

Natural Disaster Relief

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Last week provided a deadly reminder about the awesome power of Mother Nature and her ability to instantly uproot homes and disrupt lives. Unfortunately, Floridians constantly receive such reminders - generally in, the form of hurricanes. While the summer of 2006 provided the state and its residents with much need relief from natural disasters, the fact remains, our state has and will continue to endure the wrath of Mother Nature.

As a life long resident of this great state I am well aware of the devastation wrought by hurricanes. For this reason, I have introduced H.R. 913 to provide tax incentives to home and business owners to upgrade and modernize their building in order to reduce the loss of innocent lives and destruction of private property during these disasters.

Specifically, H.R. 913 would allow a tax credit of 25%, not to exceed \$5,000, to cover the following expenditures: 1) improving the strength of the roof attachment; 2) creating a secondary water barrier to prevent water intrusion; 3) improving the durability of a roof covering; 4) bracing gable-end walls; 5) reinforcing the connection between a roof and supporting wall; 6) protecting openings from penetration by windborne debris; and, 7) protecting exterior doors and garages.

In order to ensure that this tax break achieves its goal and targets the neediest of our citizens, the credit would only apply to homes valued at under \$1 million and businesses valued at under \$5 million.

Additionally, I will work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to establish an interstate compact that will allow the states to create a shared disaster relief fund and therefore better manage the financial damages wrought by these acts of nature.

The interstate compact that I am proposing will create a shared fund between states most frequently impacted by natural disasters such as hurricanes. Here in Florida, where insurance rates are spiraling out of control, such a fund is necessary to reign in costs. The interstate compact would reduce insurance rates for everyone by alleviating some of the financial burden that falls squarely on the shoulders of the insurance companies. These savings would then be passed on to consumers through lower insurance rates and premiums. Reducing insurance costs would put more money in Floridians' wallets and make home ownership a reality for more people.

While Florida escaped the last hurricane season unscathed, last week's tornados and thunderstorms were an ominous reminder that Mother Nature can be an unparalleled force of destruction. And with the next hurricane season only a

few months away, the time to act is now.

In addition to working with my colleagues in Congress, I am excited by the possibility of working in conjunction with Governor Crist, who has some interesting ideas to reduce the growing financial strain that the current insurance system places on Floridians. Together, I believe we can reduce insurances costs, put more money in people's wallets, and most importantly, greatly improve the safety of every resident of Florida during a natural disaster.

The author is Rep. Gus Bilirakis from Florida's Ninth District