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RESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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PRESIDENT

I met recently with Attorney General Michael Bryant, to press him to stop his Cabinet colleagues' incursions into PEO's regulatory regime through such independent certification schemes as the recent *Building Code Act* amendments on which I commented in my last message (for more on this meeting, see "PEO presents Bill 124/Brownfields cases to AG," p. 14).

The good news is that we received assurances from the attorney general (AG) that the provincial government remains committed to the professional self-regulation model embodied in such legislation as the *Professional Engineers Act*, and has no deliberate strategy of replacing it or undermining it with alternative demand-

ence over the climate in which we engineers work and in which we regulate our profession.

The problem, as I see it, is that for many years we have been living under two misconceptions. The first misconception is that someone else is looking out for our interest as a self-regulating profession; after all, PEO is a creature of the government, so surely they must understand and respect how the arrangement is supposed to work. Unfortunately, however, all the evidence suggests this is a false assumption. We have paid the price for it almost every time there has been a revision to our Act or to some other act that impacts the practice of engineering.

The second misconception is that, as a creature of government, PEO should not contradict or oppose any government ini-

tion in the public interest and to inform them of our concerns over regulatory incursions. As examples of the latter, we will be focusing on the flaws in the recent *Ontario Building Code* and Brownfields legislation. You might be asked to arrange a meeting with your local MPP to discuss our concerns. If you volunteer for this task, you will be provided with comprehensive background materials to help you deliver the key points.

It is important that we keep our messages to legislators clear, concise and focused on regulatory concerns. For example, we are not complaining about having to write building code exams or obtain liability insurance because of their inconvenience and cost to us; we are complaining because they represent poor pub-

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side legislation. So we're not up against a matter of fundamental principle for the government.

The bad news is that our interests are being overlooked because we're simply not on anyone's radar screen. Unlike the fields of accounting, law and medicine, there are virtually no public issues related to engineering. And unlike these other professions and the many paraprofessional groups seeking professional status, the engineering profession has tended to stay in the background and avoid public attention. The AG's main message was that it is up to us to educate legislators about the value of our self-regulation and to inform them concerning our issues.

Greater influence?

Well, maybe that's not bad news after all. Maybe by taking the AG's advice seriously, we can have much greater influ-

ence over the climate in which we engineers work and in which we regulate our profession. I have never understood this thinking. Governments have entrusted the professions with self-regulation because they accept that we have greater knowledge and expertise in our respective disciplines than the government itself. Surely, then, they must expect us to advise them on public policies in our fields of expertise, and how best to implement them. And since we are in a position of public trust, we have an obligation to inform the public directly if a government initiative, or lack of same, may cause public harm or is otherwise not in the public interest.

Information program

I am therefore calling on members of the engineering profession to engage in political activism. PEO will be launching a government information program designed to acquaint members of the legislature with our role as a self-regulating profes-

sion in the public interest and to inform them of our concerns over regulatory incursions. We must also be clear that our activism is not in any way partisan—that we are simply seeking good government where engineering is concerned and are fully committed to working with the government to achieve this.

It is also important that our government information activities be sustained over time. This is not a "one-shot campaign," but a long-term investment. As governments and policy issues come and go, we must be prepared to continuously engage MPPs in understanding and supporting the role of engineers in society, and the role of the self-regulating profession in serving and protecting the public.

I believe we have an unparalleled opportunity to influence public policy for the good of both the public and the engineering profession. Let's take advantage of it!