

Gov't can help make schools safer

To the editor:

Families for School Seismic Safety (FSSS) wishes to thank Naoibh O'Connor and the Courier for such excellent in-depth coverage of the school seismic issue ("Schools get quake study money," Dec. 17).

An important first step towards solving this issue was taken by new federal Minister of Public Works and Government Services Stephen Owen. He anticipates that his previous Ministry of Western Diversification will release money in January for research at UBC to define a standardized "performance-based" approach to seismic retrofitting of schools. The completion of this three-to-six-month project should clear the way to a much more rapid and cost-effective approach to the upgrading of schools in a more scientific and objective manner.

Using current methods and funding commitments, school retrofits could take 60 years to complete and cost billions.

The work would not be completed until our children's grandchildren are in school. With a new approach, the work could be completed before this generation leaves the system, for much less money than was previously thought.

Minister Owen has made it clear that his new ministry will also be part of the solution to this problem.

He has stated his willingness to champion the seismic issue at all levels of government and will be taking the matter up with Emergency Preparedness Minister Anne McLellan and Infrastructure Minister Andy Scott.

He has also made it clear that the new Martin government sees this issue as a priority and as one that should see all three levels of government working together. As a public, we must hold them to this.

FSSS hopes the provincial government will seize the opportunity to join in an innovative new partnership with the federal government to make the children of the province safer, faster. The province received this proposal at the same time as the feds and has yet to comment. We hope our mayor and council will also help us by strongly advocating for the safety of our children to senior levels of government.

Many concerned parents and families across the city and province are working very hard on this issue. The biggest part of the job is still ahead of us, though-securing the millions of dollars from our federal and provincial governments to complete the necessary seismic upgrade work in the next 10 to 15 years.

What building could be more important to our community than a school? Who could be

more important than our children?

Dr. Tracy Monk, Eugene Hodgson, Nathan Lusignan,
Families for School Seismic Safety