prehensive quake info a must

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syndicated columnist covering California issue

who has seen the epicenter of a major earthquake within days of its hitting knows that Californi
ntific priorities have lately been seriously skewed

t these recent events together: First, the state Legislature passes and Gov. Jerry Brown signs a ne
e development of a comprehensive statewide earthquake early warning system.Estimated initial
80 million

es a report detailing how the state's effort to map all of its significant earthquake faults has slo
o a stop. This began just after the 1971 Sylmar temblor, which destroyed a veterans hospita, ame
ngs. That quake occurred on a fault no one previously knew existed and for 20 years mapping w
with 534 maps published detailing active faults

e 1991, reports the Los Angeles Times, just 23 more maps have been drawn,none between 2004
cause of budget cuts. About 300 more faults must be mapped

rd arrives that a mult-campus team of University of California scientists funded by the National
Foundation has identified about 1,500 of the most apparently quake-vulnerable buildings in Los
, using public records and a walking survey

is, the academics won't give their list to the mayor so he can start doing something about it. Bec
't be sure all buildings on their list are really at risk, the scientists fear they could face lawsuits fr
owners if they finger structures that are actually sound— something only an on-site assessment
e

stion arising from these three almost simultaneous autumn developments: How do you create a
ensive warning system if you don't know where the faults lie? And how do you warn the people
u don't know what buildings they're in

ning system legislative sponsor, Democratic state Sen. Alex Padilla of Los Angeles, insists that w
precise locations of all faults is "very important," it's still not crucial to early warnings. "Once
emanate from the epicenter, waves go out," the MIT mechanical engineering graduate says. "En
aster than the actual shaking, so depending on how far you are from the epicenter, you might ge
15 and 60 seconds warning, as they do in Japan. That can be crucial if you're a surgeon in an op

for anyone who hasn't seen the sheer power of a major earthquake up close to understand how u
lem is. California has seen no big quakes in major population areas in almost 20 years, creating
security

n is needed. The comprehensive warning system should be online within two years. Padilla is c
says it can operate even without some key information. But adding that information can help p
sualties and a lot of damage. So we need to know where quakes might strike and who is most a

maps drawn since 1971 give far more information than anyone had before then. But the bigges
st 40 years have come in unanticipated places, generally along unmapped faults. So even with a
, all information on possibly unsafe buildings must be checked out, no matter what legislative
ation it takes

cause without adequate information, the good done by warnings could be minimized. Warning
ted as precisely as possible and that can be done if lawmakers both state and federal forget partis
entrate on saving lives