

Eleven engineers in the 2011 legislature

By HOWARD BROWN

PEO's Government Liaison Program (GLP) is having a terrific impact with MPPs of all parties.

In his address to PEO Council in November, MPP David Zimmer, LLB, parliamentary assistant to the Ontario attorney general, said: "When I first took office, the Ministry of the Attorney General didn't have much of a file on the engineering profession. Fast-forward four years and engineers are on the radar screen. You have engaged the profession in getting the government's attention."

Your CEO/registrar and Council have shown tremendous leadership in developing the most effective GLP among regulatory bodies. It's time now to get engineers at the decision-making table.

Involvement is key

The last time I guest-authored this column (September/October 2007, p. 31), I wrote about two engineer MPPs, Phil McNeely, P.Eng., and Norm Sterling, P.Eng., and what a difference they're making. This time, I want to talk about how other professional engineers can do the same. The key is to get involved.

You're probably wondering how you can do this. Margaret Best, Ontario minister of health promotion and MPP for Scarborough-Guildwood, told PEO CEO/Registrar Kim Allen, P.Eng., last month, that she had the same question when she first decided to get involved with a political party back in 2003.

She made the decision to volunteer and work on Mary Anne Chambers' campaign in Scarborough. "I never asked for anything; I just volunteered," Best stated. And it's that simple.

It's important for engineers to have a presence in the Ontario government. There are many issues facing the profession, and PEO has been able to overcome a lot of them. Over the last several years, government departments have introduced legislation that purports to override the *Professional Engineers Act* (PEA). We saw that with amendments

Let's encourage a new generation to enter public life to represent the profession

to the *Ontario Building Code*. But in May 2007, PEO was successful in its challenge, with the court ruling that certain provisions do not apply to licence and certificate holders under the PEA.

Another example of an issue facing PEO is a Ministry of Government and Consumer Services' regulation that could be interpreted to permit electrical safety reviews to be undertaken by unlicensed people. In this example, we are working with the ministry to show them only professional engineers should do this work.

Such situations show why it is so imperative that engineers take action and get involved with a party in their ridings. Engineers have certain expertise—you are able to analyze and solve problems. Engineers understand public policy and you can educate MPPs. To start, get involved by learning about the MPPs in your riding. Speak with them, interview them, and then invite them to your chapter meetings and teach them about your profession.

MPP meetings and events

In fact, chapters throughout the province have been hosting their MPPs, and we have been getting a good response from Queen's Park.

Over the last year, we've met with MPPs in Cobourg, Barrie, Collingwood, Oakville and Mississauga, to name a few, and worked with chapters around the province. Our goal is to have at least one PEO licence holder building a relationship with every municipal, provincial and—through Engineers Canada's Bridging Government and Engineers Program—federal politician. To join PEO's GLP, David Smith at dsmith@peo.on.ca, or Matthew Ng, P.Eng., at mng@peo.on.ca. They will put you in touch with your chapter's GLP subcommittee. To become involved nationally, visit www.peo.on.ca and follow the link to the Engineers Canada program.

People often wonder what to discuss with a politician. It's important to follow the government's legislative agenda and know what's going on. Go to PEO's GLP website for weekly updates on PEO's meetings with MPPs, and the *Inside Queen's Park* newsletter.

Talk to your chapter chair and other PEO members to find out which issues are having a particular effect on them, and make free use of the PEO and Engineers Canada position statements available on the GLP website. Target only one or two issues at a time—the keys to success are simplicity and persistence.

Eleven in 2011

Our other major goal is for PEO licence holders to run for a party—any party—in the 2011 election.

Former PEO President Claudette Mackay-Lassonde, P.Eng., sought a seat in the provincial government in 1987. Twenty years later, there is still a need for engineering expertise there.

As I wrote in the September/October column, instead of two engineers in the Ontario legislature, let's set a goal of 11 engineers in the 2011 legislature and make our slogan "Eleven in 2011."

Let's also bring a more diverse population to provincial agencies, boards and commissions, which is a provincial goal. Visit the Public Appointments Secretariat website at www.pas.gov.on.ca to learn more.

The bottom line is that every engineer is concerned with the issues facing the profession. So go out there, voice your concerns, and lay the issues on the table. ❖

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