

Letter to the Editor

The Washington Post

Regarding the Oct. 29 news story "In Fires' Ruins, Lessons in Prevention":

For the 20th time since 1996, Congress is coming to the aid of disaster-stricken Americans with massive relief dollars. Certainly, it is right that the federal government help, and our hearts go out to those who lost their homes.

Since coming to Congress, I've focused on using federal government assistance to reduce the devastation caused by natural disasters. Are we doing people any favors when we repeatedly put them back in harm's way? Sadly, a big reason we have to provide disaster assistance year after year is that we continue to ignore the causes of these problems.

There are simple steps we can take to reduce risks. First, government needs to focus on ways to prevent disasters.

We should also reconsider the granting of government benefits to people who choose to locate in hazardous areas. Should we continue to allow development in flood and fire zones?

Most important, we need to change federal budget rules that allow billions of dollars to be spent on emergency disaster relief but limit spending on prevention.

One hopes that this latest disaster will help bring about some significant changes at all levels of government.

EARL BLUMENAUER

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Washington