year, and I am cosponsoring it again this year. But the weakness of a statute is that it can be changed by a simple majority vote. And the only real long-term protection is by a constitutional amendment.

During my 22 years in the Ohio Senate, including several terms as Senate President, I witnessed a tremendous increase in the cost and the number of mandates being forced on the States. When the States originally ceded power to the Federal Government, they could not have envisioned a situation where State law would be so lightly overthrown and where State funds would be subject to Federal raids.

Unfunded mandates permit the Federal Government to avoid responsibility for its actions. They give the Federal Government the power to reorder and to distort State and local budget priorities. States have had to curtail services they feel are priorities because of those mandates. States have had to cut schools. They have had to cut police protection, programs for senior citizens. They have had to cut police protection.

And examples of unfunded mandates are both large and small. For example, the mayor of Columbus, OH, our capital city, has estimated the cost of unfunded mandates for his city as $800 per year for every single individual in the city. In 1993, shortly after I introduced the original amendment, I heard from the fire chief of Van Wert, OH, a small city in my district, complaining about Federal regulations that required him to replace the breathing tanks his men use when they enter smoke-filled areas. Not a single one of the tanks were defective or needed to be replaced, but it cost him $9,500 to replace them.

At the same time he was forced to cut his budget for volunteer firemen. For that $9,500, the chief could have had 20 volunteer firemen instead of having his force cut down to 5.

There is an EPA requirement that sets atrazine limits at three parts per billion in drinking water. That sounds good until you consider that it would cost one city $80 million to comply and will not increase public health or safety at all.

How much water does a person have to drink, based on that standard, to have even a remote chance of having any adverse effect on their health? An individual would have to drink 38 bathtubs full of water every day for the rest of his or her life; and for the same amount of money, that city could have hired 3,700 schoolteachers. What has happened is that Congress has been irresponsibly freeloading on the backs of State and local government.

Congress passes a requirement. It takes the credit. But it refuses to pay the burden for the mandates that are created. State and local governments pay the cost. They get the political blame.

Contrary to what some opponents say, this does not prevent Congress from passing anything on health and safety. It just says, pay for your actions like anybody else. There are some in the Federal Government who have been freeloading and have been irresponsible for so long that they think that freeloading and irresponsibility are virtues.

Now is the time to restore a proper balance in Federal relations. This amendment does not in any way endanger public health or safety. It enhances it by helping assure that public resources are effectively spent and not wasted.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Mr. MINETA] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MINETA. Mr. Speaker, this morning, as billions of people around the world know, the cities of Kobe and Osaka in southern Japan were struck with a devastating 7.2 magnitude earthquake.

As of noon today, Washington time, nearly 1,600 people were known dead, more than 1,000 were missing, and more than 6,000 were injured.

No words are necessary beyond reading that toll to know that the family lives disrupted by this epic tragedy will never heal completely.

And no words are necessary beyond reading this next tally to know that the tremendous physical damage will not soon be repaired:

More than 4,000 buildings were destroyed this morning. Expressway and rail service has either been severed or disrupted in much of western Japan. Power and telecommunications systems have been cut.

These people are now in crisis, and I know that Americans everywhere share in the sadness caused by this tragedy.

We do so because of the suffering involved. And we do so out of a feeling of a deja vu that hits still closer to home.

The sad irony of this earthquake in Japan is that this day also marks the 1-year anniversary of the Northridge Earthquake—a 6.7-magnitude quake which killed 61 people and caused 20 billion dollars' worth of damage in the Los Angeles area.

The lesson we should be learning is that the forces of nature continue to strike at will.

The lesson we should be learning is that in our increasingly developed world, the costs of responding to natural disasters and repairing the damage keeps going up—and that we do not have a bottomless checkbook.

Unless and until we act as a nation to mitigate the potential for damage,

Unless we make it possible to recover from natural disasters with lives and communities more intact than is possible under present law,

We will pay a higher and higher cost in lives lost, in the cost to rebuild, and in the dislocation to our economy and society while we rebuild.

As chair of the House Public Works and Transportation Committee in the last Congress, I can tell you that the 1994 Northridge Earthquake and the 1993 Midwest flooding became cases in point—as did hurricanes Andrew and Iniki, and the Loma Prieta Earthquake in earlier years.

Today, California also suffers from statewide flooding in addition to the Northridge memories of a year ago.

Since last Wednesday, I have spent several days examining the destruction caused by the floods in my State. I have looked at which systems worked, which did not, and how Government agencies and nonprofit voluntary agencies worked to save lives and help communities recover.

These floods reminded me again that we as a nation are not helpless, but that clearly we are not doing all that we can in advance to stave off the human and financial costs of natural disasters.

In the last Congress, the Public Works and Transportation Committee approved legislation—the first of its kind—to get ahead of this particular curve.

This legislation—the Natural Disaster Protection Partnership Act—would create the first public-private partnership to reduce the cost of natural disasters and to keep disaster insurance available and affordable to homeowners so that less of the cleanup and repair cost would be at taxpayer expense.

We would accomplish these two goals in four ways. First, through better preparedness. Second, through spreading out the financial risks, which would lower the costs to homeowners and ensure that coverage would be available.

Third, through better State and local government enforcement of building standards. And fourth, through Federal coordination and required financial backstops to existing insurance pools.

Just about every group affected—from homeowners associations, to consumer advocates, to insurance companies, to emergency service officials—has agreed that the Natural Disaster Protection Partnership Act has the right combination of ideas to end the fear and create greater security, and to do so by putting greater reliance on the private sector.

This is why I was delighted when a bipartisan House task force endorsed the provisions of my bill last month.

If there is any single piece of legislation that cries out for enactment early in this new Congress, it is this one.

Today's earthquake in Japan was another reminder, and warning.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Illinois [Mrs. COLLINS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mrs. COLLINS of Illinois, addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Arkansas [Mrs. LINCOLN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mrs. LINCOLN addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

□1730

RECOMMENDING A FAVORABLE REPORT ON HOUSE RESOLUTION 15

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WELDON). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Missouri [Ms. MCCARTHY] is recognized for 5 minutes.