

# GLP ACADEMY PARTICIPANTS GET TO KNOW THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PARTIES, PLATFORMS AND PORTFOLIOS

By Howard Brown and Kaitlynn Dodge

IT'S SAFE TO say that politics can seem like a topsy-turvy world to process-driven problem solvers like engineers.

In the world of public affairs, the best, most economical option isn't always chosen. The facts aren't always clear and, oftentimes, decision makers aren't aligned on exactly what the problem is that needs to be solved.

So how is one to navigate in an environment where things aren't black and white but instead perpetually grey? By remembering one important constant: People govern people.

Engineers who participated in the October 27, 2012, Eastern Region Government Liaison Program (GLP) academy and congress had an opportunity to see this first hand, by learning about the rich histories and perspectives held by those who are in elected office. They had an opportunity to learn that, indeed, those who govern us are people much like themselves.

The event's guest speakers gave participants a unique opportunity to learn about the people behind the parties, platforms and portfolios in their region, and to better understand how to engage with them effectively.

"Having good relationships is important," said Jeannette Chau, P.Eng., PEO's manager, student and government liaison programs, who spoke at the academy about PEO's GLP. "It is by fostering, nurturing and enhancing these relationships that we better understand what matters to decision makers and what implications certain issues have politically."

Understanding the personalities, perspectives and histories of elected officials is equally as important as facts and figures when it comes to pushing forward an agenda.

Guest speaker Steve Clark, MPP (Leeds-Grenville), PC municipal affairs critic and deputy

house leader, shared his political history with participants, providing insight into what motivates him to serve in public office. He reflected on how he was elected as Ontario's youngest mayor in 1982, at the age of 22, by running on an issue that proved to resonate with residents involving the collapse of an arena roof.

"Learning so much about who our local elected officials are as people and what drives them to serve really helped to bring the concept of government relations from theory into reality," said PEO Kingston Chapter GLP Chair Hafiz Bashir, P.Eng., who organized the event. "Now when we call our local members to invite them to events or to request a meeting, we have the context needed to foster a relationship and demonstrate that we are informed and interested in their priorities."

Other political guest speakers included Kingston and the Islands MP and Liberal Science and Technology Critic Ted Hsu, Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry MPP and PC Consumer Services Critic Jim McDonnell, P.Eng., and Kingston City Councillor Dorothy Hector, P.Eng. (licensed in New Brunswick), who provided insight into why they decided to enter politics and what drives them in office. Each speaker also addressed how engineers can build better relationships with their level of government and provided their thoughts and suggestions.

After the speeches concluded, engineers from across the region updated one another on activities and participated in a congress to plan government relations activities for the year ahead.

What was clear was that no matter the particular issue, sustaining a long-term, authentic relationship with local elected representatives is the only constant in an often unpredictable political climate.

The *Kingston Whig-Standard* published coverage of the event on October 29 ([www.thewhig.com/2012/10/29/politicians-open-to-more-input-from-engineers](http://www.thewhig.com/2012/10/29/politicians-open-to-more-input-from-engineers)). Σ

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