



Summing up

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PRESIDENT

This is the last article I am permitted to write to you as your President.

First, I would like to thank the members for having elected me overwhelmingly to this position. The first three times I was your President, I felt I had accomplished something for the betterment of the profession and for my fellow engineers—that I had left the profession in better shape than I had found it. Regretfully, the current governance of PEO makes it very difficult to get anything positive done.

The role of the President has been reduced to that of a figurehead (like the lieutenant governor—all pomp but no oomph). The President's only "power" is to set the agenda and chair Council meetings. Hence, I would summarize the past year by paraphrasing the words of Winston Churchill: "Never was so little accomplished by so many as in the past year." Cooperation was replaced with working to cross purposes. Therefore, I asked a staff writer to summarize the past year for me, and he has done so credibly as follows. (His last paragraph also reflects my feelings about our profession.)

As I began my fourth tenure as PEO President last April, I did so with a commitment to review the academic requirements for the licensing of professional engineers. It was my personal campaign to put the education of engineers on a more contemporary footing and to ensure they are equipped for 21st-century challenges.

Remarkably, there have been no major changes in the standards for registration in Ontario since PEO was founded 86 years ago. Academically, it has remained a four-year program, even though many new fields of engineering have emerged. During this same period, some of the other major professions increased the length of their educational requirements to five—or even six—years.

Both the European Union and the US are working toward requiring five years of academic training to qualify as a professional engineer.

To address this point, I spearheaded a one-day symposium last June to review possible changes to update engineering education and registration in Ontario. The Future of Engineering Education and Licensure Conference provided an opportunity to review the existing state of engineering education and to consider the adequacy of the four-year undergraduate degree in preparing future engineers. It was an essential first step in incorporating a plan that will maintain the public's confidence in our profession and in PEO as its regulator.

Another aspect of licensure I wanted to focus on was the fairness of our process. Creating a level playing field for all engineers, regardless of where they received their engineering education, was a high priority. With this in mind, we removed any potential economic hurdles to encourage engineering graduates and newcomers to Canada to apply for licensure in Ontario. Under the Engineering Intern Training Financial Credit Program, graduates of CEAB-accredited engineering programs and international engineering graduates with a bachelor of engineering or applied science may be eligible to apply for their licence at no cost.

During the year, we have also been aggressive in increasing our profile at Queen's Park. Through our Government Liaison Program (GLP), we played host to our second Engineering for Ontarians Day reception, which provided the opportunity for participants in the GLP, Council members and staff to interact with their local government representatives—including 10 ministers and 19 other MPPs from all major political parties—and relate the importance of PEO's role in protecting the public interest.

Our objective is to have government view PEO as a partner, and understand and support PEO's policy direction, so that it continues to recognize our regulatory mandate, in particular our contributions to maintaining the highest level of professionalism among engineers working in the public interest. We must continue to increase the contribution we make to policy formation in the province to make our association more effective and relevant to both our membership and to society.

To further this goal, we staged our first-ever Engineering and Public Policy Conference, at which panels of public policy experts representing academe and government offered suggestions and strategies on ways we can be seen as a positive force in the development of public policy.

As my term draws to a conclusion, I am compelled to reflect on the state of our profession. Over the past 35 years, I have been elected by our members on four separate occasions to lead our association. In this time, I have seen a troubling decline in the interest in licensure by our graduating students. Gone are the days when applying for a P.Eng. licence was a given following completion of studies. Today, licensure application is the exception to the rule with only about one of every four qualified applicants actually applying. This needs to change. During my first tenure as President in 1971, the salaries of engineers compared favourably to those of doctors and lawyers. Today, our salaries are more comparable to elementary and secondary school teachers. There must be a concerted effort to restore the value and relevance that a P.Eng. licence brings. I believe the first step to a solution entails updating our education/registration requirements and I implore our future Councils to move forward in an effort to reverse this disturbing trend. The status of our profession depends on it. ❧