

Year 2000: A tide in flood!



by Pat Quinn, P.Eng., President

Whether you consider this year to be the last of this millennium or the first of the next, the year 2000 is being celebrated around the world as an historical turning point and a new beginning. I view it as a turning point that can focus the profession on the need to move forward.

My optimistic side says we will manage whatever comes this year and, despite the potential for computer glitches, won't be faced with serious disruptions in the services we use everyday. This means that we can concentrate on our future as a profession and the ideas that will bring improvements.

Supply and demand

Canada will continue to welcome immigrants, thousands of whom will be engineers. About 28,000 immigrant engineers arrived in Ontario from 1994 to 1997. Not surprisingly, not all of them were successfully integrated into the engineering profession. Even in boom economic times, the marketplace is unable to meet the expectations of many immigrant engineers for jobs in their areas of specialty.

PEO has not addressed the issue of supply and demand of engineers in Ontario, considering this function to be outside of its mandate. One of the first tasks of the proposed new advocacy body for the profession (known as the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers or OSPE) should be to establish data processes to track the demand and supply of Ontario's professional engineers, so that it can enter the debate on immigration policies with the federal government on the basis of sound information. OSPE could also provide input to engineering schools on the demand for engineers in specific disciplines, again by analyzing data and tracking statistics.

Beyond regulation

With PEO as the gateway to a new, member-oriented organization, which could act unfettered in the best interests of the profession and its members, while working cooperatively with PEO, the issue of relevance to engineers would get broadened beyond regulation, to enhanced status and new possibilities. OSPE could provide a think tank environment where ideas are generated, evaluated and tested, and could be vocal, visible, proactive and committed to addressing strategic issues over the long-term.

In February, you will receive with your ballot for the 2000 Council elections background material and a referendum question dealing with the creation and funding of OSPE. The outcome of the referendum will shape the profession's future. I urge you to take the time to review the material, make an informed decision, and cast your vote.

Continuing relevance

One of the major issues PEO currently faces is its relevance to engineers, many of whom are not required to be licensed to do their jobs, and who see little benefit to becoming licensed. At its December meeting, Council agreed to make many changes to PEO's regulatory processes to make the association more open and inclusive (see In Council in this issue, p. 20). However, basic questions on PEO's continued relevance, exclusive scopes of practice, the future of the Certificate of Authorization program and the so-called industrial exemption all remain to be considered.

If we open the Professional Engineers Act to address these and other regulatory issues, we will need to be prepared for the same fierce criticism from business organizations that the Order of Engineers of Quebec received when it tried to modernize Quebec's professional engineering act, with amendments aimed partly at bet-

ter enabling Quebec engineers to operate in a global marketplace. Critics of the proposed changes argued that, for Quebec to be internationally competitive, total deregulation and acceptance of market-driven standards were absolutely necessary in certain areas of engineering. To accept this position is to accept a greatly diminished engineering profession incapable of inspiring public confidence. I think we can fulfill our regulatory obligations, while making Ontario's Act more relevant to today's engineering profession.

Taking action

I believe that the change from ideas to action is dependent on the fertility of the culture into which the "seed" falls. In *Julius Caesar*, Brutus says (more or less): "Our cause is ripe. The enemy increaseth everyday; there is a tide in affairs, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. And we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures." This is the case for Ontario's engineering profession, in which the culture is ripe for change and the opportunities are limitless—but we must take advantage of the sea on which we are afloat.

The opening up of PEO's regulatory processes offers opportunities for enrichment, through a culture confident of meeting any of the challenges of the new millennium. Through separate and independent regulatory and advocacy organizations, we as engineers can establish clear mandates for each, and decide what benefits we require. We can take control of our destiny once again, and create the future to which a great profession should aspire.

On behalf of Council, I extend to all members our confidence in your judgment and, once again, urge you to participate in the upcoming Council election and referendum. I also extend our good wishes for the engineering profession in the new millennium. ♦