

Mr. DENHAM. Madam Speaker, the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act will speed up recovery efforts and reduce costs. I want to just touch on one important piece of this legislation. It will allow greater flexibility to reduce rebuilding time and lower costs. This gives the local governments greater flexibility to consolidate or rebuild facilities by allowing FEMA to issue fixed grants on the basis of damage estimates, instead of a traditional reimbursement program.

Why that's important—in my area, in the Central Valley of California, we had huge flooding; and as any emergency, you're not prepared. You didn't anticipate it, especially where we have such a huge shortage of water in the Central Valley.

When the flooding hit, there was a lot of miscommunication and misunderstanding among local, State and Federal Government, who pays for what, a lot of delays and waiting. With these cost estimates up front, we basically just say spend the money on those estimates, and the FEMA money is there immediately.

So we not only help to reduce costs; but most importantly, when you've got a devastated community, what you need is speed of recovery.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. I want to agree with the chairman of the subcommittee about cost estimates and how it saves money and how it is one of the many lessons learned that I think will be acted out in this bill.

Madam Speaker, this bill is a down-payment. We all understand this. We understand that the devastation done in four States, I believe it is, was of a magnitude of what we experienced for the first time at the gulf coast.

We are going to come around, and we're going to do what we're supposed to do at times like this. But when we have a major event like this, it does not pay to simply go along doing things the way we have always done them.

This is when things get corrected. This bill is a good step toward correcting what our committee and our subcommittee have tried to do for years now. I appreciate all the effort of my friends and colleagues on the other side and, of course, Mr. RAHALL and our friends who have also, in a bipartisan fashion, pushed for these changes and now have an opportunity to see how they work in a laboratory that is a very big one indeed, one far larger than we expected, but one from which we will also learn what is yet still to be learned about these major disasters.

Madam Speaker, I have no more speakers, and I am pleased to yield back the remainder of my time.

Mr. DENHAM. Madam Speaker, just in closing, I want to talk about one final example, and it deals with the debris removal. Our bill dealing with debris removal will change, literally saving hundreds of millions of dollars.

Without the change in law, FEMA was able to get a 30-day pilot program.

This is with Sandy, had a 30-day pilot program, where in New Jersey, utilizing the pilot program, they removed debris for \$19 per cubic yard. In Long Island, using the Army Corps of Engineers, it was \$129 per yard. That is a huge significant savings, one that, in the debris removal part of this, the 30-day pilot, it's time for it to move along and become part of law. We need to do this now.

This bill has broad support from a number of different areas, including the National League of Cities, the United States Conference of Mayors, the Association of State Floodplain Managers, the International Association of Emergency Managers, the Disaster Recovery Contractors Association, the National Association of Counties, the United South and Eastern Tribes Incorporation, just to name a few.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would ask for a favorable vote, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. RAHALL. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 219, the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act of 2013. This bipartisan bill would improve how the Federal Government helps state, tribal and local communities respond to and recover from disasters by expediting the delivery of Federal assistance. The provisions will have an immediate impact in helping to expedite recovery in those areas that suffered damage from Hurricane Sandy and will help all communities that may experience future disasters.

We must continue to improve our disaster response programs to ensure that timely assistance is provided to individuals in need. At my request, this bill would require, within one year, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to review and update its criteria for issuing Individual Assistance, in order to clarify the eligibility requirements, expedite the Federal government's decision-making process, and minimize bureaucratic delays.

Last year, the State of West Virginia received four Presidential disaster declarations, the last two in response to Hurricane Sandy and Derecho Storms. In both cases, West Virginians had to endure extended and widespread power outages, lasting weeks in some cases, as well as physical damage to their homes and businesses. The emotional trauma was severe with some areas were literally cut off from basic necessities like food, water, and medicine. These disasters proved costly and expensive and dwarfed the limited means of individuals, many of them seniors on fixed incomes who have been pummeled by multiple storms, to absorb uninsured costs on their own.

In both cases, FEMA denied my State's initial request for Individual Assistance, forcing the State to redo its damage assessments and appeal FEMA's decision. FEMA later reversed itself and awarded Individual Assistance to some, but not all, of the requesting West Virginia counties in regard to the Derecho Storm; so far, the appeal related to Sandy is still pending.

These delays leave uninsured disaster victims in limbo for weeks, unable to begin home repairs because they do not know what costs are reimbursable. State emergency officials need better guidance from FEMA about eligi-

bility criteria for Individual Assistance, so that these delays can be avoided. Similarly, the criteria must be flexible enough to ensure that the Individual Assistance program accomplishes what it was created to do, which is to make financial assistance for uninsured losses available to families and individuals unable to recover on their own.

Another important provision of this bill is one that recognizes tribal sovereignty by authorizing all federally recognized Indian tribes to directly request that the President declare a disaster or emergency. This provision is based on a bill, H.R. 1953, that I introduced last Congress after consulting with Indian country and Indian organizations. It would treat all federally recognized Indian tribes as the sovereign governments that they are and creates a mechanism that affords all tribes the option to request a disaster declaration when a State in which they are located fails to do so.

This important measure is necessary because current law limits FEMA's ability to work directly with all Indian tribes when major disasters or emergency situations occurred. This language would improve federal emergency response and recovery efforts on Indian reservations and would amend the Stafford Act to align with the Federal Government's trust responsibilities. For more than a decade, tribal governments have sought this authorization to work directly with FEMA on emergency and disaster declarations from the President. My bill, and this provision, is supported by Indian Country and the Administration without qualification.

I appreciate the manner in which this bipartisan bill was developed and look forward to working with my Republican colleagues on other issues in a similar manner.

I urge my colleagues to support this measure.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. DENHAM) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 219.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 6:30 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 5 o'clock and 30 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1830

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. EMERSON) at 6 o'clock and 30 minutes p.m.