have preprinted their amendments in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, and finally, the rule provides one motion to recommit, with or without instructions. This is an otherwise wonderful rule that should certainly engender no controversy, and deserves, I believe, the support of the full House.

H.R. 707, which this carries, is the straightforward commonsense solution to a very real problem that impacts folks in my district and, of course, throughout the country as well.

□ 1045

The problem we are facing is not a new one: How to improve the way we plan for and deliver assistance to communities that have the misfortune to be hit by natural disasters.

I commend the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. FOWLER), my Florida colleague, for her leadership on this important issue and for the substantive, bipartisan work product which she has delivered.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 707 improves the process by outlining seven specific, objective criteria for awarding grants and by requiring mitigation projects to be cost-effective. H.R. 707 increases the role of the State and local governments in the short term and requires FEMA to develop a process for delegating a greater portion of the hazard mitigation piece to the States after fiscal year 2000.

Having witnessed a number of natural disasters, regrettably in my own district and elsewhere, I know that hazard mitigation is best accomplished at the local level, where people tie down their roofs and board up their windows. This bill clearly moves in that direction.

This is a sound approach that will help our constituents at every stage of the process. Our communities will be better prepared for disasters and, when one hits, the process to receive assistance will be streamlined and more efficient. I know that will be welcomed news.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 707 complements an effort that the Committee on Rules has been working on in conjunction with the Committee on the Budget to fix our broken budget process. One of the pillars of our bill, the Comprehensive Budget Process Reform Act, is the creation of a reserve fund to budget up front for emergencies, an initiative long championed by the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE), the former governor of Delaware.

H.R. 707 enjoys the support of several major organizations, including many at the front lines such as the American Red Cross and the National League of Cities. In fact, the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. FOWLER) has been working closely with the administration and has incorporated a number of recommendations from them in this package. As a result, FEMA is also supporting H.R. 707.

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that effective mitigation saves lives and money. H.R. 707 is a good bipartisan bill that is long overdue. I encourage my colleagues to support this open, fair rule, as well as the underlying bill.

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

Mr. MOAKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Sanibel, Florida (Mr. GOSS) for yielding me the customary half-hour, and I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, in the last 5 years, natural disasters have killed over 800 people in the United States. In addition to costing people their lives, these disasters cost $60 billion in property loss and other damage.

But this open rule provides for the consideration of the bill which will help minimize the loss of life and property due to fires, floods, hurricanes earthquakes and tornadoes.

Mr. Speaker, it will enable Federal, State, and local governments to take steps to prepare for disasters before they happen in order to minimize the injuries or damage caused by these natural disasters.

This bill will help people. It will create firebreaks to stop the spread of wildfires, it will help build emergency generators to provide electricity during hurricanes, it will strengthen water towers and retrofit overpasses to slow the impact of earthquakes, and it will seal manhole covers in case of floods.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will also enable the President to help people who do not have disaster insurance make emergency repairs to their homes in a timely fashion.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, last year was one of the deadliest hurricane seasons in more than 200 years, killing about 10,000 people in eight countries and causing billions and billions of dollars in damage. Experts predict that this year will even be worse, particularly in the Atlantic basin.

Mr. Speaker, this June we had horrible flooding in my home State of Massachusetts. The damage was so bad that President Clinton declared seven Massachusetts counties disaster areas. Thousands upon thousands of people applied for recovery assistance to repair the damage, most of which was caused by surge backup and overflows. Mr. Speaker, we all know that kind of damage is not always covered by property insurance and people usually learn about it just a little too late. This bill will help those people.

This bill is also based on the idea that if we prepare for disasters now, we will save people's lives and people's property later.

Conservative estimates are that this bill will save $109 million over the first 5 years; and that is assuming that a dollar spent before disaster is only worth a dollar after disaster. And, Mr. Speaker, most people say the numbers are even greater, that every dollar spent now saves $3 later. Mr. Speaker, either way, this bill will pay for itself and then some.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill and support this open rule. It is supported by the American Red Cross, the National Emergency Management Association, and it will make a big difference in people's lives when they need it most.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the honorable gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TRAFICANT).

Mr. TRAFICANT. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the rule and the bill, but I want to talk a little bit about an amendment I am going to offer because it is not done yet, so I am going to belabor the point for about a minute. It is a ''Buy American'' amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if my colleagues noticed this past week they sent around these television remotes. They are like yellow toys. They are squeezey, real soft. They look like Teletubby toys. They are yellow. And when we look at them, everybody just says, look at this, the telecommunications industry is lobbying the Congress of the United States. What a way to get our attention.

Then if one turns it over on the other side and looks at the back and looks down at the bottom, it is made in China. I know everybody laughs about this, and we argue about flies on our face. I think we have got a dragon eating our assets.

But here is what I want to talk about. I think it is time to look at Buy American laws and to enforce what Buy American laws are on the books. From Teletubbies to remotes lobbying the Congress, the labels now read ''Made for U.S.A.'' And if we look at it, on first glance we think it is made in the U.S.A. But we need the Hubble telescope to look at it further, and it says ''Made for U.S.A.'' in big print, and down in microscopic print it says ''Made in China.'' Come on, now, I think we even have to toughen these laws up.

Mr. Speaker, I am going have a little amendment. I congratulate the gentlewoman from Florida (Chairman FOWLER) on her very first bill. She is, in fact, making sure there will be enough money in this bill with her amendment, and we on this side support her and her amendment. I notified my colleagues of my amendment, and I hope it has time to get here.

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

Mr. GOSS. Mr. Speaker, we have no requests for time at this point. I only urge that Members support this fair, open rule.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I was inadvertently detained and unable to

vote on rollcall vote No. 32, the ''Death on the High Seas Act.'' Had I been here, I obviously would have voted ''aye.''

DISASTER MITIGATION AND COST REDUCTION ACT OF 1999

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GOSS). Pursuant to House Resolution 91 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 707.

□ 1055

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 707) to amend the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to authorize a program for predisaster mitigation, to streamline the administration of disaster relief, to control the Federal costs of disaster assistance, and for other purposes, with Mr. HEFLEY in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered as having been read the first time.

Under the rule, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER).

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of this legislation.

The bill addresses two separate needs: increasing the predisaster hazard mitigation activities, as well as reducing the costs of providing post-disaster assistance. It establishes a federally funded predisaster hazard mitigation program, and it authorizes $105 million over 2 years for helping fund a cost-effective hazard mitigation activity.

In addition, the bill increases the authorization for post-disaster mitigation funding by 33 percent. It also adopts measures that would modify and streamline the current post-disaster assistance program with the intention of reducing Federal disaster assistance costs without adversely affecting disaster victims.

There are two primary ways to reduce the costs of a natural disaster. One is to take measures that reduce our Nation's vulnerability to hazards, and the other is to make current disaster programs more efficient. The bill does both.

This legislation is sponsored by Members on both sides of the aisle and is supported by groups such as the American Red Cross, the National League of Cities, the National Emergency Management Association and the Association of State Floodplain Managers.

Mr. Chairman, I certainly congratulate the gentlewoman from Florida (Chairman FOWLER) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TRAFICANT), subcommittee ranking minority member, for their work on this legislation, as well as the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BORSKI) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOEHLERT). I also want to thank the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), ranking minority member of the full committee, for his support.

Mr. Chairman, one final point, I want to emphasize my strong support for the outstanding job that FEMA is doing. Years ago, FEMA itself was a disaster in many respects. But under the leadership of James Lee Witt and others at FEMA, they are actually, in my judgment, doing an outstanding job; and I think the American people should know that.

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

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TRAFICANT) will control the time allotted to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR).

There was no objection.

Mr. TRAFICANT. Mr. Chairman, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), ranking Democrat on this side. And if we left the Social Security issue up to the gentleman from Minnesota and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER), we would have less arguments and more results.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of H.R. 707, the Disaster Mitigation and Cost Reduction Act of 1999. I greatly appreciate the initiative that the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Chairman SHUSTER) has demonstrated in moving this bill so quickly through subcommittee, full committee, and to the floor.

I congratulate the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOEHLERT), chairman of the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, as well as the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BORSKI), the ranking member on that subcommittee. This bill was heard in their subcommittee in the last Congress. The bill has been reshaped and heard in a new subcommittee in this Congress, and I again commend the gentlewoman from Florida (Chairman FOWLER) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TRAFICANT), ranking member, for their strong commitment to moving the legislation forward and doing so very quickly.

Mr. Chairman, there are two main elements that we are dealing with in this legislation: a predisaster mitigation program and streamlining of existing disaster assistance programs under the Stafford Act.

I think this legislation has great potential to improve Federal, local and State government response to disasters, reduce the cost of those responses and do a better job for the victims of disasters.

The cost of the Federal, State, and local response to disaster has been going up incrementally and, in the last few years, almost explosively with the number of disasters and the greater intensity of disasters that we are seeing.

□ 1100

As the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Chairman SHUSTER) said at one time, FEMA's response to these tragedies was in itself a disaster. As chair of the oversight committee in the mid 1980s, I held hearings on the terrible response of FEMA and of a plan, then, that would have shifted unacceptable cost levels on local government as a result of disasters.

Together with our colleagues on the Republican side, we stopped that plan and reshaped the whole Federal Disaster Assistance Program, which has continued to be managed in an increasingly better fashion.

But in 1989, outlays, principally as a result of Hurricane Hugo were $1.2 billion for disaster relief. That was a milestone. That was the first time the Federal Government had paid out for a single tragedy over $1 billion.

Well, not this year, but in succeeding years, we have been in excess of a $1 billion every year outlay for disasters. In 1994, it hit $5.4 billion for one year. Last year, it dropped a little bit to $2 billion. But still, those are extremely high numbers.

When we take a careful look at the circumstances, the geography, the local conditions, we find recurring patterns. A very significant portion of what we are paying for disaster relief is for people, properties that have sustained prior losses that have not taken action to protect themselves against these acts of nature.

What this bill does is it moves us in the direction of not continuing to pay over and over again for the same losses to the same people in the same geographic areas for which we have previously paid for losses.

We should not continue to shower Federal dollars and local and State dollars on people who insist on remaining in harm's way without taking preventative measures. An old adage, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, applies to this kind of Federal program as well.

Experience under section 404 of the Stafford Act provides for postdisaster mitigation, and it clearly shows that mitigation is an effective way to limit future damages; that is, postdisaster, after tragedy has struck, take some actions to protect yourself against the next one.

It is a good initiative. We are strengthening that response in this legislation. But it is not enough. We need to go further, as we learned from the history of these various kinds of tragedies and disasters that strike various parts of our country.

The predisaster mitigation program focuses on local government initiatives, private sector participation, and leveraging of private sector participation. After all, we continue to reimburse people and businesses who are in