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NEWS RELEASE

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RECORD \$50 MILLION IN SEISMIC SAFETY GRANTS FOR SCHOOLS AWARDED

Courtney Says Work to Protect Students Far From Complete

(SALEM) – Oregon has taken a big step toward making more school children safe in an earthquake, but a lot of work remains, Senate President Peter Courtney said Thursday.

“Today is a record-setting day, but we’re not finished. We’re not even close. Too many schools remain unsafe. Too many children remain at risk,” Courtney said.

Courtney’s comments followed Business Oregon’s announcement that it will award \$50.3 million in grants to make seismic safety upgrades at 41 schools across Oregon. An even larger second round of grant awards is planned for later this year. In the six previous years since the Legislature first funded the seismic program, a total of \$34 million in grants have been awarded to fund upgrades at 37 schools.

The Senate President will hold a news conference to discuss the need for continued funding for the grant program at 1 p.m. Thursday at Highland Elementary School in Salem.

In the 2015 session, the Oregon Legislature approved the sale of \$175 million in bonds to fund seismic safety grants for schools. Business Oregon received 107 grant applications seeking \$123.3 million in the first round. Unfunded applications will be rolled over into the second round – expected to total \$125 million – and considered with new applications which will be accepted over the summer.

Courtney said the large number of applications shows the need for the Legislature to continue to fund the grant program at a high level. The Senate President said he will ask lawmakers to approve \$200 million for the program during the 2017 session.

A 2007 survey conducted by the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries listed more than 1,000 school buildings in Oregon at high or very high risk of collapse in a major earthquake.

So many of Oregon's schools are at risk because until the early 1990's, geologists did not consider Oregon a likely site for major earthquake activity and buildings weren't constructed in a manner to survive earthquakes. The discovery of the Cascadia Subduction Zone off the Oregon Coast changed that perception.

Seismologists now conclude that a major earthquake has taken place off the Oregon Coast an average of every 300 years for the past 10,000 years. The last such quake took place in January 1700.

"We've made more progress today than we made in the last decade, but we're on borrowed time," Courtney said. "We can't lose our momentum."

A list of the most recently awarded grants is attached.