

ENGINEERS CAN BUILD AND STRENGTHEN GOVERNMENT POLICY

By Howard Brown



David Caplan, minister of health and long-term care.

John Wilkinson, minister of research and innovation.

THERE HAS NEVER been a better time for PEO members to effectively convey their ideas to government, help develop public policy and facilitate change.

Over the last two months, several exciting initiatives have been introduced that emphasize the value engineers can offer key legislators.

The creation of the Ontario Centre for Engineering and Public Policy by PEO council in June and the recent appointment of Donald Wallace, PhD, as executive director of the centre are clear signals that engineers plan to assert a greater role in the public policy-making process in the province. The centre is a platform to better serve the public interest by enlisting the talents and expertise of engineers, with the goal of having government view the engineering profession as a natural partner in the development of a wide range of public policies.

Wallace, whose background already boasts extensive experience with government ministries and policy analysis, plans to ensure that engineers are seen as a valuable resource to key policy-makers and opinion leaders.

One of his first actions was to commission a student essay competition geared towards Ontario university engineering undergraduate and graduate students who are enrolled in PEO's Student Membership or Engineering Intern Training programs.

"My main goal is to show students that the engineering profession and public policy can go hand-in-hand," says Wallace. "The work of engineers is already manifested in many aspects of daily life. We need to demonstrate more clearly the pivotal role that engineers now play and will play in the future in issues of critical importance to the public well-being of Ontarians."

There is a link between the ideas of engineers and the goals and objectives of government: now is the time to strengthen that tie and ensure the exchange of ideas is continued.

How can engineering help drive legislative priorities? Recently, I attended and spoke at both the PEO Student Conference in Windsor and the National Conference for Women in Engineering in London, Ontario. Both conferences generated much interest in seeing engineers increase their participation in public policy.

And, on November 24, for the first time in recent history, PEO senior staff, led by CEO/Registrar Kim Allen, P.Eng., and Wallace met over dinner with 12 deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers to review PEO's initiative for a

Canadian Framework for Licensure. It has been a long-term goal of the Government Liaison Program (GLP) to increase the association's profile with the public service, and not just with politicians.

On December 2, a follow-up breakfast meeting with eight senior MPPs, all parliamentary assistants, occurred.

Both events clearly indicated there has never been a more effective time for PEO members to help influence the government's goals.

Ontario's minister of health and long-term care, David Caplan, recently spoke at the Canadian Club on his intent to focus on three issues: chronic complex disease, e-health and mental health. "If I've learned anything in my previous role as infrastructure minister, it is the value of teamwork," Minister Caplan said. "Building infrastructure requires the coordinated and concerted efforts of bankers, architects, engineers and a whole host of professional trades—all working towards a single goal."

Similarly, Ontario's minister of research and innovation, John Wilkinson, said in a recent speech that the greatest accomplishments are made through collaboration and teamwork, citing how a multitude of industrial firms worked together to put people on the moon.

"If Ontario is to truly go after global opportunities like greening the economy or curing disease...if we want to think big, we must find ways to bring together groups of different organizations that can tackle all the pieces of the puzzle," Minister Wilkinson said.

What the government is saying is that teamwork works.

Engineering ideas can drive legislation, but first the ideas must be put forward. If PEO is to help drive the objectives of the provincial government—such as the ministry of energy's goal of eliminating coal, enhancing renewables, and stimulating



Howard Brown engages future engineers at PEO's student conference.

conservation—we must work at getting our best ideas into government.

Getting involved is easy: become a member of your chapter's GLP subcommittee, support a candidate or run for office yourself, or simply take interest in an issue and put your opinion on paper. PEO members have the ability to play a larger role in policy-making, either by becoming politically active as candidates or by ensuring their perspective is heard through simple grassroots activism.

Our goal remains to have 11 engineers in the 2011 legislature.

For further information on the Ontario Centre for Engineering and Public Policy, contact Donald Wallace at dwallace@peo.on.ca.

For further information on PEO's Government Liaison Program, contact David Smith, manager, communications, at dsmith@peo.on.ca, or Matthew Ng, P.Eng., manager, chapters, at mng@peo.on.ca. Σ

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