

## "YES TO OSPE, NO TO BILL 15" DEBATE CONTINUES

By Howard Brown and Kaitlynn Dodge

THE RECENT Government Liaison Program (GLP) mobilization on MPP Monte Kwinter's private member Bill 15, *An Act Respecting the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers* (OSPE), was a real opportunity to test the foundation of the GLP, which was created seven years ago to ensure PEO's voice is heard at Queen's Park, and to build relationships between professional engineers and MPPs.

Until early 2012, the effectiveness of the GLP had yet to be truly tested, although relationship-building with MPPs was certainly happening through events and meetings over the years. It remained to be seen if grassroots engineers could connect on an issue of importance, in a timely manner and with a common message.

The mobilization to inform MPPs that PEO is opposed to Bill 15 was that test.

When PEO became aware that Bill 15 was scheduled for second reading in the Ontario legislature on May 17, the executive leadership team knew PEO needed to communicate its opposition to the bill to members of provincial parliament. OSPE had been meeting with MPPs and actively promoting the passage of the bill, and many MPPs were unaware of PEO's opposition. PEO had chosen not to oppose Bill 148 publicly, which was the previous version of Bill 15, preferring to keep the conflict within the profession. PEO was forced to voice its opposition publicly when it was clear OSPE was gaining momentum among MPPs in the legislature.

GLP chairs were given key messages, meeting materials, templates and issue-specific training and asked to get to work. Within four weeks, GLP chairs and PEO staff had met with over 50 MPPs and had informal conversations with dozens more at various political functions and events.

The message, "Yes to OSPE, No to Bill 15," conveyed PEO's continuing support for OSPE as the profession's advocacy body, but that PEO did not support Bill 15. PEO believes Bill 15 will create problems for the public and is not necessary for OSPE to do its advocacy work (see "PEO launches 'Yes to OSPE, No to Bill 15' campaign," *Engineering Dimensions*, May/June 2012, p. 10).

"After only a few weeks of mobilization, word was starting to spread that PEO was opposed to the bill," says Jeannette Chau, P.Eng., PEO manager, student and government liaison programs. "The main reason for the opposition is that the bill would confuse the public regarding who is the regulator of engineering in Ontario."

The term "professional engineer," found throughout the bill, is a protected title under the *Professional Engineers Act*. Since approximately 3000 OSPE members are not professional engineers, PEO is concerned the public may become confused about who is indeed licensed to engineer.

During the meetings held, many MPPs indicated they had not been aware PEO was opposed to the bill and were sympathetic to its position.

On May 17, after a 50-minute debate in the legislature (see [www.ontla.on.ca/web/house-proceedings/house\\_detail.do?Date=2012-05-17#P701\\_164416](http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/house-proceedings/house_detail.do?Date=2012-05-17#P701_164416)), Bill 15 passed second reading with a voice vote. During the debate, Gilles Bisson, MPP and NDP house leader, recognized some of the shortcomings of the bill and stated: "I think the way you fix that is by sending it to committee."

He also highlighted how effectively engineers are being heard at Queen's Park. "Over the years, we get lobbied by a lot of people in this place," Bisson said. "But I've got to tell you, the engineers and the CAs and CGAs are probably among the most vociferous—and I mean that in a nice way. They understand it's important to make contact with their local member of provincial parliament and bring their issues to us so that we become a little bit more knowledgeable."

Engineer MPPs Jim McDonnell, P.Eng., and Jack MacLaren, P.Eng., spoke during the debate in favour of PEO's position, which was also supported by the third engineer MPP in the legislature, Phil McNeely, P.Eng.

Overall, GLP chairs did a tremendous job ensuring all MPPs understood the differences between PEO and OSPE, and showing the shortcomings of the bill and why allowing it to become law is not in the public interest. The years of investment in a government relationship-building program enabled PEO to be heard at Queen's Park.

With the bill now referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, it is certain the debate and discussion will continue. **Σ**

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