



Congresswoman Lois Capps

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Congresswoman Capps Introduces Legislation to Help Local Communities Prevent and Prepare for Natural Disasters

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Lois Capps today introduced a bill that would provide up to \$200 million a year for local communities that want to prepare for potential natural disasters.

The Disaster Preparation and Local Action Now (Disaster PLAN) Act would reauthorize a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant program that provides funding for states and local governments to protect themselves from the devastating effects of natural disasters – earthquakes, tsunamis, tornadoes, hurricanes, flooding and wildfires. This measure would help local communities identify and assess risks from natural disasters and put measures in place to reduce damage.

This program is modeled on Project Impact: Building Disaster Resistant Communities, which locally helped Santa Barbara residents clear brush from public areas in Mission Canyon, minimizing the risk of wildfires spreading to nearby homes, as well as plan to evacuate vulnerable residents during a wildfire.

Additionally, Santa Barbara used its two-year, \$500,000 grant to mitigate seismic hazards, develop educational videos and use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to predict the potential spread of fire, flood or chemical disasters.

Project Impact (PI) was a successful nationwide program that helped communities become more resistant to natural disasters through public-private partnerships. PI based its work on three important principles: preventative actions must be decided at the local level, private sector participation is vital, and long-term effects and investments in prevention measures is essential.

“Pre-disaster management worked well in a FEMA that worked well,” Congresswoman Capps said. “Hurricane Katrina and its tragic aftermath highlighted the need for communities to prepare for disaster and protect themselves against the worst of nature. This will help communities work with federal and business partners to save public services and to save lives.”

For example, Seattle used Project Impact funding, coupled with funding from a public-private partnership, to make buildings earthquake-proof. Those buildings continued to stand, and public services continued to operate after a substantial earthquake in 2001.

Seattle was one of the original seven Project Impact Communities, which expanded to nearly 250 communities and 2,500 business partners before the Bush Administration zeroed out funding for the successful program.

“Under Project Impact, dollars were well spent,” Capps said. “Being prepared for any type of disaster saves lives, homes, jobs and communities.”

In 2001, Capps wrote to President Bush asking him to reinstate funding for Project Impact. Additionally, an amendment on the House floor to reinstate funding was defeated.

Now that FEMA is under the control of the Department of Homeland Security, a competitive grant program forces communities to wade through levels of bureaucracy and compete against other communities for funding. At this point, only 5 percent of available federal funding is actually making it to communities and the program is scheduled to expire at the end in three months.

“Together we can help build disaster resilient communities,” Capps said. “The Disaster PLAN Act could help prevent the horrors we’ve seen in the wake of Hurricane Katrina by empowering communities to protect themselves.”

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