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NEWS RELEASE

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SENATE PRESIDENT SAYS FAILURE TO COMPLETE CAPITOL SEISMIC SAFETY PROJECT 'DEVASTATING LOSS FOR OREGON

Statement by Senate President Peter Courtney

“The decision to not include seismic safety improvements and renovations to the Capitol in the bonding package is a devastating loss. It’s a loss for science. It’s a loss for a decade-long public process. It’s a loss for this Legislature. It’s a loss for Oregon and her people... especially her children.

“It’s not my style to hold up the session over one issue – even one as important as this.

“Over the last 25 years, geologists, seismologists and geo-technical engineers have told us in the plainest possible terms that a major earthquake is coming. We are not prepared. They have told us over and over that the Capitol is unstable and will collapse.

“A study following the 1993 quake that damaged the Capitol said we needed to make seismic upgrades. The 2006 Public Commission on the Oregon Legislature said we needed to make the Capitol safe. The 2009 Capitol Master Plan repeated those warnings. The bicameral and bipartisan 2013 Master Plan Review Committee drew up the plans and unanimously said now was the time to act.

“The Capitol is the one building for which the Oregon Legislature is solely responsible. We know the plumbing and electrical systems are inadequate. They’re a health hazard. Most of the Capitol doesn’t have sprinklers for fire safety. The stairways are inadequate for emergency egress from the third and fourth floors. She is not truly handicapped accessible. Her 1938 design is inefficient in our 21st century world. She’s not well. She needs help.

“Two years ago, the House and Senate together began the final engineering and design process on the seismic upgrades as well as the other needs of this great building. We worked together every step of the way on the planning and preparation. We took votes in committee. We took votes on the House and the Senate floors.

“We chose the former PUC Building as the site for the temporary capitol. We hired a project manager together. We spent \$25 million. The decision not to move forward means that project manager is gone. The temporary site is gone. All the prep work is gone. The money spent is gone. The engineers and architects working out of an office on the third floor of the Capitol will be sent home. The office and the project will be shut down.

“Should legislators in the future decide to do what we have failed to do, they will have to start over. To get back to the point where we are today will cost at least another \$25 million. With every session that passes, the cost to make the Capitol safe, healthy and functional will increase.

“Each year more than 235,000 visitors come to the Capitol, including more than 20,000 school children. They come from all over the state. In the month of May, students flocked to the Capitol from Beaverton and Coos Bay; Canby and Keizer; and Portland and Eugene. They came from as near as Salem and Dallas and as far away as La Grande and Lakeview.

“Hundreds of people work in the Capitol year-round. Each day during the Legislative session more than 1,000 people fill its offices, halls and committee rooms. All will continue to be unnecessarily at risk.

“When the Magnitude 9 quake hits, the loss of life and property across our state will be tremendous. The decision not to complete this project ensures that those losses will include the Oregon State Capitol and the people inside it.”