and reimbursement amounts. Local governments make major decisions during the disaster recovery phase in reliance on FEMA's initial approval. There comes a time, Mr. Speaker, when FEMA should not be able to reverse its initial decisions or award amounts. Statute of limitations protections for individuals, States, and local governments will provide peace of mind and certainty needed to go forward with the recovery process.

Climate change, Mr. Speaker, is causing more extreme weather patterns. So in order for us to become more resilient, we must encourage more local governments, communities to undertake mitigation measures. Some communities may forgo mitigation actions because they do not have the capacity to administer the funds. Ensuring that local governments will be reimbursed for management costs should help us all obtain more resilient communities.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, our subcommittee has embarked on discussions related to the trends and causes of rising disaster costs and losses. In furtherance of this discussion, the bill requires FEMA's National Advisory Council to study the issue and make recommendations to Congress and address causes and trends. Specifically, the bill requires the Council to examine mechanisms and incentives to promote mitigation and to make recommendations regarding the same.

The last few years, Mr. Speaker, I have introduced a bill to reauthorize the disaster mitigation program. Mr. Speaker, mitigation saves taxpayer funds over the long haul. I look forward to any recommendations from the National Advisory Council on how we can strengthen this available and very effective program.

I want to thank Chairman BARLETTA again and Ranking Member DEFAZIO for their leadership on this very important measure. As an original cosponsor of this measure, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join us in supporting H.R. 1471.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Illi-

nois (Mr. RODNEY DAVIS), who knows very well how important these disaster programs are when disasters have struck his State of Illinois.

Mr. RODNEY DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this bill.

FEMA's disaster declaration process is broken. You don't need to look any further than the State of Illinois to see how FEMA's aid formula is failing the hardworking families of this country because it simply doesn't put all communities on a level playing field.

In 2012, Harrisburg, Illinois, was denied Federal assistance following tornadoes that swept across the Midwest, while Missouri and Kentucky received it. Recently, towns like Gifford and Washington in central Illinois were denied public assistance as well.

FEMA currently takes into account several factors when determining the need for public and individual assistance. However, there currently is no standard to determine which factor is more important than another, which leads to highly subjective and uncertain processes that leave States and communities in limbo for weeks as their application is considered.

By working with this committee and this subcommittee that Chairman BARLETTA chairs, we were able to include language that was based on a bill that I introduced with many of my colleagues that requires the administrator of FEMA, when making recommendations to the President regarding a major disaster declaration, to give greater weight and consideration to localized impact.

Consideration of this important legislation is timely for my home State of Illinois. Just days ago, Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner submitted a request to President Obama asking him to declare a major disaster for Illinois following the extensive holiday flooding that we saw right at about the new year.

Much of this damage happened in my home county of Christian County, where four people tragically lost their lives after encountering flood waters. Sadly, two of the deceased, Brandon Mann and Devan Everett, were from my hometown of Taylorville. Certainly no amount of resources can compensate for the loss of human life when disaster strikes, and yet these communities still need to rebuild. Preliminary damage assessments determined that communities in Illinois experienced \$15 million in damages. Unfortunately, that doesn't meet FEMA's \$18.1 million threshold.

Mr. Speaker, it is just not right that States like Illinois, where a significant portion of the population is concentrated in a single area, can be denied disaster relief because of an arbitrary formula developed by bureaucrats in concrete buildings right here in Washington, D.C. That is what makes this bill and my provision so important. It levels the playing field. It tells rural America that, when disaster

strikes, we are going to look out for you, too.

Mr. Speaker, I come from rural America. I know these people. These are not the type of people who expect help, who expect Washington to solve their problems; but we as Members of Congress and as Americans have an obligation to commit that we will be there for them when they need us and that we won't let arbitrary formulas prevent that help from being delivered.

We need this bill. We need these reforms. It will make a difference. Thank you again to Chairman BARLETTA, Chairman SHUSTER, and the ranking members.

Mr. CARSON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO), my good friend and ranking member.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman, the ranking member of the subcommittee, for yielding, and I thank him for his excellent work on this bill, as I do the subcommittee chair and the full committee chairman.

This is a bill very much in the tradition of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure where, in fact, we have come together and put together a bipartisan proposal to reauthorize the Federal Emergency Management Agency, a critical, critical agency, as you have heard from some of the previous speakers.

In particular, in the West, we have some issues regarding wildfires. We had the worst wildfire season on record last year: 10 million acres burned; half the Forest Service budget went to fighting these wildfires. The perversity of that is that, when astounding amounts of money like that are required from the Forest Service, the Forest Service has to reduce other budgets, including preventative activities, particularly fuel reduction and other activities that would prevent future fires. So we are on this endless cycle that should end.

Unfortunately, this bill doesn't end that. I hope that happens later in the Congress. There is legislation pending in both the House and the Senate that we have come close to moving that would deal with declaring that catastrophic fires are disasters, just like tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, et cetera.

In this bill, we did make some progress. It makes State and private lands eligible for hazard mitigation assistance after wildfires. It is a commonsense solution to save on future disaster costs and losses. The bill also encourages States to direct the funds to the areas that experienced the wildfire.

I thank our colleague, the gentleman from California (Mr. RUZ), for his extraordinary leadership on this issue. You have a fire, and particularly in California and elsewhere you have potential for catastrophic mudslides, future catastrophes, putting the public at risk. Hazard mitigation assistance on wildfires on State and private lands,

encouraging wildfire mitigation, such as reducing hazardous fuels, and re-seeding ground cover will help reduce the costs of future disasters.

Further, there are other provisions in this legislation that deal with the potential for catastrophic earthquake and tsunami. The Cascadia subduction zone off the coast of Oregon, northern California has generated at least 12 major, great earthquakes, magnitude 8 to 9, yet we are woefully unprepared in terms of any sorts of early detection.

We have just begun the rudiments with some Federal assistance of a land-based early detection system. We need an ocean-based early detection system, such as the Japanese have deployed. Early warning of quakes and tsunamis will save many lives on the coast of Oregon, Washington, and northern California. It will also save tremendous amounts in terms of infrastructure in the inland and more distant areas where they would have ample warning to shut down transit systems, get people off bridges, stop elevators in high-rise buildings, and otherwise accommodate the public, preventing more loss of life and also more catastrophic problems.

Again, Japan is far, far ahead of us. They can and have stopped their high-speed rail trains when they have distant warning of a coming tremor. Even though the tremors move quickly through the Earth, there is enough time to slow or stop those trains. They have had time to evacuate the coastal areas. Although, unfortunately, in the last quake, when they reestimated the size of the tsunami, they found out communications were down. Now they have taken care of this. Now they have moved to a cellular-based network to notify people the tsunami is coming and to get them to high ground.

So we can and should do a lot more there. This bill opens the door to those sorts of programs here in the United States of America.

Finally, it gives assurances—well, two more points—to State and local governments they will be reimbursed up to a certain amount for costs incurred during disaster recovery.

□ 1730

This will encourage local governments to undertake new mitigation projects, which is a good deal for both the Federal Government and for taxpayers. Mitigation saves \$3 to \$4 for every dollar invested.

Finally, we have a power play by a minor Federal agency attempting to make FEMA become the national land use planning agency of the United States, trying to force FEMA to deny flood insurance to States that don't follow the directives of the National Marine Fisheries Service.

This is not authorized by law. They are way out of line, unfortunately. I talked to the woman who is head of that agency. She disagrees. Her regional representative is hell-bent to become the land use planning agency for

Oregon, although, of course, it already has comprehensive land use planning, unlike his home State of Washington, which was not subjected to these dramatic changes in law.

We are making it clear that that is not the authority of FEMA in this bill. That is a reasonable position. It is a bipartisan position. I thank my colleague and my colleagues on the other side of the aisle for their help.

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. HARTZLER), who was very helpful in adding very important language that strengthened this bill.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Mr. Speaker, in August of 2013, the southern portion of my district experienced a major disaster involving heavy flooding, which devastated infrastructure and caused significant hardship to many of my constituents.

Unfortunately, the Federal recovery efforts to this devastated region added insult to injury. Local officials dealt with multiple teams conducting duplicative site visits due to lost paperwork, inconsistent messages between various survey and evaluation teams, and unnecessarily long delays in recovery and reimbursement. Such a response to any disaster is unacceptable, and change is necessary.

Last year I introduced a bill to address the shortcomings of the FEMA response to the 2013 flooding in my district to ensure future disaster recoveries in Missouri and elsewhere are as painless and efficient as possible.

My bill, which is included in this reform package, requires FEMA to create an action plan to address inconsistent guidance, inappropriate recordkeeping procedures, and overall mixed assistance to local officials.

Additionally, it directs FEMA to issue a forward-looking report to identify new technologies that further aid the disaster workforce in partnering with private nonprofits as well as State and local governments in the wake of a disaster or emergency.

FEMA processes need to be streamlined and consistent in order to help those recovering from a disaster feel supported and assured the relief will come in a timely, efficient manner.

I rise today in full support of H.R. 1471, the FEMA Disaster Assistance Reform Act. Making sure Federal agencies have the proper oversight and resources they need is an important function of the U.S. Congress.

This 3-year reauthorization is a shining example of a bipartisan, commonsense effort to make the people get the help and assistance they so desperately need in times of crisis.

I want to thank the sponsor of this bill, Mr. BARLETTA, and the ranking member for including my language in the FEMA reform package.

I encourage my colleagues to vote for H.R. 1471.

Mr. CARSON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. FRANKEL),

my good friend and a member of the committee.

Ms. FRANKEL of Florida. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1471, the FEMA Disaster Assistance Reform Act, and I thank the chairman and ranking member for their fine work.

The bill contains a bipartisan provision which I had the honor of working on with my friend and colleague from Florida, Congressman DAN WEBSTER.

As Floridians, we know hurricanes. In 2004 and 2005, Charley, Frances, Jeanne, Wilma, and Katrina tore through our State, leaving families stranded and property damaged. Trees crashed to the ground, ripping power lines and blocking flooded streets. Water systems were compromised.

Our local governments did a miraculous job cleaning debris from public ways, fixing broken infrastructure, and getting life back to normal. It takes a lot to get this done.

When hurricanes strike, communities are ravaged and so are their budgets. So I want to thank FEMA for the funding assistance it provided Florida at a time of great stress and need.

Now FEMA is asking some of our cities and counties to pay back money that they were given for disaster relief projects that were approved more than 10 years ago.

But here is the thing. There is no question that FEMA should do responsible audits of its relief payments to make sure that money was used properly. But unless there is fraud, the process should not be an endless journey into the Federal bureaucracy.

Our local governments, unlike the Federal Government, have to balance their budgets. They can't afford to wait 5, 10, or an infinite number of years for FEMA to do its assessment, especially when millions of dollars are at stake.

Simply said, the current practice unfairly stymies our local governments' ability to plan their future budgets. This legislation will make sure that the process is more balanced, giving FEMA adequate time to review its grant payments while allowing for financial security to local governments.

I urge my colleagues to support this very good legislation.

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. GRAVES), who spent a lot of time and worked very hard to make this bill better.

Mr. GRAVES of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, the reality, as the gentleman from Indiana noted earlier, is that we are going to have disasters and we are going to spend funds responding to those disasters.

The problem with the United States disaster management policy is that it is backward. It is entirely reactive. Rather than going in before a disaster happens and making areas more resilient, making our ecosystem more resil-

ient, making our economy more resilient, we are dead set on this process of coming in after disasters and spending exponentially more dollars.

The ranking member referenced a few figures a little while ago. He referenced a figure of a CBO study indicating that, for every \$1 we invest in the right type of hazard mitigation, we save \$3 in disaster response cost.

There was another study that FEMA did. For every \$1 we invest, we have \$4 in cost savings. I think, Mr. Speaker, with the right criteria, you actually even save more.

Now, we are challenged as a Nation right now because the agency that is primarily responsible for making our communities more resilient is the U.S. Army Corps Engineers, which, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, is stuck on stupid.

What we have seen over the last several years is, rather than trying to fix that, we have seen other agencies coming up being granting agencies. We have seen FEMA. This year we have seen the Department of the Interior in the President's budget. In the recent years, we have seen HUD.

Rather than fixing the problem, we are just trying to go around it and put more granting agencies out there. It is creating a disparate approach, an approach that is not coordinated and an approach that is going to result in more taxpayers' funds being spent on the wrong projects, the wrong priorities, rather than being proactive. This bill addresses that, Mr. Speaker.

This bill actually includes a provision that has FEMA begin developing a coordinated, proactive approach to how we mitigate or reduce vulnerabilities from disasters.

In the last several years, in my home State of Louisiana, we have seen extraordinary disasters, whether it is Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 or Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in 2008.

We had the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2011. In 2012, we had Hurricane Isaac. In 2011 and again this year, we saw record-high water on the Mississippi River system causing flooding.

We are going to spend dollars. We have got to spend them in the right and principled places.

This bill does a number of things that are important. Number one, it eliminates bureaucracy and helps to streamline the process of getting dollars on the ground to some of our important impacted areas.

We have seen where this bill comes in and it actually changes criteria, where severely impacted local communities, like in Louisiana, where we just saw St. John Parish, Ascension Parish, Livingston Parish, the area of Kenner, and St. James Parish experience extraordinary impacts from tornadoes. Those areas actually could potentially qualify for Federal disaster because of the severe impacts in some of these limited areas.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the ranking member and the chairman for working with us on a

provision that prevents FEMA from being able to move the goalpost on us, being able to come and change conditions after a grant is made that could result in homeowners having to pay back absurd amounts of money when they followed the criteria and followed the commitments when they entered into these grant agreements.

Mr. Speaker, this bill goes a long way. I want to continue working with the leaders of this bill on these zones, on duplication of efforts, and other things. But I will say it again, Mr. Speaker: we are going to spend the money one way or another. We need to spend it in a principled manner.

Mr. CARSON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend my colleagues for passing H.R. 1471, the FEMA Disaster Assistance Reform Act of 2015. This important legislation authorizes appropriations for the Federal Emergency Management Agency for FY2016–FY2018 for management and administration. It also, directs FEMA, through the National Advisory Council, to undertake and report on a comprehensive study of disaster costs and losses.

H.R. 1471 includes provisions that I introduced that extends the authority of FEMA's Administrator to waive debts associated with an overpayment of individual assistance, so long as the overpayment was not a result of fraud.

This issue received national attention when about 30 residents at the Belle Harbor Manor, an assisted living facility in my district, received collection notices related to assistance provided by FEMA in the aftermath of Super Storm Sandy. FEMA's Administrator, Craig Fugate, later cancelled their debts. However, he is limited in canceling the debts of others who are in the exact same situation.

H.R. 1471 fixes this and provides FEMA's Administrator with expanded authority to waive debts of thousands of Super Storm Sandy survivors, as well as the debts incurred as a result of future natural disasters.

I want to thank my colleagues, Representative LOU BARLETTA and Representative PETER DEFAZIO, for their assistance in developing this language. I would also like to thank New York State Assemblyman Phillip Goldfeder for his tireless advocacy on behalf of Super Storm Sandy victims. It is my hope that this measure will receive speedy passage in the Senate so it can be signed by President Obama, and survivors of Super Storm Sandy can finally recover for this horrific act of God.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BARLETTA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1471, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

NUCLEAR ENERGY INNOVATION CAPABILITIES ACT

Mr. WEBER of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the