

By KIM ALLEN, P.ENG.

"Ten people who speak make more noise than ten thousand who are silent."

—Napoleon Bonaparte

PEO's Government Liaison Program is fairly new, having launched in 2005 as a six-month pilot project.

The program was born out of a meeting a few years ago with Michael Bryant, the attorney general and our responsible minister at the time. During the meeting, we voiced our frustration at what we viewed as a rash of incursions into PEO's regulatory jurisdiction by his cabinet colleagues. Minister Bryant's message to us was simple—it was up to us to educate legislators about the value of our self-regulation.

Taking his advice to heart, we recruited and trained more than 70 engineer spokespersons from our chapters to represent PEO in meetings with local government officials. And during the half-year pilot, they held over 20 meetings with MPPs, including key ministers, parliamentary assistants and backbench MPPs, at Queen's Park or in the ridings.

The success of this pilot demonstrated the benefit of PEO members engaging government on a regular basis to remind it of the benefit to Ontario of a self-regulating engineering profession. So, in June 2005, our Council approved making a permanent Government Liaison Program part of what PEO does.

But if we were going to have a large number of people talking to government, most of whom had never done this kind of thing before, we understood early that we needed to develop resources for them, both to assist them in doing the work we were asking of them, and to ensure some consistency in our messages.

So, we put in place a process for developing approved PEO position statements on our important issues, and created a dedicated website for our government relations activities, which includes the PEO position statements. We also put together a toolkit that includes an introduction to the plan, template letters to send to govern-

Growing grassroots activism

The following is an abbreviated version of a presentation made at the Public Affairs Association of Canada's annual conference on November 21, 2007. To view the complete presentation, please visit the GLP website at www.glp.peo.on.ca.

ment officials, and the expected conduct of and protocol for our spokespeople.

We dedicated space in *Engineering Dimensions*, for regular updates on the program's progress and to highlight individual chapter successes, to recognize individual good work and recruit more volunteers to the program.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, one of the reasons for developing our Government Liaison Program was to help combat and prevent intrusions by the provincial government into our regulatory domain.

In 2002, the ministry of housing introduced legislation that amended the *Ontario Building Code*, so that designers, including licensed engineers, would, as of January 2006, have to qualify and register under a housing ministry regime to continue to be able to undertake designs and review associated with building permit applications.

PEO strongly opposed these changes. It was our belief that the amendments duplicated, contradicted and otherwise interfered with, our statutory role to license, discipline and regulate our licence holders.

So, as we launched our Government Liaison Program, this issue became the most important.

Besides turning loose our local GLP spokespersons, we featured the building code issue prominently in our magazine, grew a "Building Code Regulation Reform" page on our website, and sent people to it for continuous updates through email blasts to licence holders.

How did we do? Well, we found a lot of support amongst MPPs from all the parties, who took our messages back to their caucuses.

Nonetheless, in January 2006, the amendments to the building code took effect. Three months later, with still no resolution to our liking in sight, we took the province to court by filing a Notice of Application for Judicial Review with Divisional Court to clarify the application of the *Ontario Building Code* amendments to professional engineers.

The application was heard in October 2006.

Finally, this past spring, in what really was an historic decision, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice ruled in PEO's favour, confirming our authority to regulate the practice of professional engineers and of our Certificate of Authorization holders, and that this exclusive jurisdiction extends unequivocally to areas of building code compliance and activities relating to general review of construction.

So did our Government Liaison Program lead to our courtroom success? Ultimately, we prevailed on points of law in the court room. But we'd like to think the province's decision not to appeal the court's ruling was influenced by the consistent and persistent voices of our GLP spokespersons and of our 70,000 members speaking to their elected representatives.

The next step must be to encourage our members not only to build relationships with their local policy makers, but also to play a larger role in policy making themselves by becoming more politically active, either as volunteers for elected officials or as candidates in future elections.

Thanks to our dedicated group of volunteers across the province, we're building the necessary relationships in all levels of government to ensure our perspective is heard. ♣