

Opening Statement of Rep. Rush Holt
EMR Legislative Hearing
December 13, 2011

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Today the Subcommittee is considering two bills. H.R. 3749, the Natural Hazards Risk Reduction Act of 2011 would, in part, reauthorize the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program. This important program allows the federal government to assess and monitor earthquake hazards and risk in the United States. Under this program, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) coordinate their efforts to monitor risk.

Nearly 75 million people in 39 states face some risk from earthquakes. Just this summer, a magnitude 5.8 earthquake near Mineral, Virginia had impacts felt up and down the East Coast, including here in Washington and forced the emergency shutdown of the North Anna nuclear power plant in Virginia.

The Virginia earthquake this summer and the meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan following the earthquake and tsunami in March highlight the risks of seismic events. However, the legislation we are considering today to reauthorize this important Earthquake monitoring and research program would reduce by more than \$30 million dollars, the funding level for the USGS – a cut of nearly 35 percent.

That funding level would prevent or delay a number of important programs. For instance, it would prevent the completion of the Advanced National Seismic System in the next five years, the goal of which is to deploy better and more comprehensive monitoring technologies on seismic events, including their effects on buildings and structures. That program is helping modernize and upgrade our infrastructure in order to better understand and respond to risks.

We have tough budgetary decisions to make as we try to get our fiscal house in order. But given the risks earthquakes pose, I have serious concerns that reauthorizing the earthquakes hazard program at the level proposed in this bill could reduce research and monitoring of earthquakes and potentially lead to greater costs to taxpayers down the road.

In addition, today we are considering legislation, H.R. 1252, which deals with the abandoned Three Kids Mines in Nevada. The roughly 1,260 acre Three Kids Mine site is an abandoned manganese mine and mill near Las Vegas. The abandoned mine today has open mine pits and significant volumes of mine overburden and toxic manganese tailings containing arsenic, lead, and diesel fuel, which the BLM has said pose significant risks to public health, safety and the environment. According to the Bureau of Land Management, costs of remediating and reclaiming this abandoned mine site are estimated to be between \$300 million and \$1.3 billion..

H.R. 1252 would direct the BLM to convey the federal portions of the Three Kids Mine site to the Redevelopment Agency of the city of Henderson, Nevada and require the Redevelopment Agency to remediate and reclaim the site. The

legislation would also release the United States from all liability relating to the Three Kids Mine site under environmental laws such as the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) or the Clean Water Act.

I support the goals of H.R. 1252 to clean up this toxic abandoned mine site. However, because of the potentially large and still uncertain costs associated with remediating this land, we need answers to questions about whether there will be sufficient funds available to complete the cleanup, and who would bear the costs should the cleanup be abandoned for any reason in the future.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on these pieces of legislation.