

REPRESENTING ENGINEERS IN GOVERNMENT, ONE ELECTION AT A TIME

By Howard Brown



FORMER PEO vice president Corneliu Chisu, P.Eng., FEC, did not expect to win a seat in the May 2 federal election.

Well-known in engineering circles and a strong supporter of engineers getting involved in the political process, Chisu has emerged as a pillar of possibility for engineers across the province.

In Canada, engineers have been seriously under-represented in federal and provincial government. It's hard to say why this is the case but it seems that the tides are changing.

Chisu, Canada's first Romanian-born MP, told *Engineering Dimensions* that it all started with a simple request to meet his MP at the time, Dan McTeague, on some local issues.

When McTeague cancelled plans to meet three times, Chisu decided to take action.

Eager to contribute his life experience to benefit Canada, he decided to run in the next federal election, most definitely as the underdog.

A retired military engineer major, empowered by the belief that engineers' analytical minds and problem-solving capacity are skills that any policy-maker should be equipped with to resolve

issues for the country, Chisu filed his nomination papers, ran a solid campaign and came out on top May 2.

The election was an excellent experience for Chisu. He cites the April 12 leaders' debate as the turning point for the campaign. "I won because of the prime minister. His leadership and debating skills and how we presented our platform were determining factors."

A new recruit to the hill, Chisu has a lot to learn, but will stand by the core values that he said got him elected: prudent fiscal policy, progressive values and respect for taxpayers' money.

He is already drawing on the experience of fellow Conservative engineer Pierre Lemieux, P.Eng., MP (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell), who was re-elected on May 2.

He is most interested in the policies of international trade, national defence, and science and technology. After a public service career spanning 36 years, including nearly 19 years with the Canadian military, his value to these policy forums is sure to be multi-faceted.

Gearing up for a mountain of responsibility, a very demanding schedule and new rules to learn to be effective in the House of Commons, Chisu recognizes the challenges ahead. "The rule book governing Professional Engineers Ontario is about 300 pages; the rule book governing Westminster rules of procedure in the House of Commons is 1398 pages—the stakes have definitely been raised."

It's clear great strides have been made through PEO's Government Liaison Program (GLP) to develop relationships between engineers and the government. The next phase of engineering in politics, however, must be direct representation, Chisu says. He is helping lead that charge because "engineers are bringing their own vision to politics. The Government Liaison Program is a non-partisan initiative that not only brings knowledge of politics to engineers in Ontario but also provides the tools necessary to get involved and be successful."

In the May 2 federal election, six engineers representing all parties put their names forward in Ontario. Two won their seats, Chisu and Lemieux. The four other engineers who ran were Omar Alghabra, P.Eng., the Liberal candidate for Mississauga-Erindale; Adam DeVita, P.Eng., the NDP candidate for Richmond Hill; Damian Konstantinakos, P.Eng., the Conservative candidate for Ottawa Centre; and Anne Tennier, P.Eng., the Liberal candidate for Hamilton Centre.

Looking forward, PEO is encouraging engineers to take the plunge and run in the upcoming October 6 provincial election so that there will be more engineers in the legislature in the next session than the two who formed the engineering contingent in the past session.

The prospect of having engineers represented at all levels of government, encouraging evidence-based, technical policies that benefit the public good, is a future that we can all work toward together. Σ

Howard Brown is president of Brown & Cohen Communications & Public Affairs Inc. and has worked with PEO on its Government Liaison Program since 2005.



NEW GOVERNMENT LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETS

PEO has formed a Government Liaison Committee (GLC) to provide oversight and guidance to its Government Liaison Program (GLP). The group met for the first time May 5. They elected Consulting Engineers of Ontario President Barry Steinberg, P.Eng., as chair, and the Oakville Chapter GLP chair, Anita Cwynar, P.Eng., as vice chair.

Participants at the meeting, from left to right: (Front row) PEO CEO/Registrar Kim Allen, P.Eng., FEC (GLC member); Consulting Engineers of Ontario President Barry Steinberg, P.Eng. (chair); Jeannette Chau, P.Eng., manager, student programs, and advisor to GLC; PEO then President Diane Freeman, P.Eng., FEC; McMaster student Shannon Pole; Alana Lavoie, manager, government relations, Engineers Canada; Kaitlynn Dodge, PEO government relations coordinator; PEO President-elect Denis Dixon, P.Eng., FEC (member); (Back row) PEO government relations consultant

Howard Brown (member); Jonathan Risto, P.Eng., Engineers Canada Bridging Government and Engineers program representative (member); PEO Oakville Chapter member Anita Cwynar, P.Eng. (vice chair); LGA Councillor Ishwar Bhatia, P.Eng. (member); PEO Councillor Chris Taylor, P.Eng. (member); Windsor Essex Chapter member Andrew Dowie, P.Eng. (member); OSPE Political Action Network representative Axel Garcia, P.Eng.; and PEO Chief Administrative Officer Scott Clark. Absent from photo: Councillor Rick Hilton, P.Eng. (member); PEO Director, Policy and Professional Affairs Bernie Ennis, P.Eng. (member); Ruth-Anne Vanderwater, EIT (observer); OSPE board member Michael Monnette, P.Eng. (member); PEO President David Adams, P.Eng., FEC (member); and PEO Advisory Committee on Volunteers representative Chris Kan, P.Eng. (member).