



## Laying the groundwork

*One generation plants a tree,  
Another enjoys the shade.*

—Proverb

**PATRICK J. QUINN, P.ENG.**

**PRESIDENT**

This is my last message as President, and I thank you all for entrusting me with this honour. I wish President-elect Bilanski much success.

It behooves me to give an account of my stewardship, and I am sorry it is not a more positive report, from an accomplishment point of view. From a planting point of view, it is a lot more positive.

In my first message, I said there was a lot of work to be done to maintain our profession and to realize its potential, and that I came to help. In my first address to Council, I said I was not going to debate the governance issue again, which had been argued about for several years in a divided debate, and that we should make progress by using the processes that were in place.

Over the year it has become clear to me that our processes in the governance area are such that we will inevitably fall farther behind a society that is moving faster than we are. Our systems, as designed, bring to Council recommendations on policies that are so extensively documented that they present a major challenge to many Councillors when the decision-making time arrives. Progress, which always involves change, inevitably goes some power ox in our committee system.

A President with a one-year mandate trying to navigate our political minefield has little immediate influence, and history seems to show that the role has become more caretaker than leader. I am convinced that leadership is not a collective; a group can support an initiative but only an individual can reason and articulate. In a year, despite putting in the time and effort that would be

impossible for someone with regular job and family obligations, it has been beyond my talents to bring to completion the major and minor changes that I am convinced need to be made, and which I think we are capable of, in a more timely way. I sincerely regret this.

I believe we are beginning to make some real progress in our government relations and in stimulating the issue of participating on decision-making public bodies. My experiences in dealing with members at town halls in Kingston, Ottawa, North Bay, Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo have been positive, and there is a genuine concern about the issues that I talked about in my first message. That most of us care for our profession is apparent to me and I wonder what it is that riles so many and seems to fuel the destructive divisions at Council.

Two former Presidents have told us in recent issues of *Engineering Dimensions*, “to embrace major changes, or our profession will slip into irrelevance along with its licence and restricted scopes of practice” (George Comrie, P.Eng., November/December, p. 45), and “embrace major change or we will fade into the night” (Alex Kobelak, P.Eng., January/February, p. 9).

Our last full Council meeting put my term into the context of the proverb above, and heartened me considerably. On a Friday following a major storm, with two-thirds in attendance and war stories of the hours it took and the hills conquered in getting from A to B, Council acted decisively.

It decided to:

- implement initiatives to increase the licensure rate of our Canadian graduates and newly arrived international engineering graduates, by reducing processing times and giving them an

upfront break on costs when this has real meaning for them;

- begin a study of the education of the “new” engineer so that “students can acquire not only scientific and engineering principles, but can also understand the social context in which they work and reflect on the consequences of their work.” This will involve looking at what we need for our future admission evaluation processes, including a conference planned for June 21 (details will be available on our website);
- look at our governance system and processes from a fresh perspective, again considering the needs of a faster-paced society. I was directed to lead this study and will be canvassing for your input and advice. I hope we can find a way to satisfy all the concerns while acting expeditiously; and
- affirm our support for the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers (CCPE) to use Engineers Canada as its operating style name. This avoids the use of acronyms, clearly shows their national status and, if the experience from abroad works here, will increase their media exposure and profile.

The town halls have shown our desire to keep our profession relevant, and the belief that we are capable of embracing whatever changes this requires. To again quote former President Kobelak from last issue, “No profession can remain an island in a sea of constant change. My hope is that there is an era of enlightenment coming soon.”

I share that hope and, on that snowy Friday, there was civility, enlightened debate, and progress. I feel that I have shared in the planting and, with continued goodwill, this generation will bring it to fruition and we will all enjoy the shade.

It has been an honour to serve our profession. Good luck to all for our future. ❖