

Just in time for the start of the 2011 hurricane season, two Florida Republicans in Congress -- Tom Rooney and Allen West -- joined up Thursday to introduce three measures to help Americans impacted by natural disasters.

Rooney and West, along with U.S. Reps. Jo Bonner, R-Ala., and Bernie Thompson, D-Miss., introduced what they have dubbed the Natural Disaster Mitigation Act. The proposal would provide a tax credit of up to \$5,000 for homeowners who make improvements on their property to prevent damage from earthquakes, hurricanes and other natural disasters.

"Mitigation must be a priority," said Rooney. "Too many families and homes remain unnecessarily vulnerable to natural disasters like hurricanes. While mitigation will never eliminate the risk to homeowners, it could reduce loss and, in many cases, save a family's home.

"For every \$1 spent on mitigation, \$4 in post storm cleanup and rebuilding is saved," said Rooney. "These tax credits would provide an important incentive for families to proactively protect their homes from natural disasters."

Rooney and West also reintroduced a proposal setting up tax-deferred reserve accounts for insurance companies in order to combat losses from future disasters. Under existing law, insurers can only hold funds in reserve for losses already incurred.

"Floridians have seen their insurance premiums skyrocket in recent years because of the threat of natural disasters," said Rooney. "Allowing insurance companies to save for future losses and take proactive measures to protect policyholders would prevent companies from having to increase premiums after losses occur. This legislation would help keep insurance rates under control."

Rooney also is looking to create tax-exempt savings accounts for individuals and families to stow money away and use in case of a natural disaster. The proposed Catastrophe Savings Accounts Act would allow people to stow money without paying taxes until they paid expenses resulting from major disasters. Under the proposal, the only major disaster areas covered would be declared by the president.

"As Floridians know all too well, when a hurricane or other disaster strikes, the costs can be enormous, even if you have insurance," said Rooney. "Tax-exempt catastrophe savings accounts would allow people to put away a little money each month, before taxes, and save it for when disaster strikes."