



LIKE AN ENERGIZER BUNNY
ON CAFFEINE OVERLOAD,
WALTER BILANSKI, IS BACK
FOR HIS FOURTH GO-ROUND
AS PRESIDENT OF PEO.

President Bilanski, PhD, P.Eng., takes over from Pat Quinn, P.Eng., who last year at this time was fielding questions about why he chose to throw his hat into the ring for a second term at the helm of the engineering regulator. Perhaps it will be four times the charm for Bilanski in his personal campaign to put the education of engineers on a more contemporary footing.

Having served as PEO President in 1971, 1977, 1998 and now in 2007, one would expect Bilanski's priorities to have shifted over the years. And while he acknowledges the ebb and flow of the priorities of those who govern the engineering profession, Bilanski has, throughout his long association with PEO, held firm to education as his overriding concern, as evidenced by his championing of PEO's recent Future of Engineering Education and Licensure conference in Toronto (see pp. 19-21) and his other comments since his installation at the annual general meeting on April 28.

"My first priority is bringing engineering education and registration into the 21st century," Bilanski told members at his inaugural address. "Creating a level playing field for all engineers, regardless of where they received their engineering education, is part of this priority."

Little upgrading

PEO's new President says engineering is the only senior profession not to have upgraded its educational requirements since being granted the privilege of self-regulation. Although members of the profession are urged to pursue continuing education and commit themselves to lifelong professional development, the basic academic requirement for admission con-

What makes Walter run?

By Michael Mastromatteo

tinues to be a four-year undergraduate degree in engineering.

Bilanski has also often voiced a desire to achieve the level playing field by way of standard admission examinations, whether applicants for licensure are graduates of engineering programs accredited by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (CEAB), or graduates of non-accredited programs.

The President bases his views on the fact the regulator is the body responsible for applying a consistent, comprehensive standard for licensing, and his knowledge of the difficulties PEO would face in trying to intrude on the universities' domain of designing and updating, as required, their engineering education.

"We have to be completely open and fair, whether the applicants are offshore or inshore. Right now CEAB applicants are automatically exempt from technical exams and offshore applicants are not," Bilanski said. "I think the most feasible and simplest arrangement would be that PEO sets the exams for everyone to enter [the profession]. We would be treating everyone evenly."

In addition to his concerns about the profession's academic admission standards and process, Bilanski has strong views on the so-called "industrial exemption" clause of the *Professional Engineers Act*.

This exception to the requirement for licensure to practise professional engineering allows non-licensed individuals



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to perform engineering work related to production machinery or production processes for their own employer in the employer's manufacturing facilities, except work of a structural nature.

Bilanski is concerned that industry is interpreting this clause too broadly to include, for example, engineering design of manufactured products, and is in favour of reconsidering the clause in some way.

"We might not be able to eliminate [the industrial exemption clause], but we can tighten it up," Bilanski says. "It mainly refers to companies or organizations doing in-house work [on their own production facilities]. That is really all that is intended."

One-year terms

Another of Bilanski's concerns is the constraint on PEO Presidents and senior executives in effecting long-term changes in the governance and regulation of the profession, given the current one-year terms they serve. He is pleased at changes to Regulation 941 that became effective on May 1 (see Gazette, pp. 33-40) that revoked a clause that prevented former Presidents from seek-

ing election as an officer of PEO within five years of their presidency.

"What I like in the new system that we introduced is that we've removed the five-year clause and you can be nominated again after one year being Past President and if elected again be in, which would give you sequence," he said. "Before, you would have to wait a full five years."

Bilanski says he firmly supports PEO as a regulator and not simply as a recruiter of new members, and believes a streamlined licensing application process, coupled with an enhanced database of members' employment and specific expertise, will provide new insights into the profession at large.

"[We should] look realistically at engineering employment in Ontario," Bilanski said in a statement of objectives for 2007, "including the quantity as well as the types of positions related to engineering. [We should] add to our membership database not only what each member is qualified to do, but also what each is actually doing. This data could be requested as a mandatory update when the annual fees are paid."

A Guelph resident who also owns a parcel of land near Brantford, Bilanski recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of his engineering licence. Over that time, he has earned a reputation as a world-renowned agricultural engineer at the University of Guelph. The father of six, and grandfather of nine, has combined the education of future engineers with active involvement in the local community. It's also fair to say that as a long-time professor, Bilanski has developed a gift of the gab. When not expounding on his favourite topics, he keeps a close eye on the stock market's intriguing hieroglyphics.

But like the stock market, the future of the engineering regulator isn't always easy to predict, he's learned. The new President takes over at PEO in the wake of its successful legal challenge of the government's encroachment on engineers' self-regulation. With this major achievement on the books, Bilanski and his successors will no doubt continue to grapple with making the value of engineering self-regulation better understood within government and the wider public. ❖