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## **Seismic upgrading of schools a key issue**

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A recent letter from A.W. Chang asserts that the \$1.5 billion the province plans to spend on seismically upgrading high-risk schools could be better spent (Quakeproofing schools ignores higher risks, Nov. 12.)

We have been involved over the past decade, as engineers and contractors, in preparing the provincial infrastructure for the next large earthquake in our heavily populated regions.

We worked to upgrade the nonstructural components, primarily in hospitals, but also in a few schools. A great deal of work remains to be done before critical structures are prepared and meet the requirements of the building code.

Chang's assertion that the old schools should be replaced with seismically resilient new ones sounds reasonable, except that many of the 300 schools at risk are not old and are still within their designed service life. Further, it would take far more than \$1.5 billion to replace all the schools at risk.

The fact that our children spend only a portion of their time at school does not relieve society of the responsibility to make those buildings safe during an earthquake. Most schools are occupied 12 to 15 hours a day for various activities.

The issue that many people's homes are not properly prepared should strengthen our resolve to do a better job there, rather than weaken our determination to protect schools.

Our schools are designated as emergency reception centres during post-disaster periods. Thousands of people are still sleeping in schools following the recent Ojiya earthquake in Japan.

The fact that few school children have been killed in recent earthquakes is pure luck.

The strong quakes which occurred in recent years (with the exception of San Giuliano de Puglia, Italy, 2002) were triggered during times when schools were not occupied.

Let's hope that British Columbia will not be the region to counter that lucky record.

The provincial government is to be commended for launching this important program.

Parents will likely feel more secure when they see a schedule for when their children's school will be upgraded.

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