Mr. BLUMENAUER. Madam Speaker, my priority in Congress is for the Federal Government to be a better partner in promoting livable communities, to make our families safe, healthy, and economically secure. A critical element in a livable community is making sure that we can deal with the natural disasters: floods, fire, earthquakes, and storms.

Every year natural disasters cost billions of dollars and kill and injure Americans all across this great Nation. Every year the Federal Government is there to help unfortunate victims and their States and local governments in the recovery and repair. In the last 8 years alone, the United States has suffered more than 850 people dying in floods, and the property damage has totaled almost $90 billion. The total expenditure for disaster relief, including FEMA and insured losses, has been more than $150 billion in the last 20 years.

There are two ways that we can help: we can be dealing after the fact, dealing with the unfortunate victims and the damage that has been brought; or we can work to deal before disaster occurs to minimize damage and perhaps even prevent it all together.

I note two important provisions in the administration's recent budget submission: one is the reform of the Federal flood insurance program. This is a high priority for me. It is long overdue. The gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BEREUTER) and I have introduced legislation in the last Congress that two floods and you are out of the taxpayer pocket bill to stop the Federal Government subsidizing people who live in areas that God has repeatedly shown that he does not want them. There is one home in suburban Houston that has suffered over $800,000 of loss over the last 20 years, 16 occasions, a home that is only worth, they tell us, $115,000.

Our legislation would allow people to use this money to relocate out of harm's way or to flood-proof their property. But if they do not, then they will be required to foot the bill themselves, not the U.S. taxpayer. We have seen dramatic examples of what this sort of proactive activity can do. The Arnold, Missouri, flood damage in 1993 was over $2 million; but after work in flood-proofing the community, moving people out of harm's way, the 1995 flood, which was much larger, had only $40,000 in damage.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased with the recognition the administration has for our legislation, but I have serious reservations about another proposal which would eliminate Project Impact. This is a Federal program that is not a grant, but instead provides seed money to help the

people themselves build disaster resistant communities, to develop the partnerships and upfront investment needed to make sure that people do not suffer these horrible losses.

Madam Speaker, I was impressed this last fall to be able to address a conference of over 2,000 participants, partners all across the country in these partnerships. There are now 250 Project Impact communities and over 2,500 business partners alone, including NASA and four NASCAR race drivers. It is important for us to nurture this type of partnership, not to turn our back on it.

Project Impact and flood insurance reform are two important ways that the Federal Government can be a better partner to promote livable communities and to make our families safer, healthier, and more economically secure.