

A STRONG Act for a Stronger America

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Written by [Jason Hartke](#) , [Jason Hartke](#)

Posted in [Advocacy and policy](#)

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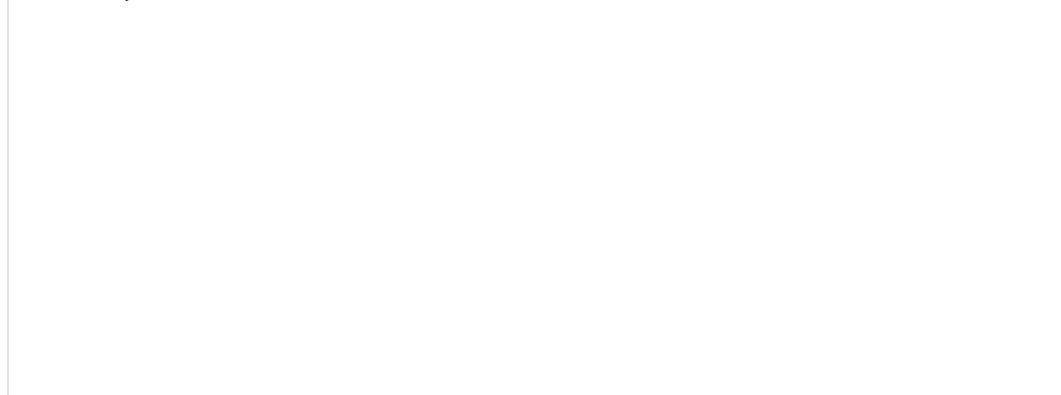
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Sen. John Kerry. Photo credit: cliff1066™ via Flickr



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Most pieces of legislation start with a series of customary “findings.” But the findings section of the [Strengthening The Resiliency of Our Nation on the Ground \(STRONG\) Act of 2012](#) reads like a biblical warning.

It points out that:

- There have been 130 separate billion-dollar-plus disasters in the U.S. in the past 30 years (14 in 2011 alone).
- Hurricane Sandy led to more than 100 deaths and is projected to have caused more than \$50 billion in damages, affecting more than 8.5 million homes.
- Hurricane Katrina led to more than 1,800 deaths and \$80 billion-plus in losses and a subsequent \$120 billion in federal spending.
- 2011 was the worst year on record for damages from natural disasters.
- Extreme weather has hit every region in the U.S. this year.

Interpreting these findings is simple. The strength and resiliency of our country is at risk, and our increasing vulnerability is more and more exposed each year. We have to do something. And the STRONG Act, introduced today by Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), is a historic starting point for our nation and our communities.

“By building stronger communities, we can reduce the serious economic and human costs of extreme weather over the short and long term,” reads the bill’s summary. “For every \$1 spent now on disaster preparedness and resilience-building, we can avoid at least \$4 in future losses.”

For the first time, thanks to Kerry’s leadership and co-sponsors Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) and Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), we have legislation that would coordinate, unite and maximize government resources, efforts and funding to help America better advance its disaster preparedness plans.

“Hurricanes, flooding, drought and other extreme weather take an immense toll on communities, homeowners, the local economy, and our first responders. ... This bill can help save lives and reduce the serious economic impact,” Kerry said.

Specifically, the bill offers new ways to better support state and local governments, as well as the American public, in their short- and long-term preparedness efforts. For example, an interagency working group will develop an extreme-weather resiliency action plan to support state, local and private-sector resiliency efforts and identify innovative financing opportunities to implement these plans.

“We firmly support Sen. Kerry’s visionary STRONG Act because it sets down a critical marker to ensure we build up our resiliency to natural disasters, taking action now to save lives and money later,” said Roger Platt, senior vice president of global policy and law at the U.S. Green Building Council.

For the better part of this year, I have been working with Kerry and his staff to ensure the bill effectively addresses opportunities to increase resiliency in the built environment. We are pleased that “housing and other buildings” is one of the key sectors called out in the legislation. In the long term, we need to think about how we establish resiliency in our communities.

I’ve proffered that Congress consider creating a U.S. Resiliency Institute, an independent, nonpartisan center that would provide an enduring institutional foundation for how our nation plans for disasters and prepares for changing temperatures, stronger storms, longer droughts and increased flooding. A U.S. Resiliency Institute would establish a technical and analytical center of gravity across government, helping us better prepare for the circumstances of tomorrow and be more able to bounce back when these tragic events do occur.

In addition, for over two years, we’ve led a national series to discuss what it means to be [resilient and secure](#) in the 21st century. Our [last event](#) featured three local leaders who are taking it upon themselves to chart a road to resilience and doing what it takes to forge a community built to last. With the STRONG Act, mayors and other local leaders will have a much stronger federal partner in these efforts.

But whether it’s a homebuilder or a policymaker, we’re now all asking the same question: How do we prepare for these disasters and prevent the tragic loss, damage and death that they invariably cause?

Passing the STRONG Act will be a critical part of the answer.

See Jason’s other [Resiliency blog posts](#) on USGBC.org.

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